

**2009 ANNUAL MEETING**  
**OF THE**  
**« CLUB DE L'EPAGNEUL BRETON OF THE UNITED STATES »**

Answering to the invitation of the chairman of the "CEB of United States", Mr. R.L. Dalrymple, I travelled at the end of March to Iowa where the annual events were held all together: Field-trials, TAN, A.G.M., and National Breed Show.

After more than 14 hours flying: Lyon – München – Chicago – Peria – Muscatine, I spent a few days with the chairman, who everyone calls just "R.L.", and with Reynald Lefebvre, a Canadian "*bretonnier*" who made many assessorships in France invited by Léon Le Louët.

Things started to become serious on March 25<sup>th</sup>, with a trial for braces on wild game. Together with Reynald Lefebvre, we had to judge about a tenth of braces according to the UKC regulations. These are quite close to the FCI ones wherefrom they probably originate.

Yet, there is a difference in the classifications as a first prize can be awarded, then a reserve, then "passes" coupled or not with a ranking, depending of the quality of the performance. So, a "*3<sup>rd</sup> place pass*" is of more value than a simple "*pass*".

The game can be diverse, but we just met woodcocks and some pheasants.

We had the feeling that we were more watching two parallel solos, even if the handlers walked side by side.

For this first day, there were no awards, as the birds were very discreet. Yet two or three dogs were above the average level.

March 26<sup>th</sup> was a very busy day, with an "open" solo trial on wild game, followed by a "gundog" trial on wild game. The ground was made of an immense fallow-land prairie, subsidized by the state of Iowa.

A very dry and rather high yellow-grey grass made a perfect cover for wild pheasants. We saw many deers as well as coyotes leaving their banquet as we approached.

In this trial, there will be no awards given either, but I gave a HNQ (High Natural Qualities), something of the kind of our CQN, to Waldemar de Witerhaven, handled by its breeder, Russell Winter, who could have gone much higher!

Once this trial finished, I switched to the "solo Open Dog".

This was quite close of an "amateur" trial, and one is not asking much about steadiness, the handler being allowed to second its dog. Some dogs were not at the requested level, and had such a lack of passion and birdyness that they were unable to find a bird. On the contrary, some other are very passionate, but not "canalized".

One in all, there is a great lack of training, mainly because the handlers need practicing, but also because we face "basic hunters" who have no knowledge of field-trials.

I awarded two "pass" to Alexander de Chanteurs Bretons, bred and handled by Wallace Huey, and to CH.TAN Gundy's Gypsy Jo du Hunruhr handled by Glen Gunderson. This last handler is quite better performing, and one can feel that he worked seriously his dogs.

The next day, March 27<sup>th</sup>, a very cold wind was blowing over the "middle-west", and the ground was frozen, but the sun was shining, yet not enough to warm up my ears!...

Reynald and I started by judging a brace trial on released birds (to be shot). These birds were bobwhites (known in France as *colins de Virginie*) flying very well.

We had a great brace run between Topperlynn Gallant Bodacious, a very beautiful O/W male handled by Glen Gunderson, and Valdemar de Winterhaven, handled by Russell Winter. A real hunting run in a very good "Breton" style with two dogs honouring up spontaneously, and a perfect retrieve upon order.

This was of the level of a CACT in a French Fall trial.

Gallant won the first place and “Val” had the reserve.

A third dog, very well settled but of a somewhat lower level, won a “pass with honour”. It is Zeus Ebony Leaps A Lot, handled by the sympathetic Peter Wax, to whom we owe all the photos illustrating this article.

Then Reynald and I split, as he had a solo trial on some other ground, while I stayed on the same land to judge two other trials: One “open solo” and one “gundog solo”.

I placed no dog in the open, as there was an obvious lack of training, and no steadiness on wing. Many dogs would have done better in “gundog”, but “open” was too high for them.

In “gundog solo”, I gave two “pass”, one to Bako de Keranlouan owned by Stephen Broughton from Illinois, and the other to Alan de l’Escarbot owned by Bill Wall from Florida.

Bako is a very well built dog, extremely avid and very brutal in its gait. His handler holds him very tight and this is not too much! The dog had a good point and could have been placed higher, but it has a hard mouth, and I had to explain to its handler how to blow in an ear and simultaneously take the bird out of his jaws.

Alan is not as well organized in its quest, and despite a better retrieve than Bako’s he will also have to be limited to a “pass”.

As I had finished before Reynald came back, I have been asked to examine a TAN, which I did as I do in France. And just like in France, I noticed dogs who do not even know their name, and who run out of hand and flush birds one after the other.

It is not because a TAN is a test on natural abilities, that one does not have to teach its dog some obedience and return to call, at least! Nevertheless, the quality of the dogs entered at this TAN is very similar to what we see in France.

After these three days, I am aware that the average quality of the dogs seen here is very much alike to what we see in France in Fall trials. I even rewarded some dogs able to figure decently in our Autumn competitions, if their training was led to its end. This is no wonder considering that most of the lines are rather recent and carry European blood, mainly French but also Italian or Belgian.

On the contrary, I have not seen many dogs able to participate in springtime trials, with exception for “Topperlyn Galant” and a young female not even one year old, “Dublin”, who made me a great impression by its passion, its mental, and a uncommon scenting ability.

March 28<sup>th</sup> is the only day where the event is inside. Happily, as it snows!

In the morning, I lead a “clinic” which actually is a kind of conference.

I prefer questions and answers to long boring monologues. So, I had the opportunity to explain to the audience the principles for quotation and also the details for each different level.

Some questions are asked about sable coats, as there are some here too, coming from France. One of the staff members owns such a dog and gets it. It is a female I saw in the field, very passionate, but of poor quality regarding the standard. On her ears one may notice black hairs. She already bred some sable coats and the breeder explains that, as young as the age of one week, it is very easy to separate the sables puppies from the orthodox coats.

The most important point, which is the training and handling of an Epagneul Breton will be discussed by Reynald Lefebvre, who is passionate by this subject that he develops in details. He offers to run a training clinic in August 2009, which is accepted with pleasure.

After a coffee and a sandwich comes the time for the show.

The entry is of 41 dogs in 18 different classes, which does not make things easy.

If the standard is strictly the FCI one, qualificatives are not used and are replaced by placements from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>. This is also not a true “ranking” as one may not allow any 1<sup>st</sup>, but give a 4<sup>th</sup>. This makes it a bit easier for me, as, in some classes, there is a lack of quality, including some recent imports from France, which makes me very sad.

So, I will have to refuse a “French” dog measuring 54cms (21, 26”) at the withers at one year of age. In one class I even gave not higher than a 4<sup>th</sup> prize.

When it came to rankings, I explained on the mike the differences from one dog compared to another and the reasons for ranking as I did. This surprised the audience as usually the ranking is rather fast and made without any comment.

The best dogs are awarded by a rosette of “best”.

On my way back to France, I checked who my “best” were, and found out that most are coming from well known French lines as hereunder:

*Champion:* Topperlyn Gallant Bodacious (Sierra de l’Escarbot (USA) x Beau de l’Hospitalier(Belgium)

*Reserve Champion :* CH Arius de Saint Lubin (Obene de Saint Lubin x Nixo de Saint Lubin)

*Best of winners :* Cerise de l’Escarbot (Taleg de Cornouaille x Toy de Saint Lubin)

*Best male:* Hites Mississipi Bandit ( Sigilitto St.Louis Bonnie(USA) x Sigilitto Florissant Toussaint (USA)

*Reserve best male:* August de la Savane Rouge (Upfen de Calestray x TAN Tahdaste des Pigenettes)

*Reserve best of variety male –Other Colors:* Valdemar de Winterhaven (Soska du Pont de Cauhet x Stadia de l’Escarbot(USA))

I will keep an excellent memory of this trip to our American friends.

They are truly authentic lovers of our breed and are avid for advices, help, and above all for dogs of various origins, as they have a very natural trend to go by priority to the French breeders able to communicate in English, when I know tenth of good breeders who do not speak English and by whom they would find advantage in choosing their dogs.

Their club is small, indeed, but the people involved are remarkably organized and do everything very well, in an apparent relaxed way that hides a formidable efficiency in their action.

Every three years, (which I consider as a bit short) the board of director changes, and the chairman goes back to the basis, even though he stays for one year at the board to transmit his experience and help his successor.

Before leaving, I received some gifts among which a magnificent bronze sculpture of an Epagneul Breton, to be offered to the Maison de l’Epagneul Breton, in Callac, on behalf of the CEB of United States.

Thanks a lot, American friends!

Christian Gunther  
(Trad: P. Willems)