

For the love of the Gundog!

→ **TONY RAINE** on his twin passions: photography and gundog training



Photo: Tony Raine

Without dogs, or, to be more exact gundogs, we'd still be out on the moor picking up for ourselves. To see a well-trained gundog doing its thing is a marvel. I first witnessed the skills of the gun dog more than 20 years ago when I first started shooting. I had just started a new career in farming, and before long I had a shotgun certificate then a brand new shotgun. I had some great times shooting and was always amazed to see the skills of the labradors and spaniels whilst working on the moors or in the forestry.

Move on 20 plus years and things have changed a little. Different career, less time, other priorities, shotgun sold and then certificate not renewed. I then found myself with a springer spaniel called Sprocket (more about him later).

I am now shooting again but with camera instead of a 12 bore shotgun. I used to dabble with a camera long before my interest in country sports, but had not done so for a very long time. It's only been a couple of years since I picked up the camera again, but getting out and about with Sprocket has given me an excuse to start taking photographs of him and kick-start my interest in all things country sports. The main big advantage I have is my location. Within 20 to 30 minutes I can be on the North Yorkshire moors, over in the Yorkshire Dales or heading off into the Durham Dales for some of the best sporting country in the UK.

For the last 12 months I have had the opportunity to photograph the training sessions of the Yorkshire Dales Gundog Club, started by Andy Brook who I have

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known for nearly 15 years but only found out about his interest in gundogs last year. Andy invited me along to one of the training sessions, and I was hooked. Everyone in the club is an amateur, but an amateur with a love of gundogs and a passion for seeing them fulfil their potential. It's been a real pleasure watching the dogs develop; as has meeting the owners and seeing their enthusiasm for their dogs grow. Watching the dogs gain experience and new skills required to take part in tests, and to be confident enough to get out on local shoots with their handlers, is a real joy.

Looking at the qualities needed to be a good gundog (see box) I am not sure how many I would tick off with regard to my dog Sprocket. He's now 12 years old but still believes he's a two-year-old and has a genuine love of retrieving, mostly the socks out of the laundry basket. He also has a great nose; he can always find the Sunday roast no matter where we hide it. In his own mind he is a well disciplined and obedient Springer Spaniel; in reality 95% of the time he is, the other 5% always seems to clash with when I am showing off his skills and he decides to do it his way. He would swim the Channel given half a chance, he is a proper water dog, the only thing being its mostly muddy smelly water that he tends to find and he does make the most of it! His battery is running a little lower these days, but I think he thinks he can re-charge it by the amount of sleeping he does. Morning walk, sleep, eat, sleep, afternoon walk, sleep, eat, sleep, things dogs need to do last thing at night walk, sleep and repeat. Sprocket is a Springer Spaniel, so of course, he's family friendly. He would be barking on your arrival for the attention he so rightly deserves (his opinion I think) and be on your lap giving you a great big sloppy welcome, if you gave him half a chance.

I wouldn't change one thing about him, he may be seen as a typical gundog to lots of people, but to me and my wife he's a lot more, and I suspect that will be the same for the majority of gun dog owners out there. ●

We know that gundogs are intelligent and energetic, and training is the ideal way to channel their natural drive and enthusiasm, resulting in a happy relaxed dog.

Below are just a few qualities this amateur gundog enthusiast/photographer thinks that go towards making a good working dog

- Genuine love for retrieving
- Great nose
- Disciplined
- Gentle touch
- Obedient
- Water lover
- Energetic
- Family friendly

The Yorkshire Dales Gundog Club, run by Andy Brook, is firstly about fun.



As Tony explains, it is an amateur club focussing on seeing dogs fulfil their potential. Those who come to the club may be completely new to gundog training and want to find out what it entails, or may have been, or are involved with the game shooting aspect but now want to learn more about the competitive side. Training takes place every two weeks on a Sunday morning and is divided into Puppy class and Novice Class. For more information and to book, visit www.yorkshiredalesgundogclub.org.uk