

# A GRIFFON VENDEEN EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER

In May this year my husband Russell I and had the amazing opportunity of being able to see, examine and experience the French flavour of the four French Griffon breeds which originated in the Vendeen region of France, at the Club Du Griffons 100 year anniversary, Nationale d'Elevage, held in Montier en Der a wonderful little French village in France's Champagne Region. These breeds that make up this group of Hounds are the Grand Griffon Vendeen, the Briquet Griffon Vendeen, the Grand Basset Griffon Vendeen and our own passion and the only one of these breeds we have to date in Australia and New Zealand, the Petit Basset Griffon Vendeen.

These four breeds were all developed in the rugged region of Vendeen in France with their ancestors going back to the 16th Century. The French have always been passionate hunters and are exactly the same today, any dog not able to do the job it was developed for, is quickly disposed of. Needless to say as each of these breeds have a distinct purpose and style of hunting for a particular type of game it is paramount to French breeders, that each breed keeps their own distinct type and balance.

The Grand Griffon Vendeen is the largest of the four varieties, standing at M: 62-68cm F: 60-65cm. He is a powerful, strong boned individual, a scent hound used by hunters with or without guns, to hunt large game, stag, roe-deer, wild boar, fox, generally in a pack or individually as a limer (dog held on a lead and used for picking up a cold trail).

The next down in size is the Briquet Griffon Vendeen, "Briquet" meaning "medium-sized dog, stands at M: 50-55 F: 48-53 and hunts rather fast, usually with nose to the wind. They are usually worked in small packs and used with the gun, on large game, along with fox and hare. This dog is lighter in bone than his larger cousin who makes him swifter and more agile.

Next come the two smaller varieties the Grand Basset Griffon Vendeen (GBGV) standing between M: 40-44cm F: 39-43cm and the Petit Basset Griffon Vendeen (PBGV) standing 34-38cm. The GBGV is the fastest of all the scent hound Bassets, and today is used primarily when hunting with a gun; he is used for hunting all furry game, from rabbit to wild boar.

The PBGV is perfect for the hunter with a gun on territories of medium size, his prime game is rabbits, but no other game escapes from him. The PBGV as well as being the smallest in height, like the Briquet Griffon Vendeen, is a little lighter in bone than the GBGV, which makes him more agile and able to access small openings in undergrowth that the bigger, heavier dogs cannot.

So now for the actual event. If anyone knows the French well, you will understand learning to speak English is not high on their agenda, so unless you have someone who speaks fluent French trying to speak in depth with them and learn anything is a bit of a trial! Luckily for Russ and I we had friends there that could. We formed an overseas team of PBGV fanciers that stuck closely together which included Linda and Jenna Skerritt from the UK, Suzanne Douglass, Brent Humphries and Corey Benedict from the USA, Gunnar Nymann, Hoger Busk and Gita from Denmark and Jolanda Huisman from the Netherlands, who was actually very busy most of the time, showing her 8 dogs (7 GBGVs and 1 PBGV). With Suzanne and Jolanda speaking fluent French and Gunnar a little French, we managed to understand most of what we heard or was explained to us. Of course understanding the language was one thing, but understanding the show procedure and judging was really something else and to this day, I still think the only one of us that did was Jolanda!

At least they judge the breeds separately, so finding where the breeds are being judged is not too difficult, that is if you can work out which is the ring and which is ringside, as people with dogs are milling everywhere, and standing around in groups talking both inside and outside roped areas. The judge is often nowhere to be seen, then suddenly pops up and asks for a dog to come over to him and he goes over it.

I have to say at one stage, I was standing behind some ropes taking photos of dogs which, I thought were in a ring, when actually I was in the ring and they were on the outside! Everything is so casual. Most of the dogs were not bathed and in fact many had mats in their coats. One dog in the ring had obviously had a fight at some stage of the day and the owner had rubbed the area of the wound, smearing the blood all over one side of the face and the judge did not even seem to notice. In fact this dog was short listed for a placing. Handlers of the dogs chat away on cell phones whilst the judge is looking at their dogs in line ups and people come and go out of the ring, often changing handlers at whim. Dressing up for the event does not seem to be too high on the agenda either. You can imagine how we Aussies and the Yanks, tended to stand around with our mouths slightly agape for much of the time.

However in saying all this, the judges were very astute and could see exactly what they were looking for in the breeds and it was MOST obvious they really knew the breed characteristics of each of these four breeds well. The wicket was brought out time and time again, especially with the GBGVs and the PBGVs and a number of dogs were

wicketed out, no matter how good a specimen they were. The judge writes a critique for each dog as he judges it, and then awards either an Excellent, Very Good, or Good and so on, once he gives this to the handler they can leave the ring. Those dogs that receive an Excellent or Very Good are bought back into the ring and the place winners of the class are picked from these, hence all the coming and going that initially looked so confusing to us.

Once the dogs are called back for class placings, things are more conventional, and even we could understand procedures, as the judge shortlists, then runs the dogs around together and compares them to each other like we do here before placing them to 4th place. I must admit though, with the grass around 3 to 4 inches in places and half the dogs pulling on the leads and galloping, I am not sure what they could see movement wise. Finally, the first and second place winners (another anomaly I could not understand), are all bought back into the ring for the judge to get his CC and Reserve for each sex. Regardless of my lack of understanding of their system, in the finally analysis, each judge in each group of dogs, seemed to come up with a series of good dogs to pick their CCs and their ultimate BOBs.

Show Specials begin with Breeder's Packs for each individual breed, which is wonderful to watch as a breeder comes into the ring with their own hunting packs, some with as many as eight dogs in a pack. These are judged (like our team classes) on conformity of type etc. It was an amazing sight I will never forget, to see these wonderful packs of dogs that were so uniform within their breed.

This is followed by Breeder's Teams, (sire dam offspring etc) and finally they bring in the four BOB winners to pick the eventual BIS winner.



BIS Ch Une Farandole Van Tum-Tum's Vriendjes



Briquette Griffon Vendeen

This year, BIS went to a gorgeous GBGV bitch from the Netherlands Ch Une Farandole Van Tum-Tum's Vriendjes owned by M Huikeshoven. In the Netherlands they do wash and trim their dogs and this dog was presented superbly and moved beautifully by his accomplished handler and in my opinion stood out, but then I also loved the BOB PBGV bitch, which I was itchy to get my hands on, as I believed cleaned up and handled as well as the GBGV would have given him a real run for it's money. (The 'PBGV' took out Second Best in show, with the 'Briquet Griffon Vendeen' Third Best and the 'Grand Griffon' Fourth Best)

Apart from the competition, the event is coupled with many wine stalls for tasting local wines, wonderful French food and lots of stalls, sporting all sorts of hunting equipment from archery, to high powered guns. There are many shops to buy all sorts of doggy paraphernalia. The French Club had hired a team of men who play the French hunting horns. They are dressed in traditional uniforms and walked around the grounds playing hunting calls every half hour or so. (You would be standing talking and then suddenly couldn't hear a thing as you were blasted from behind by 8 hunting horns for 10 minutes then off they would go again!)

I must say it certainly added a kind of ambience to the day! The club also puts on two big dinners, with great food and local wines, but once again in the typical French fashion of 'don't worry or hurry', even though the tickets stated 8.00pm start, the entrees, never arrived until about a quarter to 10 each time.

The French club has come under fire from overseas members, especially PBGV clubs from other countries regarding their lack of interest in the health of the breed, as there are blind dogs now in a number of countries. I was lucky enough to be invited to the Club Board Meeting and honoured also to be invited to become the Australian delegate for the club. At this meeting, I was delighted to hear, they have now adopted the rule that all breeders MUST have their dog's eye's tested yearly, and a dog can not obtain either it's hunting or conformation Championship title unless it has it's current eye certificate and any breeder that does not have their dog's eyes tested will not be listed as a club member.

Being a PBGV lover, I was most interested in the PBGV judging I saw and the comments from many of the judicious and successful breeders over there. It was very noticeable, that there were hardly any long PBGV, and none that were over

