

SPORTING DOGS of NORTH CAROLINA

Trailing & Treeing Breeds



Of the many traits we prize and perpetuate in sporting dogs, none is more revered than “nose”—the ability to detect the scent of a game animal, often hours old, and stay relentlessly on the trail until the quarry is brought to gun, bay, ground or tree. Canine scenting ability reaches its zenith in the hounds. Their earliest record in America traces to the war dogs that accompanied the Spanish explorer De Soto in the 1540s. By the late 1700s, imported English foxhounds and German game hounds were being bred by American sportsmen to pursue cunning and ferocious North American mammals, from foxes, raccoons and deer to cougars and bears. Beyond nose, hounds must possess size, speed, voice (mouth), courage and endurance.

A cloudy, damp night, a cast of good dogs and a hot trail mean some “sweet music.” Here are 12 familiar breeds, valued no less fervently than the folkways they sprang from. All of these breeds trail their quarry, and several of them tree (H).

BASSET HOUND

At first glance, the basset, with its floppy ears and baggy hide, appears homey as a hobnail. But there's aristocracy in those veins and a world of character beneath the wrinkles. Kept by French nobility as trailing dogs, bassets throw back to the French bloodhound and the legendary St. Hubert's hound, now extinct. Black, tan and white, or orange on white, the basset is a dog of charm, good humor and deep voice, independent and quite adept on rabbits at a pace comfortably followed by foot. Branscombe Bassets in Charlotte has been home to one of the top field lines in the nation for 30 years.



"Henry," courtesy of Ruth Paule, Branscombe Bassets



BEAGLE

The only thing more at home in a brier-patch than a beagle is the rabbit itself. A happy-go-lucky little scenthound, just 11 to 15 inches at the shoulder, the beagle is button-cute and trail-serious. In the field, the beagle is a tough and agile, music-mouthed hound of moderate pace and unfaltering nose—a rabbit dog supreme. Put a pack on a cottontail, and it's one pretty racket! At home, it's a fun-loving, wonderfully dispositioned and adoring companion. Not a bred-down foxhound, but its predecessor in fact, the predominantly black, white and tan beagle has a distinctive small-dog lineage that traces to medieval England.

"Jackie," courtesy of Bobby Cooper



TREEING FEIST

Ever wondered where the old Southern epithet “feisty” came from? Here's your trouble. Bright as a gold piece, the pint-sized feist holds gallons of courage and game sense. Watching one of these little knee-highs tip-toeing through a squirrel woods, ears pricked and eyes flicking, is a down-home, “hick ry-holler” delight. The earliest ancestors of the feist were imported mixed terriers; after that, who knows? The term “treeing feist” is a catchall; the United Kennel Club (UKC) recognizes four distinct feist strains in a broad mix of colors.

"Buddy," courtesy of David Check, Southern Outlaw Plotts

REDBONE COONHOUND

Strikingly distinctive, in a coat of dusty red to deep mahogany, this is the coonhound so beautifully revered in Wilson Rawls' touching story of hill life and rite of passage, *Where the Red Fern Grows*. The redbone throws back, even in name, to the redbone strain of the American foxhound. The foundation type was set around 1840 and preceded by an early, sensible outcross to the bloodhound. At its best, the breed is statuesque and powerfully built, and it rivals the Plott's agility. One of its most esteemed assets is its voice, typically strong and sweet, with a distinct bawl while tracking that rolls over to a choppy bark when it trees.



"Warrior," courtesy of Timmy Frazier, Buckshot Kennels



ENGLISH COONHOUND

It can be fairly said that the history of the English foxhound is the history of all American hounds except the Plott. Noted Virginia sportsmen, including George Washington, imported English foxhounds, which became the foundation for American foxhounds and coonhounds. Today's English coonhounds may be almost solid white, red-ticked, blue-ticked and splotted, or white, black and tan, reflecting the rootstock of our American breeds. Well-muscled, broad-chested and deep-barreled, the English is admired for its bawling voice and staying power. An English dog won the first Leafy Oak, the earliest major coonhound trial.

"Rach," courtesy of Felton Roberts

TREEING CUR

A hang-tough little rounder that won't let go, the cur can handle almost anything on four feet. A mid-sized, stoutly-built dog of powerful leg, ample chest, and compact head and muzzle, the modern cur was developed by early settlers, often from mountain stock, as an all-purpose trailing and treeing dog. Its ancestral origins are ubiquitous, claiming Indian curs, red wolves and even the Spanish war dogs of De Soto. Unlike the silent feists, many curs have open voices on the trail. Multi-colored, embracing leopard and brindle, this breed's eight UKC strains include the Catahoula.



"Black Boy," courtesy of Houston McLain



PLOTT HOUND

You can sum up a Plott in two words: true grit. In 1750, a German immigrant named Johannes Plott reached the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, bringing along a pack of Hanoverian boarhounds. All modern Plotts descend from this beginning, with modest outcrosses to Georgia's leopard-spotted bear dogs and black-and-tan coonhounds. Markings are primarily brindle, in shades of brown and black. Boldness on the track, unflinching courage, fighting ability and cat-like agility make the breed a natural for dangerous game such as cougar, bear and boar. In 1989, the Plott was accorded legislative acclaim as North Carolina's state dog.

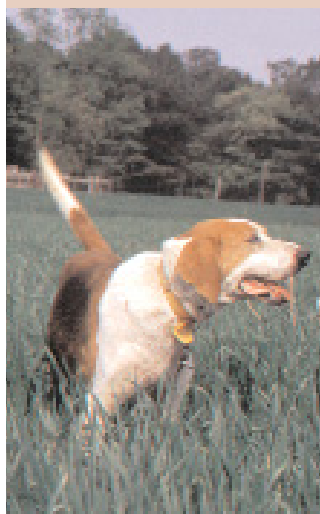
"Penny," courtesy of David Check, Southern Outlaw Plotts



WALKER (AMERICAN FOXHOUND)

Whether they ride red-coated and horseback over sprawling green meadows or hunt in overalls on a mountain bald, many sportsmen exalt the lithe Walker as the classic American foxhound. Refined in 19th century Kentucky from the English foxhound, it has a characteristic black blanket, red markings and white points. The Walker has exceptional game sense, drive and speed, and a clear, short mouth that can rive thrillingly into hair-spiking squeals, chops or bawls. The TREEING WALKER (H) strain of this versatile breed is the most popular and dominant treeing coonhound in the country.

TRIGG (AMERICAN FOXHOUND)
Offhand a slightly stockier Walker, the Trigg is a distinctive and distinguished strain in its own right, renowned among foxhounds for a strong, bawly mouth. Developed by H.C. Trigg in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky following the Civil War, Triggs are a July-Walker cross carrying blood of two of the most celebrated foxhounds of all time, Old July and Tennessee Lead. As the Walkers are, Triggs are “runnin’ dogs”—fast with superior staying power and a head full of game sense. Typical markings include a black blanket and prominent white collar.



"Sam," courtesy of Harold Britt



JULY (AMERICAN FOXHOUND)

Another famous branch off the American foxhound tree, the July is a speed merchant. Scalding fast on the trail and blistering in a sprint, a good July can outpace a coyote in a sight race. Around 1812, a pair of foxhounds, Mountain and Muse, were imported from Ireland by Bolton Jackson of Maryland and bred. Of their offspring, the most famed was Old July, hence the breed name. The feats of Maryland hounds trailing the red fox became legendary. Julys are alert, cast-ahead, drive-to-the-end dogs on the trail, with a choppy bark, in colors from steel gray to buckskin, black and tan, spotted, ash cream, blanket tan and shades of red.

"John" and "J.C.," courtesy of Jimmy Hogge, Old Dominion July Kennels



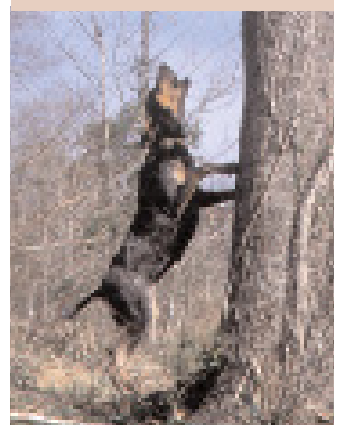
BLACK-AND-TAN COONHOUND

The black-and-tan, regal and houndy, is the grand old-timer of the coonhound world, the first admitted to the United Kennel Club registry. With ancestors embedded in antiquity, the American type springs from the black-and-tan foxhounds of the 19th century, with a touch of bloodhound bred in. Famous for its “cold” nose, or ability to track incredibly old trails, the black-and-tan is also one of the most superbly vocal of all hounds, with a bawl that can wake the dead. The glossy, jet-black coat with tan points contributes much to this breed's dignity.

"Riker" and "Tevon," courtesy of Katherine Shontz Settle, Designer Hounds

BLUETICK COONHOUND

One of the most striking of the sporting breeds, the bluetick has blue-black ticking swarming over a white undercoat and fawn accents at its muzzle and legs. Keen-nosed, open-voiced, steadfast and sturdy, blueticks are exceptionally hardy in rough weather with a natural affinity for water—traits that make them superb for coons or big game. Many of these attributes spring from ancient roots to the French Gascony boarhound of the 1200s, known for its voice, appearance and tracking ability.



"Cover Girl," courtesy of Phil Rennell, Blue Cedar Kennels

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PRESERVING OUR SPORTING TRADITIONS