

Until then, it is just an ugly picture of devastated forest, with some wonderfully hardy crowns today; still holding on to their sorrowfully wilting needled boughs, breaking the heart of any European who has grown up with foresters caring for the land, and people combing the woods to remove any wind-fall that would blaze in their wood fire stoves, to keep the chill winter at bay. Here, nothing of the spent and harvested forest may be removed by firewood gatherers, it is all left to cry to the heavens. What a waste!

Casting an experienced eye on an "unclaimed" section that might well be useful in a couple of years, we turned south again, onto Euro Rd, a delightful sandy limestone road, typical of the narrow forest roads cutting across the vast acreage of this old plantation. Here I had my "Thump-Euro" tracks, several TQT, TD, TDX and Champion Test tracks. No need to go into details of the name giving here, is there?

Now we reached my newest tracking area, one I had dubbed "Adventure Playgrounds" for it was like a vast green meadow, in the vicinity of the location of a long forgotten and demolished forest workers' settlement. For me, who had for years worked in forest and bush sections, this was an adventure playground indeed!

It was wintry! The sun warmed us with an unaccustomed gentleness as I espied wide open grassed plains, undulating, verdant but wintry, with clusters of pines here and there, and a belt of tall slim Gum Trees wandering where once there may have been a runnel of water, now only hoped for, by the searching deep roots. In this region I would not find the various types of Boronia, Crowea and other small shrubs whose bruised foliage would delight the passers by with their heavenly scent!

This was former pasture land, cleared in the days of the settlers, long time gone! Freesias, Lupins, clover may be found just a few hundred metres further east of this section, and the wild Geranium of course, true Stork bills! I was now however, inspecting one of last year's tracks!

Here I strode along briskly, for I knew where I would place every flag to mark the way, knew where I would need to place the flags a little closer together than I normally would, to ensure that the track layer would walk exactly where I wanted him to, with some obstacle to step over or else evade in a little loop that would not detract from the track design, but make passage safe for all working this section.

I saw where I would place the turn flags, in such a way as to be able to see the turn behaviour of the dog, from a fair way back,

(/) and to clearly see the hoped for "Loss of Track" indication that would tell me, and should tell the handler, that the next footfall had not been straight ahead! With some dogs this is an excited circling on the spot, with others, it may be the characteristic wide cast of the dog working the trailing body scent and not working strictly to the ground picture. We are thrilled to see a dog take another step, and then check carefully to left and right before moving on, and of course we thrill to the sight of the dog who works around the turn in the track, as though he were on rails, never missing a beat of his measured, rhythmic step of the track sure Tracking Dog, the type of dog many of us dream about! Strange lush grass here, with foreign looking Dock!

As this particular track a TD 2 track would have 3 turns (it requires at least 2 changes of direction) I discarded the idea of placing a pair of "article flags" (X) somewhere not too far after the turn (min. distance between article and turns is 25m) to reward the dog for finding the turn, but intended to place it as a motivator a fair bit further onwards, to give the dog heart for this long stretch across wide open, wind swept, but well grassed meadow grass. There would be another long haul afterward, with wind currents to contend with as the breeze swept down the hill before he would need to rally his by now fairly taxed concentration and work out the second turn.

This was in an especially exciting section where Roos habitually crossed, and I had also seen a fox purposefully streak up the hill whilst I was setting this track in the previous year! After this difficult section, I always liked to see that the dog was rewarded with another article, just 30m from the turn, so that both dog and handler could have a breather and rejoice in another wonderful find! The handlers generally had no idea of the proximity of the curious Kangaroos that would investigate the trail after the track layer had traversed their domain, pulling out all the markers placed on the day before, but the dogs knew all too well, who had explored "their" track and needed to work conscientiously to avoid the pitfalls of the tempting game trail!

Not too far now, to the crest of the hill where we had another turn, this one with tempting Albany Woolly Bush thickets with wonderful Cats Paws glowing in pools of whitish sand, miraculously a Cowslip Orchid in a shady nook, and as a blind man with a stick could see, rabbit tracks luring the dog off to one side, seemingly wide open spaces with felled timber straight ahead with an unseen from here, forest trail cutting across, and on the other side, a straight

run down a green slope; studded with the occasional burnt out stump, a few remains of long burnt out logs to step over, a few Black Boys and Wattles, to graze in passing, with a carpet of young Lupins soon to be reaching for the sky, and mats of the wonderful succulent, commonly called Pig Face carpeting the sandy islands in the cheerful green, all the way down to the hide in a clump of Melaleucas and Wattles, with a white flowering Ti Tree marking the spot, as seen from the road!

What did this all lead up to?? Well you might ask. This is meant to be about dogs, is it not?? Yes, so it is. Many dog lovers are, just like Rick and I, also impassioned nature lovers who take delight in their surroundings and to whom a track is more than just a track! We love the find of a Hovea, the little wild starry Clematis, we might find an Enamel Orchid or pink Swan River Myrtle in the wilds of our tracking area, we enter the world, with our hearts open, and somehow fit the Rules and Regulations of a tracking trial into this!

In the next issue, I'll talk about some of those wonderful Tracking Dogs!

HONEY GROSS-RICHARDSON
with photos by Rick



HAVING AN EYE FOR A DOG

The wide range of quality in the dogs produced in any breed tells us that not everyone is born to be a breeder. Experts feel that one of the most accurate predictors of a breeder's potential to produce animals of high quality is whether he possesses an "eye for a dog."

Grossman (1983) tells us:

"The importance of having an 'eye for a dog' cannot be overstated.... There are some extremely knowledgeable breeders who ...can 'talk a great dog,' [but] are not able to produce an outstanding specimen The consistent breeding of show quality dogs should be considered an art. To some breeders this comes naturally with little effort, others have to learn this art, and still others will never achieve success in this most important area of purebred dogs."

"WHAT IS AN "EYE FOR A DOG"?"

An "eye for a dog" is an old dog man's expression referring to a person's "almost instinctive ability to know what is true quality in animals and what is not" (Nicholas, 1979). Grossman again (1992) defines the term as *"the ability to select a good dog without a lot of effort"* and concludes that this attribute, more than any other, is the most important thing a breeder can possess.

In addition to having a greater ability to visualize the potential impact of various ancestors in a dog's pedigree, breeders with an "eye" tend to more easily grasp abstract breeding concepts such as balance. The following analogy by Grossman (1991), which refers to coated dogs, offers a clever explanation of an "eye for a dog" than I am certain both men and women can appreciate!

"What do I mean by an eye for a dog? Let me draw an analysis for you. When my wife goes shopping she flips through acres of dresses on racks. To me, they look like floppy things on hangers. To her, knowing her measurements and what color and style flatter her build, it's easy for her to visualize the necessary accessories to finish the outfit."

You, as a breeder, need to do the same sort of things: What kind of build do you want your puppies to have; what should their color be; what accessories, texture and length of coat, ear set, etc., do you want. You have to be able to visualize the sire and dam and their parents and grandparents."

Then you can create by breeding one almost like the ones you have visualized."

CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE AN "EYE FOR A DOG"

1. As breeders, they consistently produce animals of high quality.
2. They can evaluate any dog quickly and easily.
3. They have an instinctive ability to recognize quality and soundness in almost any breed.
4. They place a high priority on, and can recognize, the intangible element of "balance."

ACQUIRING AN EYE FOR A DOG: A MENTOR CAN HELP

"To some breeders, 'having an eye for a dog' is second nature. Breeders lacking this natural talent can become self-taught provided they have the intelligence and motivation to discern between the good and poor specimens put before them." (Grossman, 1983)

Breeders who consistently produce fine dogs may have a natural eye for a dog, while other persistent, dedicated individuals have taught themselves to have an "eye for a dog." The artist has an eye for balance and elegance. So too must the breeder of dogs. For those needing to train their "eye," working with a knowledgeable mentor can put you on a fast track to acquiring an "eye." An experienced mentor can literally place your hands on various parts of a dog's anatomy and expertly guide you through many aspects of evaluating a dog's physical make-up.

"TRAINING YOUR "EYE"

Breeders can begin to train their "eye" by learning to evaluate a dog's outward appearance or phenotype. Several things helpful in evaluating phenotype include: (1) a copy of your breed's official Standard and Illustrated Standard; (2) A list of faults in your breed that are considered Very Serious, Serious and Minor; (3) an illustration of the anatomical parts of the dog; (4) a scoring system and (5) a recording system which allow you to keep your evaluations for future use.

The process of training your "eye" to evaluate the conformation features of a dog involves the following steps:

1. Locating the parts of the dog

Knowledge of a dog's basic body parts is an absolute necessity for any dog fancier. Study your breed Standard and illustrated Standard and with the help of an anatomical chart, locate on a "living, breathing" dog each conformation feature. Locating each part on your dog is essential to deciding if it meets the Standard for

correctness and is a crucial step in training your "eye."

2. Evaluating the parts of the dog

After locating the parts of the dog the breeder must evaluate their correctness based on the Standard. As Grossman (1983) notes: "The concept of relating the various parts of the dog to each other and viewing this relationship as a whole, rather than as a series of individual good or bad traits, is the key that so many breeders never grasp" – this is the all important crucial concept of balance. Training your "eye" to evaluate balance takes persistence and experience.

3. Annotating your evaluations

Make notes of your evaluations for future reference. Many master breeders devise numerical scoring systems that are quick and easy to use when planning future breedings.

4. Formulating a plan

Based on your scores and notes, formulate a plan to improve features which do not meet the Standard. Scoring and making notes on the first 3 generations of ancestors in a pedigree can help a breeder "visualize" how a future mating might turn out. The ability to visualize the ancestors behind a sire and dam is an integral part of having an "eye" for a dog. A color coded stick figure pedigree can be especially useful in this regard. It is important not to breed two dogs who possess the same faults and to realize that closely linebred animals (i.e., those having a common ancestor behind the sire and dam in the first three generations) may be more apt to pass their physical features on to offspring.

AN "EYE" FOR THE IDEAL

A starting point in strengthening a breeder's "eye" is the ability to locate and evaluate the conformation features, unique characteristics and structural balance which define a breed. Having the "eye" to visualize a sire's and dam's ancestors, combined with the use of scoring and recording systems, can provide valuable information on the traits parents are likely to pass on to offspring.

A breeder's goal is to create his ideal dog. Having an "eye," that is, having the ability to recognize quality in a dog, as well as the ability to visualize ancestors in a pedigree, is one of the most important things a breeder can possess in order to create his ideal.

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