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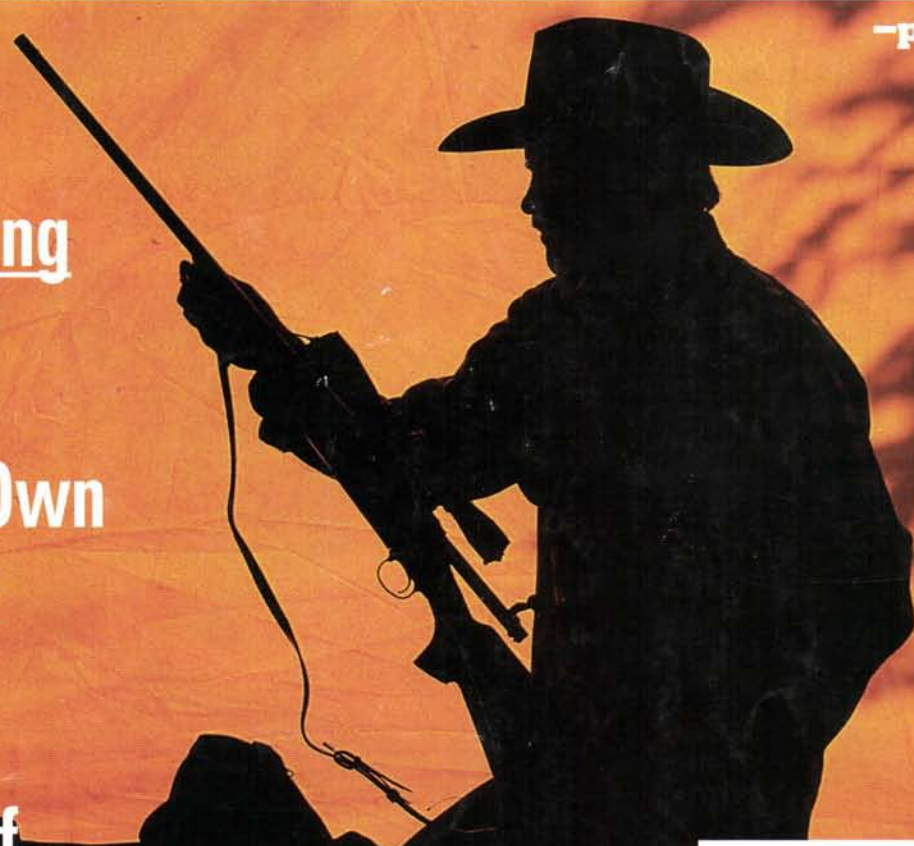
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BILL TARRANT

The Pudelpointer

Bob Farris accepts nothing less than perfection

from himself—and his dogs.

ONCE FIGURED THE MOST CONSCIENTIOUS hunter on earth was Weatherby Award winner Watson T. Yoshimoto. I awakened in our hunting tent one morning to find that Yoshi had field-stripped, oiled, and reassembled his tape measure. If there was a trophy to measure, that tape was going to work.

But I may have met Yoshi's runner-up when I called on Bob Farris in Boise, Idaho, to ask about his pudelpointers. I talked for a while with this hospital lab chemist, toured his grounds, worked some pups, then followed him to his rec room.

There I found a grand slam of North American sheep hanging on the wall, an elk trophy with a rack that could hold all the laundry of a mud game played by the Green Bay Packers, and sundry other trophies that some hunters would cut a deal with the Devil to call their own.

But what really impressed me was the intensity of this man's appraisal of his dogs. The pudelpointer is a German product begat with multiple crosses of the old *wasser* (water) *pudel* and the English pointer. The result is a versatile dog that will point and fetch, hunt fur and feather,

cramped urban or suburban dweller limited to one do-it-all dog. For this is a live-in dog, a family dog, a kid's dog, that nevertheless will fetch your duck from an ice-packed river, kick your pheasant from a row crop, or dig in a

and blood-trail wounded game.

In other words, it's an excellent dog for today's

company of an aged and infirm Communist-routed Balkan protester. He was a kind man and his two pudelpointers hunted for him, that's for sure, but they gave him more than that. Those dogs were concerned with his well-being, his ability to get about the marsh. And that care showed in their eyes and in their slow and precise way of moving about the man.

Yet, when I hunted these dogs alone, they were animated, full of fire, playful, eager, and, if given encouragement, would beat you to a pulp with their let's-get-it-on tails.

Since then I've loved these dogs and I ask Bob Farris why he shares that sentiment. He tells me, "The pudelpointer is just totally different. It's the affection, that's what it is. It's their biddability. Why, I can teach a pudelpointer to whoa in two days. With a shorthair pointer it would take a week. That's pretty standard, too, so I'd rather be training pudelpointers.

"They have a personality that glows within them," adds Bob. "The people who own them really get hooked on them because they have a way of winning your affection.

"It's important to them to do that. It's in every one of them and I've never seen it that strong in another breed."

Bob had Chesapeake Bay retrievers and English setters prior to the pudel-



brush tangle to produce a knocked-down bobwhite.

I've been impressed with the pudelpointer since I first hunted waterfowl with one in Germany. I was in the

"This is a family dog that nevertheless will fetch your duck from an ice-packed river or kick your pheasant from a row crop."

ILLUSTRATION BY SALVATORE CATALANO

pointers, so I ask what prompted him to switch to the salt-and-pepper dogs with the hairbrush face.

He says, "The pudelpointer bonds with people...like the golden retriever. They need that: yes, some dogs just seem to need people more. Without that, though, why have them?"

I nod my head and take measure of this man before me. He's not tall—a little taller than I am—blocky, with light-blue eyes and gray hair. He's wearing shorts and shows a set of rock-hard calves: they let him get the grand slam, up and down those endless mountains.

The man talks about fishing for steelhead in the Snake River, hunting blue, ruffed, and sage grouse with his pudelpointers, getting them into valley quail and Hungarian partridge, chukars, pheasants....

I tell him, "To do all that you've got to put in some days each year."

He says back—and, yes, this is so distinguishing about him, his low, barely audible voice. I can hardly hear him say, "I want to hunt 100 days each year. But I'm lucky if I can get in eighty."

THEN HE POINTS OUT, "THERE are pudelpointer breeders and owners who don't hunt their dogs. With me—I'm a hunter first. I love hunting. So that's the thing that's different between my dogs and a lot of pudelpointer kennels.

"You see," he explains, "if I went duck hunting with a man who owned the national champion retriever, I'd be putting my back against the wall. Especially with the sissy name of my breed: pudelpointer.

"And I couldn't do it. I couldn't stand for them to laugh at me and my dog. So if I'm going to join that guy duck hunting, I'm really going to put down a duck dog. Understand?"

I nod my head yes and Bob says, "I've gone through a lot of pudelpointers to be able to do that. So that permits me to go bird hunting the next day with a guy whose setters are horseback field-trial champions. And I'm not going hunting unless my dogs

"If you don't hunt, you're never going to have one of my pups...."

are as good as his."

Are you starting to feel the intensity of this guy? His need to oil his own tape measure? His demand for performance? His refusal to have any gun dog put his pudelpointers to shame?

"I've sold a lot of six-month-old puppies," he says. "They didn't love the water enough, weren't bold

enough, weren't tough enough. I've worked to get what I've got.

"That's why I prescreen anyone who wants a pup from me. And there aren't that many to be got. This isn't a factory-outlet dog. Matter of fact, there are probably no more than five guys in America who can say they are pudelpointer breeders. And I work hard to have my kennels personify the hunt.

"So if you don't hunt, you're never going to have one of my pups. And if that dog isn't a house member, you aren't going to have one of 'em neither. Oh, the dog may be placed in a kennel during the day, let's say, but he'd better be invited in at night to watch TV.

"Cause this is what these dogs give you. They'll lay there in the living room and never once take their eyes off you. They are just unbelievably loyal...and you're going to put that in a kennel?"

When you get around the continental breeds, the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) eventually comes up. I consider this to be America's premier group for training and testing hunting dogs.

Most field trials and hunt tests exist more and more for man's vanity, his attainment of a trophy at a dog's misfortune. Plus, these trials exist to *avoid* complying with their own charter, which states, "A field trial will duplicate a day's hunt afield." Well, if what our field trial and hunt test contenders are doing is called hunting, they'd better apply for food stamps.

But not with NAVHDA. First off, there are no winners. So that takes out man's ego and concentrates on the dog's performance. All dogs vie against par, like a golfer. In other words, the course beats the golfer,

not some other guy.

So it is with NAVHDA. The course beats the dog. Some other dog didn't do it.

This removes all the rancor that accompanies testing, all the bitterness with the judges, the jealousy of fellow contenders, the hostility bar at the conclusion of the day.

So really, to get yourself a continental dog and start to school (for that's what it is) with NAVHDA, you and Pup are on your way to becoming bona fide foot hunters and waterfowlers. And you've got training support, instructions, get-togethers. It's all just swell.

Oh, I admit, some of the NAVHDA guys may show up looking like alpine climbers, with beards to match the ones their dogs wear. But don't we have room in this country for diversity? It is cross-over training and different breeds that give us our breakthroughs. Just heel, sit, and stay don't get it anymore.

So I'm going to tell you how to get in touch with NAVHDA. Write them at Dept. FS, Box 520, Lincoln Heights, IL 60006 or weave the web at www.navhda.org. Some questions are pre-answered on the website.

Bob Farris is presently apprenticing for a judgeship with NAVHDA. Get involved; you may be under his gavel one day. But from what I sense about this guy, you'd better put down a hunting dog if you intend to get his nod.



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Last Spring, Did You Have
The Uneasy Feeling
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feel your IQ increase.*