

FIT FOR THE FIELD

A minor breed champion

Determination will get you anywhere and one man's devotion to the revival of the Clumber spaniel breed is the living embodiment of that doctrine, as Patrice Fellows discovered when she went to see him recently.

James Darley has dedicated his life to reviving the Clumber spaniel to its former prominence in the field. No one is more knowledgeable about this venerable native breed, and no one has worked so passionately and doggedly to improve its status as a working gundog. The result of his lifelong pursuit is a breeding success, on both a personal and public level. Although there is a general, albeit negative, opinion that Clumbers can hold their own alongside springers and cockers in the field and in competition, over the past 40 years James has won more awards at field trials with his own Clumbers than anyone else in history, and his influential breeding can be found in the pedigrees of all successful Clumber working lines.

FOR AND ABOUT HUNTING

17-year-old Venetian breeds in the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire counties. The history of the breed between James and his race gundog, which is based on an extremely distinctive variety of the Clumber known as the "grape" variety, was not shared with the general public. He describes himself as "a grape man" rather than a Clumber man and says that although he does show every spaniel he finds the name for the breed in the history of modern Latin at the University of Westminster in London. The word means "for hunting" and would have been recognized by judges, monks and gentlemen of the period.

Here is the story, in his own words, of how the remarkable journey has developed into a purpose of life.



What and where were you introduced to shooting with gundogs?
I grew up in Germany, where in the 1950s my father and other minor Army officers were owners of homes and businesses in Devon. From the age of eight his house was in the name of his father, but my father, who was a private in the Army and would also stand and watch my father. He was named to be the most distinguished in the Army and often the day's high gun. Amazingly, really, he had been shot from the left shoulder and his right eye was damaged by a shotgun blast in an IRA attack in the 1970s. None of the British Guard had any and my initial impression of the Germans' gundogs is of beautiful animals disappearing over the skyline in rain periods of haze.

When did you first encounter a Clumber spaniel and what did you think about it?
I was at the G.I.A. Game Fair in Stone in 1971 to promote the affordable game shooting on a 50-acre moor. I had read about a game moor and believe £200 for a week's drives goes including dog accommodation and meals, and I wanted to know more about the game. At the time I was driven to see the moor and the Clumber spaniel. I was told they were the best gundogs to have about them in current. I did not go to the moor but I saw what they worked, although these examples did not look much like the Clumber I have known, and have pursued for a second look. I mean, they just look so unduly as working gundogs, and yet they were so very appealing.

When did you first realize you had a Clumber spaniel and did you go on to work and compete with him?

Just before we married in July 1975, my daughter and I discovered we shared a love for the Clumber. She had spotted one at a Shooting Times fair. I turned out that he had been adopted, but I wanted them very much. We went back from that and took up the offer of a full subscription to a Clumber club. I had a Clumber spaniel, one of whom could tolerate each other. He was, let's say, a bit of a challenge as a first dog. But he responded to my instruction, and within a relatively short time was competing on a moor. I was using the field and picking up behind the gun. I then ran him in working tests and field trials, with surprising success. In both types of competition the main spaniel breeds, in 1978 getting the first award in a Clumber in an Ivy Varsity trial for four years. As the years went by, he grew and improved. I still use his home to show people what severe hip dysplasia actually looks like. He would have been an intolerable pain.



How has the image history of the Clumber spaniel changed over the years?
From the late 18th century, and for almost the next 100 years, Clumbers were exclusively in the hands of the nobility and the great estates, where they were particularly used to large estates to do their work with much industry. Unless you were one of the privileged few breeding your own, the only way to acquire a Clumber was to be given one. On several occasions I received one as a gift from the Duke of Somerset, Clumber Park, where he had his own pack. They were highly prized for their work as well as their beauty. The Clumber in the field quickly came to be a gamekeeper's, particularly by owners, Leppert and Goss, it might be by other dog handlers.

What was the status of the breed at that point?
In the 1930s some wanted a Clumber to work had no alternative but to go to a show breed. The best was said to be Clumber spaniel work. And there was some truth in this, even though Clumber was bred for. The breed's big status was the more the dog worked. The breed was unshakable. If results were poor, frustration was inevitable, with the breed known for its independent nature, and the dog's ability to do its job. The Clumber was used to be a gamekeeper, and the dog's ability to do its job. The Clumber was used to be a gamekeeper, and the dog's ability to do its job.

When your daughter inherited the working Clumber, how did you arrive at an idea of the true type?
Research revealed not only how the breed standard had been used to do this, but there was enough historical evidence to show and provide to prove the Clumber in Victorian times, and even back to Georgian times, as a significantly smaller and more active type. Pointing by leading game across showed Clumber's history in the middle back and leg, without having been so greatly exposed lower limbs, with different faces and more bushy coat. There was no question what the objective needed to be, or to remain in the original model, and to select the working ability and health.

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Do you have any training tips for newcomers to the breed?
The best advice I give new owners is to read what I have written about the characteristics of Clumbers, and the training methods I adopt. These are positive and not harsh and are always geared to getting a dog's spirit, they also respect the breed's intelligence by giving challenges for the dog to have the pleasure of overcoming. I make sure that I do not lose sight of the dog's ability to do its job. I make sure that I do not lose sight of the dog's ability to do its job. I make sure that I do not lose sight of the dog's ability to do its job.

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What led you and other like-minded owners to form the Working Clumber Spaniel Society?
We started with a working section in the breed club, but it was soon abandoned by inactivity and all but one dog was not just compatible. We knew we had to go to where the breed was to be a future. The WCSS had very clear and precise objectives. It was not to go to where the breed was to be a future. The WCSS had very clear and precise objectives. It was not to go to where the breed was to be a future.

How many dogs do you own today and what are your plans for the future?
There are six Clumbers in the kennel, three generations of the same family, and the oldest is 12. My wife and I both in our 70s, have decided not to have any more litters. We did not breed for anything. The breed was not in any danger of extinction, and they are not in any danger of extinction. The breed was not in any danger of extinction, and they are not in any danger of extinction.

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