

The Supreme Specialist

By Lee Connor



CH. SEABREEZE OF MR ARKWRIGHT
Painted by Mrs. Elena Marisaldi in 1954

THE HISTORY OF THE POINTER

Recently I encountered the most beautiful Pointer bitch when going for my usual morning beachside walk. She greeted me in a typically enthusiastic style, placing two sandy paws on my chest, and giving me a wet lick across the face.

Her red-faced owner came rushing up and offered her profuse apologies.

'Oh, don't worry,' I assured her, 'she's absolutely gorgeous.' Relieved that I was a fellow dog lover, she began to tell me the horrifying back story of her lovely, extremely friendly girl.

'She's a rescue, I've just brought her over from Cyprus.'

I subsequently learned that the wonderful sun-baked Mediterranean island of Cyprus hides a shocking history of abused hunting dogs. Pointers feature heavily in the tally of dogs that are annually abandoned on mountain tops, shot or barbarically hung from trees.

And Cyprus isn't alone in this cruelty; the very same abuse is also rife in numerous European countries, and the problem is simply being swept under the rug and isn't being discussed.

Thankfully, there are now a number of UK charities that are speaking up about the wicked treatment suffered by Cyprus' hunting dogs and are bringing scores of these noble dogs into Britain and giving them a fresh start. I highlighted their amazing work in a British canine publica-

tion a few months ago and I think it shocked a lot of people, many of whom had been completely unaware of their plight.

That beachside encounter wasn't my first close contact with a Pointer. When I was a kid (back in the far flung reaches of the 1980s) I used to earn some pocket money by walking dogs for my local boarding kennel. Out of all the various breeds that I would have to walk, my favorite was an orange and white Pointer. She was so gentle, loving and had such a proud carriage. She was an absolute joy to be around and it was a pleasure simply to watch her move.

Admirably proportioned in every way, the Pointer is a dog that will appeal to anyone who has an eye for form. But, of course, he is far more than just a superb physique, he also needs courage and stamina to run for long periods and above all he needs intelligence and sensitivity, the ability to respond not only to given signals but to his owner's body language and slightest gesture.

This wonderful breed certainly has a fascinating, unique history.

Renowned writer, A. Croxton Smith once wrote, '*One approaches the subject of the Pointer with almost deferential feelings because he is undoubtedly a great dog, treasured for his working qualities in every part of the civilised world where sportsmen are to be found.*'

And, as I write this, I now know



exactly what he meant!

Most writers thankfully agree that the 'English' Pointer actually has his origins in Spain. The Pointer is said to have come to England in the early years of the 18th century.

Edwards (1800) writes that the '*Spanish Pointer was introduced to England by a Portuguese merchant, at a very modern period, and was first used by an old needy Baron, of the name of Bichell, who lived in Norfolk, and could shoot flying game.*'

This gentleman, according to Edwards, lived by his gun, sending his game to the London market. It is recorded that Baron Bichell was amongst the very first to master the art of shooting birds on the wing – a truly miraculous feat when one considers the bulky, contemporaneous fowling-piece.

He also alludes to a 'ladies Pointer', a variety, 'too diminutive for use.' And he goes on to make this interesting point, "*some of them have a deep fissure in the centre of the nose which completely divides the nostrils, such are termed double-nosed, and are supposed to possess the power of scenting better than others.*"

With the improvement in firearms and the art of shooting, the old Spanish Pointer with its lack of speed and sluggish style of hunting quickly fell from favor, a dog with more dash was considered desirable and actively bred for.

Even in those early days of 'dog fancying' the improvement and development of the dog was an art keenly practiced in England and it soon came to pass that the problems with the ponderous Spanish Pointer were rectified with a dash of the old Southern Hound and the blood of the Foxhound.

Sydenham Edwards (1803) writes, "*The most judicious cross appears to have been made with the Foxhound, and by this has been acquired speed, courage, power and perseverance; and their disadvantage – difficulty of training to be staunch. I believe the celebrated Colonel Thornton first made this cross, and from his producing excellent dogs it has been very generally followed.*"

The "celebrated Colonel Thornton" is a character, one might almost call him a dog fancier, who looms large in the canine literature of the early nineteenth century, and he was as great, perhaps even greater, in Pointers than in (the more commonly attributed) Foxhounds or Beagles.

He owned two celebrated Pointers called *Pluto* and *Juno*, of whom it was recorded that they 'pointed' for over an hour whilst an artist by the name of Gilpin painted their portrait!

This rather tall tale is repeated by many authorities on the breed over the decades and 'tall tales' do seem to be profusely scattered throughout Pointer history. There is one old chestnut of a Pointer that pointed not merely to death...but to a skeletal state!

And common are the stories of dogs 'standing' for twelve or more hours.

But there is one (allegedly) fully authenticated tale that speaks of the breed's dedication to duty. *Clio* was a bitch belonging to a Mr. Lee, and as she was out with him one day, she suddenly became aware of a nest of partridges just as she was in the act of jumping a five-bar gate. It is inferred that she performed the feat of pointing in mid-air!



Mr. R. J. Lloyd Price's Pointers "DRAKE" & "BELLE"

Her owner, having missed her for about two hours, went back on his trail and finally came across poor *Clio*, her front legs planted on the ground and her hind ones still hooked on the gate.

She had remained in this peculiar position the whole time, pointing at the nest of partridges!

Mr. Lee relieved the poor girl of her duty but she was so stiff she could barely move, and he had to set her down on some grass and rub her legs vigorously before she could bend them again.

Well-known Victorian writer about dogs, the Rev. Thomas Pearce, far better known as

'Idstone' left us a picturesque and captivating description of the Pointer that is still easily recognizable by any who knows and loves the breed today.

He writes: -

"*The Pointer is a model of beauty, worthy of the capital material from which he is descended. He is to be found now in every kennel of mark, with all the attributes and propensities of the highest class, and with intelligence and observation worthy of the name of reason. His airy gallop, his lashing stern, his fine range, his magnificent dead-stop at game, his rapid turn to catch the wind of the body scent, his perseverance, under a trying sun, to catch a faint and hardly perceptible stain of game borne to him on the breeze; his glorious attitude as he becomes (directly his wide nostrils assure him he is right) stiff and motionless, with limbs widespread, head aloft, stern held high, and his implicit obedience, to the lessons he learnt, perhaps two or three seasons past, — all these wonderful gifts put him on a level with that paragon of hounds with which he claims a relationship.*"

The breed improved rapidly and reached a zenith in the 1870s with the production of *Ch. Wagg* and *Ch. Drake*, each weighed around 65 lbs. and both did a lot of winning on the show bench and at field trials.

Drake was said to be the fastest and most wonderful animal that ever quartered a field. Rawdon B. Lee (who certainly knew a good dog when he saw one) called him, '*a phenomenon of Pointers.*' His grandson, *Faust*, was sold for £450 and went to America.

THE SUPREME SPECIALIST - THE HISTORY OF THE POINTER



CH. NANCOLLETH MARKABLE, 1934 by Reuben Ward Binks

The St. Louis Kennel Club was originally a group of sportsmen who were interested in the improvement of the Pointer. The club imported a number of Pointers from England—one of the first was back in 1878. He was a dog called *Bow*, a bench and field trial winner, and the sire of *Beaufort*. *Beaufort*, a well-known show winner, was considered the handsomest Pointer of his day.

Some truly astonishing figures were paid by wealthy American fanciers around the turn of the twentieth century. The Pointer was to prove enormously popular across the Atlantic.

This popularity is referenced in Leighton's, *New Book of the Dog* in 1907.

The Americans have shown on the other side of the Atlantic that dogs are indispensable as the associates of sport. They saw, or probably read about the doings of the Setters and Pointers of the 1860s/70s and they promptly provided themselves with the best of stock. They boast at present that they have far better of both breeds than can be found in England – and perhaps this is a correct view.

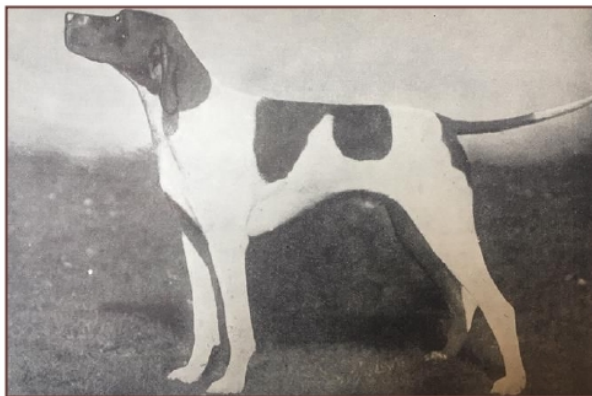
Just as important as Col. Thornton's contribution to the breed back in the early 19th Century was another stalwart of the Pointer; Mr. William Arkwright's work was equally valuable for the modern dog. Mr. Arkwright, whose scholarly monograph is still much prized, always argued strongly in favor of the dished face, that is, a concave formation with the nose pointing upwards, which would enable the possessor to scent the birds most easily with his head carried in a natural position. He also maintained a strain of black pointers that were renowned for the working ability and constitution.

In 1909, a statement in a French sporting paper to the effect that he had resorted to a Bloodhound cross to obtain the black color provoked a furious response from Mr. Arkwright who said that he had never introduced any outside blood into the Pointer, and had never dreamt of crossing with a Bloodhound, to which he added the characteristic eulogy: *'You can take it from me that I have found the Pointer to be the most beautiful, the most intelligent, and most industrious, the most active of dogs; and therefore in my opinion he would only be deteriorated by the introduction of any alien blood. I thought and hoped that I had made this clear in my book, but there are none so dense as he who will not understand.'*

Around the same time the *Crombie* Kennel of Mr. L. Turton Price came to prominence. For many years it was the name to be reckoned with in both Pointers and Setters.

In 1929 a lemon and white pup was born, sired by *Nancolleth Mark* out of *Ella of Crombie* and bred by Mrs. A. Rowe, England. He was to become *Ch. Nancolleth Markable* and was subsequently purchased by Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge (a legend of the dog show world and the driving force behind the Morris & Essex Kennel Club) of Madison, New Jersey. Markable (having gone RBIS at Crufts in 1931) quickly earned his American championship and went on to win BIS at Westminster in 1932.

This dog was aptly named for he was truly remarkable. Shooting men considered him the best Pointer to have come across the water in years. He had won his field championship before leaving England, defeating many renowned field trial winners, something almost unheard of for a bench champion.



STAINTON STARTLER
Bred in 1932 from Hector of Crombie

Surprisingly, it wasn't the first time a Pointer had won BIS at Westminster; that accolade goes to 'Governor Moscow' back in 1925. This dog, whose sire was from England out of an American-bred bitch, also excelled in the field and he sired nine champions that were also just as comfortable in the field as on the show bench.

After the Second World War, British Pointers were in a very sorry state indeed. Government orders to 'conserve food supplies' had led to the widespread destruction of many large kennels. But ties between Pointer lovers in the

US and the UK had been maintained throughout those hard times and several years after the cessation of fighting, several descendants of 'Govvy' were shipped, free of charge, back to the motherland to help restore this most precious of British breeds.

One of these imports became the sire of 1958's Crufts BIS winner, *Ch. Chiming Bells*.

The story of the Pointer had come full circle.

