

PORTUGUESE PODENGOS PEQUENOS & PORTUGUESE MEDIO/GRANDES

by CLAIRE "KITTY" STEIDEL

First let us understand though the Podengo breeds may be classified by size, as varieties within a breed or even by coat-smooth or wire in some registries, in the US as of 2009, there are two breeds: the Pequeno is one and the Medio/Grande the other.

To the ancients Podengo was the word given to light-footed hunting dogs of the Mediterranean region where, 2000 years ago, the Phoenicians were said to have brought dogs from the East to this area. Looking at the color map of the Mediterranean Basin, one can see which breeds were influenced by early travel. Each was adapted to their special terrain and conditions to develop into national breeds. Refer to the map. The Portuguese had no word for hound and the Latin Pod is foot. Podengo became the general term for light-footed pack hunting dog. Thus many of our present day breeds roots may in fact be Podengos.

MOST POPULAR HUNTING BREED IN PORTUGAL

The smaller rectangular one, the Pequeno, is in our Hound Group so you think you know him. He is cute trotting the ring; however, give him earth, the sight, scent or sound of rabbit he is off as a tenacious, formidable flusher of rabbit. However, not the rabbit from our familiar brush and bush but instead from rock crevices and the thickest of brush in Portugal. The Portuguese Medio and Portuguese Grande hunt larger game than Pequeno, are fewer in number both here and in Portugal, and every effort is being made to preserve this primitive creature.



Mediterranean Basin and its Primitive Breeds



Medio Wire and Grande Smooth.
(Photo by Karen Riley)



Moving—notice the easy action.

The Portuguese Podengo is the most popular hunting dog in Portugal, Nuno Ferro, huntsman and breeder, tells us and the most common game is rabbit. "The Podengo is a natural hunting machine requiring no special training except gradual exposure to the sound of a gun. He is independent—often finding, flushing, catching, killing and retrieving all in one."

"Take some, leave some and always have some," is the axiom of rabbit hunters of Portugal. The Podengos reason for being is hunting either rabbit, wild boar even pheasant. From the

beginning of settlement in the Mediterranean basin, this primitive hunting dog has excelled in his work. And his form is directly related to his function. As he is a pack hunter, his style relies as much on cleverness as on pure speed. There is the leader hound that directs the pack's teamwork and saves the honor of the retrieve of the kill for himself. His necessary features for his task are sharp vision, keen hearing, and an acute sense of smell. His physical traits include athleticism with a lean aerodynamic head with erect ears, nearly no stop and rather



"Bigs" on Wild Boar. (Photo by Diana McCarty)



Smooth Pequeno



Wire Pequeno



Diana and her Hounds.

"...NEEDED ARE AGILITY, ALERTNESS, STAMINA AND STRENGTH FOR RUNNING DOWN RABBIT, AND COURAGE AND SUBSTANCE FOR THE GRANDE FOR STAG AND BOAR."

Diana McCarty, involved since the beginnings here in the US, writes that the Podengo is a primitive breed along with the Ibizan, the Cirneco dell'Etna and the Basenji. She emphasizes that their entire design is for hunting—from the streamlined head with large erect and mobile ear and eye placement, to the strong limbs, not too wide a rib spring, the natural coat—wire or smooth and a more open upright shoulder, to his strong hindquarters—all his features contribute to his flexibility and stamina. Diana has been on the BOD since the founding of the Medio/Grande Club. She provides information on her breed by contributing her expertise at workshops, seminars nationwide as well as articles in magazines.

Diana has both asked and answered those questions she feels we need to understand with both Podengo breeds.

Q: What do they hunt? What is the quality of the terrain?

A: These questions directly relate to the FORM the Podengo breeds have taken. The Pequeno needs to push through brush to bring back rabbit for the family meal. His functional priorities to get through dense brush: substance in a small package, sturdy, strong muzzle to carry home the rabbit, height at withers equally divided between depth of chest and length of leg. Body longer than tall. Alertness.

For the Medio and Grande which are open field runners, needed are agility, alertness, stamina and strength for running down rabbit, and courage and substance for the Grande for stag and boar.

Q: Will the Grande and Medio split into two breeds?

A: Since in Portugal they are not able to predict the size of the individual dog it is critical for survival of the breed that they remain together. One over size for a Medio goes on to Grande variety. This variety could be compared to the 13" and 15" Beagle; however, there is no 'measuring out' for the Medio.

Q: When did the Podengo arrive in the US?

A: In the 1990s and hunters here continue to import hounds to add to their packs

Q: Aspirations to go into the Hound Group?

A: Benchmarks required by AKC were met for the Pequeno and now must be met by the separate breed, the Medio/Grande. The breeders are getting closer but with the numbers AKC requires and those local ordinances impacting and restricting breeding, it is a challenge. We want the greatest diversity yet only three generation pedigrees count here. Perhaps the AKC needs to base their requirement on history and the numbers in the country of origin rather than demand the very same numbers for all breeds seeking admission.

As an aside, the Lisbon Zoo had to restore the wire Pequeno in the 1980s as their numbers in hunting packs were so few. They used the smooth Pequeno, the wire coated hunting dogs but also introduced Doxie, Cairn, Yorkie and Min Pin.

JUDGING THE PODENGOS

Q: You have a ring of Podengo Pequeno. What are the things you need to consider?

A: Overall balance and size is a critical part of TYPE. Does it look like it could do what it was bred to do. Hunt Rabbits. There is a size range, but no size DQ so it's your responsibility to question if any appear to be under 8 inches or over 12½ inches.

Looking at the height at the withers—it should be ½ leg and ½ body. A dog that is too long in the leg without sufficient body does not embody the type or function of the breed. You should not see a Corgi body, but good width of chest. Too narrow or too wide—can impact movement from an efficient trot to an ineffective prance or pitty pat OR if too wide—a rolling, almost Bulldogish front.

slender deep chested body and very strong limbs.

Except at rare breed exhibitions we do not see the larger Podengos—the Medio and the Grande. According to Diana McCarty, founder of the Podengo Medio/Grande Club in the U. S. is our authority on these breeds. She states if one looks at the FCI distribution the order of consistency and the numbers would be as follows: Medio Wire, Pequeno Smooth, Medio Smooth, Pequeno Wire, Grande Wire and Grande Smooth. The Medio and Grande hunt rabbit as well but more big game—deer, boar.

The Pequeno is 8-12 inches and approximately 9-13 pounds the Medio 16-22 inches 35-44 pounds, Grande 22-28 inches 44-66 pounds.

- Look at the total outline of the dogs—should be a rectangle not square. Lower to the ground, push through brush. With the shorter legs needed for efficient work over rocks. It should be well muscled and not frail. This is a sprinting, jumping, climbing little athlete.
- Strength of muzzle/jaw. Can it carry a 15 lb. rabbit back to the hunter or its family? Not needle nosed, not snikey but clearly functional in grabbing and holding game. The neck then obviously needs to be able to also support this function. The Podengo Pequeno has a moderate stop and the ears are NOT set on top of the head but obliquely and

If one were to strip a 'wire' Podengo of any size—you would have a bald dog and the coat would NOT come in coarser or thicker. It will however appear in the stubble to be more coarse in texture—but once it grows out it will still be too soft. The smooth coated dog is not able to hide any imperfections and you can find a dog that has a very short or a little longer—there is no preference. It is interesting to note that if you shaved down a wire you would NOT see a smooth. In FCI countries they are distinct breeds—the smooth being the coat that is the most historically intact. Smooths were used as part of the restoration

The Grande size (Over 22") needs to have heavier bone. For their function it is important that they arrive at the Boar as a pack. Too swift with no back-up does not bode well for the survival of the dog. The American Portuguese Podengo Medio/Grande Club as prepared this tip sheet for judges:

PODONGO TIP SHEET:

General Appearance

Well proportioned muscled, sound with moderate bone. Wedge shaped head with prick ears. Tail: sickle-shaped. Over emphasis on any one feature should be strongly avoided. The Medio and Grande come in two coat textures, smooth and wire. The Podengo is a hunting dog, scars from honorable wounds shall not be considered a fault.

Size & Substance

The proportions of the Grande and Medio are almost square. Strong in build, heavier bone present in larger size dogs. Body length from prosternum to point of buttocks is approximately 10% longer than the height at the withers.

- GRANDE: 22" to 28" at the withers, 44 to 66 lbs.
- MEDIO: 16" to 22" at the withers, 35 to 44 lbs.
- Smooth coat which is short and very dense.
- Wire coat which is rough and harsh with a distinct beard.
- The coat is to be shown in a natural state.
- Chest to Elbow
- Highly Mobile Ears
- May be WARY

Since they are hardwired to hunt—they are very aware of their surroundings and you will see them scent the air, ears move in every direction. Dogs that are not aware of their surroundings when they are hunting can find themselves dead, so it is self-preservation for them.

Thank you, Diana for important lessons on the history and the conformation of the Podengo breeds—the Pequeno and the Medio/Grande. ■

"THE PROPORTIONS OF THE GRANDE AND MEDIO ARE ALMOST SQUARE. STRONG IN BUILD, HEAVIER BONE PRESENT IN LARGER SIZE DOGS."

they are highly mobile. They are far more interested in hearing and assessing the noises around them so alerting to a silly noise or crinkly wrapper will likely not happen. Their hearing is sensitive and acute. To be effective at what they were bred to do, they must be aware of their surroundings and the possibility of lunch.

- Coat—This is perhaps the time to say that calling this a wire coat might conjure up thoughts of a Terrier that needs to be stripped. That is NOT the case. This is clearly something lost in translation. The word *Cerdoso* translates not to wire, but to rough or bristly. But when a standard goes through several languages before English—that's what happens. The coat needs to be harsh and coarse to the touch; a soft coat will get hung up hunting and get matted. Soft, silky coats should be penalized as they are not functional for the breed.

of the Pequeno Wire—but not the other way around.

- Gait should be swift and light-footed. This is a breed that can change direction on a dime.

So most important

- Type—you know you are not looking at a Cairn or a Yorkie
- Proportion—longer than tall, and height made up of ½ body and ½ leg
- Coat Texture—harsh to the touch not sculpted
- Head construction—moderate stop, oblique set ears
- Movement—swift and lightfooted

THE MEDIO/GRANDE PODONGO

It is important to remember that the Medio (16" - 22") is more the open field runner and will have a structure more what you would expect in a sight-hound. More square than the Pequeno but it is still designed to hunt for rabbit so can be a lighter bodied dog.