

NAVHDA, Pudelpointers & An Alliance of Breeders



Not so long ago, on a warm July summer eve, a group gathered in Idaho to celebrate the rewards of one of NAVHDA's tested breeds!

A van with four men picked me up in my drive on July 16th at dusk. This warm Ohio eve was thick with humidity and bugs. It was also filled with a certain air of excitement. Our planning of many months has come to be. After loading up, I hugged my family goodbye, climbed into the van that would be my home for the next 32 hours. Forty-five minutes down the road and we were picking up our final traveler. On this thirty-two-hour journey was Bill Athens, Bob Segedi, Bob Croner, George Hrbek, Mike Rathbun and myself.

We met down in Iowa with many miles to go before we would arrive at our destination of Boise, Idaho. One mile faded into the next. Before I knew it we were in Nebraska. None of us could resist the idea of stopping at the original Cabela's. So we did just that! It was a first for George, as practically everything on this trip was a first for him. For, you see, George had already journeyed solo before meeting up with us. His home is in the Czech Republic. It was a great honor for everyone to show him the vast greatness of our nation. After filling our eyes and bellies and emptying our wallets, we were back on the road. The sun had begun to set and the sky lit up with a multitude of hues. Eventually darkness would come and blanket us in Wyoming. We drove on, each taking a turn in the captain's chair. We met the sunrise just outside of Boise. Priorities were made and we had to stop for coffee among other things. Apparently, McDonald's has the best coffee offered at senior prices. I'm not a senior nor do I drink coffee, so it did not matter to me. While leaving the parking lot, I realized I was in a special place, as running across the parking lot we spied a covey of wild valley quail.

By now you may have asked yourself, "What makes a group six avid NAVHDA supporters want to spend 32 hours in a van, driving half-way across the United States." This was the

After six years, George Hrbek takes Hery through his paces in Czech.



annual meeting for the North American Pudelpointer Alliance (NAPPA). About eight years ago several Pudelpointer breeders formed NAPPA as an alliance for breeders of this breed. A strict breeding standard is the core of this group's existence which, as of this writing, is 22 kennels strong. NAVHDA testing along with hip radiographs are the primary focus of NAPPA's breeding standard. This group of breeders and their standard can be viewed at: www.pudelpointer.org.

Within the hour, our van would find itself at the home of Bob and Lafaye Farris and we were being greeted by six or seven female Pudelpointers, all getting along harmoniously in their enclosed acre of lawn at Cedarwood Kennels.

As we awaited the arrival of more colleagues, we bore witness to the intelligence and memory of a very special Pudelpointer for our group. About six years prior to this very journey, Bob Farris had purchased and imported a male from George Hrbek. The dog's name is Hery Ze Strazistskych Lesu. First, Bob put Hery through a few paces showing what this dog's life was now about here in Idaho. Not to be outdone, George showed us what Hery could really do and what was expected of him in past days in the Czech Republic. All in Czech commands! After six years, Hery still remembered George's training from years past and performed to perfection. Hery has been used to add genetic diversity to the North American Pudelpointers with some of the breed's most polished NAVHDA performers being sired by this dog. George was truly overcome with joy as he witnessed what his dog's contribution has given North American hunters and breeders when he encountered offspring from Hery on his two-week visit to Idaho. Bob currently has three NAPPA qualified stud dogs out of Hery. George was fortunate enough to view each dog's skills in the field during his visit. Several new Czech imports are due to arrive this spring at both Cedarwood and Killbuck kennels to hopefully add more

genetic diversity for our breed as George is now also breeding his Czech females with Austrian dogs. Other significant dogs from Ze Strazistskych Lesu Kennels that have made significant contributions for NAPPA breeders are: Heidy Ze Strazistskych Lesu, Chajra Ze Strazistskych Lesu, Gora & Gola Ze Strazistskych Lesu.

From Boise our group travelled 100 miles north to the quaint town of McCall, Idaho. Not quite Mayberry, but close enough for me. Located only two hours north of Boise, McCall is the play area for many who call Boise home. All the NAPPA breeders met at the Farris cabin. This first night was primarily to meet in person other breeders that we possibly only knew by name, but had not actually ever met in person. As well as enjoy one another's company over an adult beverage and barbecued beef by Larry Stone. It was a beautiful clear evening overlooking the crystal clear water of the stream that courses behind the Farris property. Most ate out by the river and visited far into the night on dogs and hunting experiences around the fire pit. We had breeders present from California, Oregon, Idaho, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Quebec, and Florida, so the stories and experiences seemed endless. Each NAPPA member introduced themselves and gave a synopsis of their residence, hunting opportunities, and an overview of their kennel operation. Mr. Farris had accommodations for the group planned out in advance. Seven members stayed at the Farris cabin, several stayed in a motel in McCall. I was fortunate to stay with four others in the log home of one of Bob's close friends. Not only was the log home amazing, but the owners were amazingly gracious hosts. Yes, they own one of Bob's Cedarwood Pudelpointers as well, and he is also one of Hery's offspring.

Saturday, the next morning, we all met at a McCall standard, The Pancake House. We had spoken with our hosts about the restaurant prior to leaving that morning. They said

we had to get the cinnamon roll. That's exactly what I did! You can imagine my surprise when the roll that was brought out to me would have barely fit in my dog's food dish. This thing was huge!

After breakfast, we traveled to our meeting destination, Black Hawk Lake. We had the use of their lakeside conference building for our meetings. The members dove right in to the meat and potatoes of the meeting. We discussed things such as NAVHDA test scores, preferred coats, genetics, line-breeding vs. outcrossing, the importance of both and, most importantly, breeding standards. We decided to up the ante on our breeding requirements, so that females must now score a minimum of 105 points on their NA test and a UT prize is recommended to be eligible for breeding. Males must prize in their UT test to be eligible for stud use. Since NAPPA's origin, there has been a strict breeding standard in place. The past two years of NAVHDA testing certainly support not only testing versatile dogs prior to breeding, but the use of a numerical standard to help breeders improve the breed's performance statistics. During the past two years (2008 and 2009), there have been 116 Pudelpointers tested in NAVHDA NA tests from NAPPA breeders. The average score of these 116 dogs was 107 points with 66% receiving Prize I's. Prior to NAPPA and the use of a breeding standard, the average NA score for the breed was 96 points. It becomes quite obvious when you can raise the average NA score of a breed's performance from 96 points to 107 that this breeding standard has significant merit when only the best of a breed are used for breeding purposes. The results are very favorable. Also, there were 35 Pudelpointers tested in NAVHDA UT tests during these two years; far more dogs tested than during the past years when the breed experienced a lower NA average. NAPPA wasn't in place with Utility expectations for breeding purposes, and breeders now encourage their puppy buyers to test their new pup with NAVHDA.

Larry Stone gave a PowerPoint presentation on BreedMate software. This software had been purchased by NAPPA, and all Pudelpointers in North America and Europe have been downloaded into this database. Larry demonstrated the COI (coefficient of inbreeding) for a proposed breeding and the COR (coefficient of relationship) of individual dogs on the pedigree giving a much science-based evaluation of expected breedings. Each breeder now uses this software and usually looks at three or four different possible stud dogs before their final selection. I can't begin to tell you all the different

ways this software can and will help each individual's breeding program while forecasting litters.

I might add that George had no trouble understanding our English as we covered such sophisticated topics as BreedMate and proposed increases to our breeding standard. We were fortunate to make him right at home in the USA as we made arrangements for a translator from the Czech Republic who is doing landscaping in McCall to attend our event. This made it easy for George to completely express himself, and George certainly likes to fully express his thoughts. During the PowerPoint presentation, it was easy to see the significant Czech influence from George's Ze Strazistek Lesu kennel within several of NAPPA's breeders' programs. George Hbrek is the only person that has actually handled dogs in the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, and North America, experiencing the testing organizations for each country. When asked which was the best testing system, there was no hesitation in his response. George explained that NAVHDA testing is best for our "bush" and Czech testing is best for his "bush". He went on to explain that European testing needed changes to have an effective testing program for our hunting conditions, environment, and the birds we hunt. North America rarely uses dogs to hunt fur as is done so much in Europe. There are unlimited waterfowl opportunities here that are not available in Europe. This is probably the simplest way to explain why the originators of NAVHDA in 1969 placed more focus on water retrieving and no testing on fur rather than just duplicating European tests.

At the conclusion of the official NAPPA meeting, Bob Farris took us on a sight-seeing tour in and around McCall. We ended our tour high atop a golf course at their clubhouse. Conversations continued to flow amongst new friends as easily as the suds and ales. We ended the evening with dinner at the Farris cabin. Thoughts were expressed as to, not only the value individuals receive from NAVHDA, but the values a versatile breed such as the Pudelpointer can receive following years of dedication with breeders using the NAVHDA testing system as one of the primary standards. It is this testing system that has helped breeders from all the various breeds improve and evaluate their improvements from past breedings.

We met the next day's dawn and gathered back at the Farris cabin for a breakfast of elk sausage and huckleberry pancakes. Having grown up in the Midwest, I had never eaten a huckleberry. Just imagine a smaller blueberry packed with

tons more flavor. At the request of Mike Rathbun and myself, Bob put on a training clinic after breakfast to demonstrate how he prepares dogs for their NAVHDA NA and UT tests. It was a thought provoking clinic that brought forth many new ideas and concepts.

By noon on this Sunday, we were back on the road and heading home to northeastern Ohio. Though we were one short for the ride home, as George would be staying at the Farris home for another week before flying back to the Czech Republic. This time we decided to travel through part of the northern route home. We headed north from McCall on US-95 toward I-90 in Missoula, Montana. We encountered stunning views of mountains, canyons and the crystal clear Salmon River. We were now passing through the land

of the chukar. It was midnight by the time we were east of Billings, Montana. We met the sun somewhere in the middle of South Dakota. Only one word can describe the Dakotas: EXPANSIVE! It would still be many hours before this 38 hour part of the journey would conclude at my home early Tuesday morning. I awoke from a brief nap near the end of the trip with a new found longing to get back to Idaho. I would also awake with a newfound appreciation of the journeymen I am fortunate to call friends. I also awakened with a grander appreciation and more thorough understanding of the dog called Pudelpointer, of NAPPA the organization representing this breed, and of NAVHDA the organization supporting this breed.