



# Sport'n Dogs Go

*When considering a new dog for waterfowl or bird hunting, look at your full range of options.*

story by Clarke C. Jones

*“W*ell, what do you think of her?” my friend asked as we stood in his driveway admiring his new luxury vehicle.

“Aren’t you the traditionalist who always says, ‘Buy American?’” I responded.

“You are right,” he replied somewhat sheepishly, “but the Cadillac and Lincoln just don’t have the same cachet they used to have. Besides, this car is made in America—it just didn’t *originate* in America.”

“When did you start using words like ‘cachet’ in a sentence?” I inquired.

“Ever since a French company agreed to

buy my construction business. Everyone has gone global now,” he countered. “Good or bad, things just aren’t the way they used to be.”

As I headed home in my less-than-luxurious pickup, I thought about what my friend said and how things have changed in this country, not just in car selection, but in so many other ways, including bird and waterfowl hunting. Loss of habitat has certainly played some role in the selection of dogs we use to hunt. But it is not the only factor.

It did not seem so long ago that a Labrador or Chesapeake retriever was the only dog you considered when hunting ducks and an English pointer or English setter was all you would want for bird hunting. About 25 years ago, I started to notice a few conti-



Left, Flat-Coated Retriever, and above, Vizsla. ©Dwight Dyke

# Global

mental imports, like brittanys or the occasional German shorthaired pointer, in the field. Whether you shoot pheasant on a preserve or waterfowl in a marsh, it's worth looking at a few different hunting breeds that are now available but may not rise to the forefront of discussions when considering a bird dog.

## The Flat-Coated Retriever

Let's start with a dog that many consider one of the best looking of all dog breeds, the flat-coated retriever. This longhaired, raven beauty could be the Elizabeth Taylor or Kim Kardashian of the dog world and looks very smart trotting around the show ring. However, the flat-coated retriever can perform in the field as well.

Hill Wellford, who lives on the Rappahannock River near Caret, says this about flatcoats: "My wife and I have owned both Labs and flat-coats over the years and both breeds have wonderful and loving dispositions. Our experience with flat-coats is they are relatively easy to train, absolutely love to hunt waterfowl and upland game, and have excellent noses. They are great at finding a cripple in a marsh and at trailing a bird that has crawled away," added Hill.

It is Wellford's opinion that flatcoats, though full of energy, are a little calmer than Labs in a duck blind. If you have ever been bowled over by an eager Chesapeake or Labrador while in the close confines of a duck blind, you know how important a quiet, calm retriever can be. Who should not own a flat-coat? Wellford cautioned, "Flat-coats are very energetic and require walks and daily exercise... I would not recommend them to a family that doesn't have the time to give them regular exercise opportunities."

## The Vizsla

Imported from Hungary, the vizsla is a medium-built, short-coated and rust-colored pointing dog whose breed history goes back over 1,000 years. They are known to be clean, light-shedding dogs. The vizsla is considered a versatile hunting breed and it will hunt fur as well as feather. It put its stamp on the term *versatile* when it became the first dog breed to become an AKC Quintuple Champion, meaning that one vizsla won championships in five different categories.

I had the opportunity to watch Darin Strickland work his vizsla at Blandfield Plantation near Tappahannock, and—take it from me—this dog did not mess around. It can cover a lot of ground in a short period of time and seems to do so effortlessly and with style. Strickland has been hunting with vizslas for a dozen years now. According to Darin, not only are vizslas good hunting dogs, they are affectionate family dogs as well.

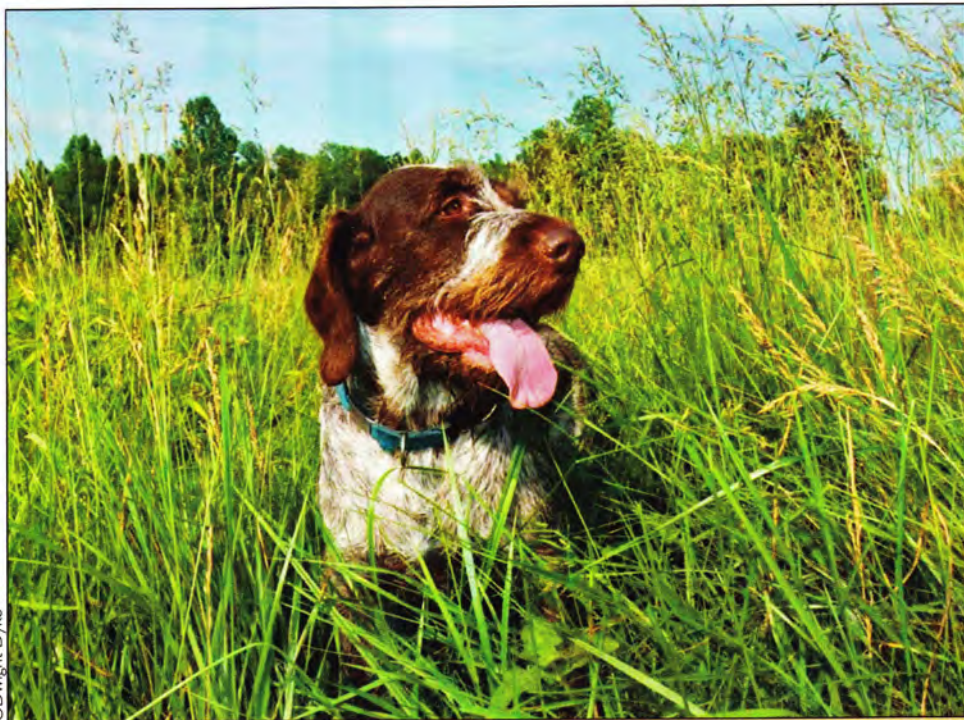
“Vizslas do not make good kennel-run dogs. They want to be with you in your house and near you. They are excellent pets for people with an active lifestyle.” Darin advises those who may be interested in acquiring a vizsla: “If you intend to hunt, get your vizsla from known field stock. The best come from field trial stock. You will not find a well-bred vizsla waiting for you in the classifieds of your newspaper.”

## The Spinone Italiano

The Italians have been making firearms for over 400 years. They have been using hunting dogs for over 1,000 years and boast of two of the oldest hunting breeds in the world: the bracco and the spinone Italiano. The spinone (pron. spee-NO-nay) is a muscular, versatile hunting dog, often confused at first glance with German wirehaired pointers. Unlike the German wirehaired pointer, the spinone does not have an undercoat. They are a close-hunting dog, making them ideal for upland hunts. Breeder and hunter Ron Rosinski of Powhatan has hunted over spinoni (plural) since 1996 on grouse, woodcock, and pheasant. Although Ron has hunted over brittany's in the past, and believes them to be a close-working dog, it is his opinion the spinone is “more attuned to the hunter.” The spinone also has the reputation of being a friendly and loyal family companion.

## The Boykin Spaniel

The all-American boykin is the state dog of South Carolina, and compared to some breeds in this article, it is a relative newcomer to the hunting scene. This brown, or chocolate-colored, dog of medium height has a wavy outer coat of medium length as well as an undercoat. It can hunt most feathered game where any flushing dog is used. A number of Virginians have already discovered the flexibility of this breed. Carson Quarles, near Roanoke, believes the boykin to be a fine turkey dog, while Harriett Clark, from Sutherlin, field trials her boykins and believes they are excellent dogs when hunting pheasant. Other owners believe this 30- to 40-lb. canine is the perfect dog for duck hunting when in a boat. If you have ever tried to pull a 90-lb. Lab back into your jon-boat after it has made a retrieve, you can certainly appreciate having one of these little brown, dynamo boykins do the retrieving for you.



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Top, Spinone, and above, Boykin.

## The Deutsch Drahthaar

The Deuthsch drahthaar (pron. dra-thar) originated in Germany and, like so many European hunting dogs, it was expected to hunt both fur and feather. In the U.S., however, a pointing dog that is sturdy enough for waterfowl hunting might be the answer to a wing-shooter's prayers.

“I was looking for a versatile hunting dog that I could take both upland and waterfowl hunting,” said Ben Adamson of Richmond. “I’ve hunted upland game with flushing dogs and a number of them range so far out and often flush game before you are close enough for a good shot. This can be extremely frustrating—especially when grouse hunting,” continued Adamson. Ben also believes the



Drahthaar



Toller

drahthaar can be a good family dog that likes being around its owners.

Deutsch-drahthaar breeder Whit Johnston from Spout Spring points out that the drahthaar is bred through very strict guidelines. "To know you have a true drahthaar, inspect the underside of the dog's right ear for a green tattoo," cautioned Whit. "This green tattoo number is issued from Germany to the breeder after the breeder registers his or her puppies." According to Johnston, this is to guarantee that you are getting a puppy whose entire line comes from hunting stock.

"When you get the certification that your puppy is an actual deutsch-drahthaar, you are pretty much assured that both its parents have passed at least two versatile hunting tests, had their hips X-rayed and blood tested, and its teeth, eyes, coat, and confirmation are all within the breed standard," he added.

## The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever

This medium-sized, double coated dog loves to retrieve and is the smallest of the retriever class, though it does resemble a small golden retriever. It is far more active than a golden, however.

Hunter and full-time trainer Paul Kartes,

who has hunted over all types of retrievers, explains his desire to hunt over tollers. "I wanted a smaller retriever. While a toller can compete in a 200-yard retrieve, most of my 'real world' shots in hunting are rarely longer than 30 yards. The toller has a great nose, a desire to retrieve, and energy to spare, but it also knows when to turn it 'off' at home. The toller personality fits my type of hunting and my personality. They are not like Labs and goldens, where they are everybody's friend. They know who their family is and that is generally where they will seek attention. They are not mean or vicious to strangers but can be aloof to them."

Ed Callender, from Woodbridge, has been hunting with a toller for over seven years and wanted a smaller hunting companion. A male toller will run about 45–55 pounds, which works a lot better when hunting out of his 12-foot pirogue. According to Callender, tollers are highly adaptable but cautious, so if you plan to hunt them they will need access to water and open areas where they can train and get used to field conditions and be exposed to a wide variety of new environments.

"They need exercise and contact with people, so leaving them in a crate all day is not a good option. Tollers from hunting stock may be difficult to find, cautions Callender,

so do your research. "If you want a great hunting companion, a superb family dog that will make you laugh at least once a day, I recommend a toller," said Ed.



The reader should be mindful that this magazine is not endorsing any particular breed here and that a number of quotes come from breeders and owners who may have a natural bias toward the breed they own. Every dog breed comes with its own issues, and anyone interested in *any* breed should do his research before purchasing one. Most hunting breeds require daily or regular, vigorous exercise. Many breeds have their own organizations, which offer good resources for learning the specifics of a particular dog's character. Good breeders are particular about their breed of choice, and the last thing they want to see is a client buying a pup based on how cute it is and not making a knowledgeable selection. Too many dogs wind up with rescue organizations or in shelters because a new puppy owner didn't do his homework. ❦

*Clarke C. Jones is a freelance writer who spends his spare time hunting up good stories with his black Lab, Luke. You can contact Clarke or Luke by going to their website at [www.clarkecjones.com](http://www.clarkecjones.com).*