



Quail Ahead, Owned by Mike Mullineux of Pennsylvania

German Shorthaired Pointer

by
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Photos by Trischa Franklin

He took a quick glance over his shoulder to see if I was following him, then tip-toed a little farther. He paused once again, then quietly moved a few steps more. This whole business was like watching a married man trying to sneak into the bedroom of his sleeping wife after a late night with the boys. I felt a heightened sense of awareness as we both eased forward a few more feet.

Then in mid-step he froze, started to put his left foot down, then lifted it, and then dropped it to about three inches off the ground and held it there. I looked behind me and his brace mate stood as his twin, rigid as Lot's wife.

That's the way I remember hunting for the first time with German Shorthaired Pointers about 20 years ago. Since then, I have seen the breed slowly

increase in popularity, not just among bird hunters, but non-hunters as well.

The German Shorthaired Pointer (GSP) has a loyal following. But as Debbie Burgess, who along with her husband, breeds German Shorthaireds in western Goochland County states, "They are not for everyone." The Burgesses show their dogs in specialty shows as well as shows similar to the Westminster Dog Show. The GSP won Best in Show at Westminster in 2005. "German Shorthaired Pointers require a great deal of exercise, and we interview a potential buyer of one of our pups to make sure we have a good match. German Shorthaireds like companionship and make excellent family dogs, but left alone they can be destructive."

Reputable breeders follow a code of ethics and will take a dog back if there is a

problem. "The interview process, we feel, helps both the breeder and the potential buyer understand the obligations of both parties," says Debbie. This process may seem foreign to someone who wants a pup, German Shorthaired or otherwise. However, if more potential owners of dogs did some pre-planning and investigation of the breed they think they want to spend 10 to 15 years with, there would be less need for rescue organizations. This theory seems to have worked well for the Burgesses: They have had to take back only one dog in almost 20 years.

The German Shorthaired Pointer is one of a number of dogs that would be considered a continental breed, a versatile hunting dog that does more than just point birds. These dogs are thought to have descended from the Spanish Pointer in the 1600s. They were bred to other hunting breeds including the English Pointer. European hunting was different from bird hunting as practiced today in the United States. Economics prevented having specialized dogs that only hunted and retrieved birds. A versatile dog had to hunt in the summer heat and make water retrieves for ducks in the winter. It had to be able to retrieve hares, and run and give sound while chasing deer. It was also required to act as a guard dog.

Americans began to import the German Shorthaired Pointer in the 1920s, looking for a close working, all-around bird dog and a dog with other talents. You will see Shorthaireds at work not only in field trials, but also in agility and obedience competition, search and rescue, and drug detection. Because of their affection for people, they are also used as therapy dogs.

As a hunting dog, the breed excels in most environments and on just about any feathered quarry. Their popularity over other pointing breeds may be because they are eager to please and therefore easier to train. The dog's coat, though short, is not thin and has an underlayer that protects it in colder temperatures. It also has webbed



Preparing for the breakaway at a field trial near Remington, Virginia

Retrieving to hand: Professional trainer Dave Pomfret of Blandfield Plantation with Bubba



feet, which help make it a good swimmer. The GSP hunts with you, not by himself – a bird dog who desires to please you, instead of wanting to see for himself if there are birds in the next county.

An interesting aspect of the GSP is the variation of coat color, which may confuse people into thinking they are looking at a different breed. According to the German Shorthaired Pointer Club of America's guidelines "the breed standard as written (currently) does not allow for the black variation to be shown in the confirmation ring but that does not preclude the black version from being registered with the AKC or compete in all performance events..."

And while the German Shorthaired Pointers were initially imported as hunting dogs, the breed's intelligence makes it a prized athlete in agility trials as well. In an agility trial, you and your dog compete together. Your dog must run a course consisting of hurdles, tunnels and other obstacles. You assist the dog with a series of verbal commands and hand signals. For those who appreciate the athleticism of sporting dogs but do not wish to hunt, a German Shorthaired Pointer would make an excellent companion.

Beth and Bob Ritchie, who reside in Powhatan, Virginia, have been breeders of Shorthaireds since 1991. Bob works their GSPs in the show ring, while Beth has been running their dogs in agility trials since 2000. As Beth said at the Central Virginia Agility Club's AKC sanctioned trial held recently at Campbell Springs Farm in Chesterfield, Virginia, "These dogs are very trainable and can compete effectively in agility trials. It is their versatility that makes them so special. Because they were bred to be close hunting dogs, they respond

well to human contact."

The German Shorthaired Pointer is an excellent family dog for the right kind of family. It is an intelligent, active dog, and not suited to be left alone a great deal. If so, its owner may discover it has other talents and ways to amuse itself, such as fence climbing or interior renovation. This breed is loyal, affectionate – wants to be an inside family member – and is protective. If your family likes hiking, jogging and/or hunting, this dog would make a great addition.



New best friend
(Photo by Dwight Dyke)

Clarke C. Jones is a freelance writer who spends his spare time hunting up stories with his black Lab, Luke. You can visit Clarke and Luke on their web site at www.clarkecjones.com.