

A clash in Clumber land



David Tomlinson asks why the Kennel Club has ignored the work of the WCSS in its latest review of the Clumber breed standard

Clumber spaniels are one of the breeds whose standard the Kennel Club (KC) believes requires careful consideration. Indeed it does.

According to James Darley of the Working Clumber Spaniel Society (WCSS), the KC has revised the standard no fewer than four times in the past 100 years, always at the behest of the show community. Each revision increased the maximum weight allowed from the original 40lb to the current ideal of 80lb. The latest standard also stipulates a *rolling gait attributable to long body and short legs*, hardly the recipe for a sporting and active gundog.

For the past 24 years the WCSS has been working hard to restore the Clumber to a proper gundog, ignoring the breed standard and attempting to recreate dogs that look something like the 19th-century depictions of the breed, such as the classic paintings by John Emms. The society's success has been quite remarkable. I have enjoyed some great shooting

days over Clumbers and have invariably been impressed by both the endurance and sheer ability of the dogs.

There's no doubt that the WCSS has demonstrated brilliantly that both the looks and health of a breed can be restored through sensible and careful breeding. Thus you would have thought that the KC would have turned to it for advice and guidance when drafting the new breed standard. Not a bit of it, for the society hasn't even been informed by the KC of the review now taking place, nor of the development of a breed health plan. The WCSS, incidentally, already has its own evaluation scheme for work, size, hips and eyes, which is approved by the British Veterinary Association and used as a model by other breeds.

James Darley made the point that, "If any

organisation was in a position to demonstrate from experience what works in Clumbers, it is the WCSS, yet the KC has chosen not to involve it. Could this be pique? If so, it comes from an organisation now trying to persuade Government minister Hilary Benn that it should be entrusted with the improvement of dogs through statutory powers. The KC would do well to swallow its pride and gratefully accept the help offered by the WCSS, an offer made before the critical review of standards was announced."

James went on to remind me that, "among the minority spaniel breeds, Clumbers dominate.

In the past 10 shooting seasons, 11 different dogs have won field trials. This compares with only one in the previous 84 seasons. The average hip score of work-bred Clumbers is 12, whereas that for show dogs is 55. In size, type, trainability, temperament, pace and punch, Clumbers have been restored to a Victorian model that owes nothing to the current breed standard, but meets the

expectations of sportsmen. Demand continues to grow for these appealing gundogs, though for most Guns it is still a comparatively rare joy to see one or more working on a shoot."

I first shot with James over his Clumbers 18 years ago. I recall a bitterly cold day in the Chilterns when the scent was poor and the birds few. We ended up with a single cock pheasant in the bag, a reward for the perseverance of his dogs. The most enjoyable day I've had over Clumbers was eight years ago, when I joined James with John and Debbie Zurick for a memorable day's roughshooting over the marshes at Pulborough, in Sussex. Among the Clumbers out that day were James's dog, Max, and his litter brother Wooster, owned and handled by John Zurick.



Max and Wooster both enjoyed successful careers



Founding member of the WCSS
James Darley with his Clumber Max

D. TOMLINSON



Max and Wooster were then only two years old and they worked tirelessly in difficult conditions. I was impressed and reported as such in this column. Max and Wooster went on to enjoy successful careers both in the shooting and trialling field. Max eventually won three trials, a record unequalled by a Clumber since Queen Victoria was on the throne.

Thus I was saddened to hear from John that Max had to be put down last month when he suffered an irreparable break to his leg while out exercising before a day's picking-up. By a twist of fate, on the very day that Max died, James's bitch Ros (*Sedgeburst Rosamund Venaticus*) gave birth to nine puppies, the first-ever litter of Clumbers bred from parents that have both won field trials. The sire is Clumber breeder and trialler Ron James's dog, *Flintwood Blizzard*.

A revolutionary new dummy

Innovation in the world of gundog training is as rare as a golden retriever winning the Retriever Championship. It happens occasionally, but not very often, so when it does it is newsworthy. So I was fascinated when Ian Clinton told me that he had designed and was marketing a revolutionary new retrieving dummy. Ian, together with his wife Jill, runs the Working Dog Company. They both train and work their own Labradors.

Like all good ideas, the new dummy is very simple but totally logical. It has the gently rounded shape of a real bird and its soft, firm filling is much more likely to encourage a dog to retrieve gently than the sawdust-filled, canvas-wrapped sausages we all take for granted. It's easy to throw, and bounces on landing leaving a scent trail for the dog to follow. It also floats, so is perfect for water work. Attention to detail in the design ensures that the toggle is small, so that dogs won't be tempted to pick the dummy up by it.

► **The revolutionary retrieving dummy has the rounded shape of a gamebird**



It's such a sensible design it makes you wonder why nobody has thought of it before. It's only real disadvantage is that it costs more to manufacture than a conventional dummy, but at £5.99 for the partridge size and £6.99 for the pheasant, it certainly won't break the bank. If you are looking for a Christmas present with a difference for the handler (or dog) who has everything, this is it. My spaniels have given the new dummies their seal of approval. For more information, visit www.workingdogcompany.co.uk or tel Ian or Jill on 01462 457034.

▲ **To encourage a gentler retrieve, the Working Dog Company's new dummy is firm but soft**

Lanyards of distinction

Another suggestion for a practical present for anyone who handles gundogs is a smart, plaited leather lanyard from Karen Saynor, who markets her products under the Lagopus name. Karen is an HPR enthusiast with three large Munsterlanders that all work for their living. The youngest, 16-month-old Ekko, has recently won her first field trial award. Karen's lanyards are both individual and hardwearing and come in a variety of colours. Tell Karen what colour you would like and she will do her best to provide it. All her standard whistle lanyards cost £13, including post and packing. She can also provide lanyards for priests or even mobile phones. Order your lanyard via her website at www.lagopus.co.uk or, for more information, tel 01352 716099.

If you want a silver whistle to hang from the lanyard there's plenty to choose from. The least expensive sterling silver dog whistle I've traced comes from Annabel Chaffer and costs £40 (www.annabelchaffer.co.uk or tel 08707 300888). Rothenburg offers a silver-sleeved Acme 210 dog whistle at £47.50 and a silver Labrador-head dog whistle that looks good fun at £41.50. For more information, visit www.dogsinsilver.co.uk. For those lucky enough to be unaffected by the current financial turmoil, a James Purdey silver hallmarked dog whistle at £395 has to be the ultimate shooting accessory. To order, visit www.purdey.co.uk. Sadly, there's no guarantee that the dog will take any more notice of a luxurious silver whistle than a \$5 plastic one! ■

Email David at STgundog@aol.com.

Next week... David Tomlinson meets cocker, Lab and GSP trainer Tommy Brechney

