

# Breeding and Training Versatile Hunting dogs

## by Bob Farris

*The following is a book review provided by Jeff Martin, DKGNA Director of Membership Education.*



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Director of  
Membership  
Education

I have never personally met the author but had heard of him in NAVHDA circles over many years.

I helped train a Poodle Pointer bred by Bob for a local wildlife officer about 10 years ago. The dog had very nice athletic conformation with all the natural desire, pointing and retrieving you could ask for and I would have happily owned him. I was suitably impressed because I realize dogs of this quality rarely happen by chance.

I recently came across a book written by Bob Farris available for purchase on the NAVHDA website. It covers the topics any versatile dog owner would find interesting and written from the perspective of 45 years' experience, I knew I had to buy it.

The book covers many topics from hunting tactics, anecdotes of hunting as an aged hunter, some of Bob's "once in a lifetime" dogs with subjects such as Breeding systems, using test results, selecting a stud dog, maintaining breed diversity, raising and socializing a litter as well as how to train and prepare for tests.

All subjects that would benefit the versatile dog owner, from the first-time owner to someone with the experience of training a number of dogs, there is plenty of great information to glean from this book. All were well written, and, in such detail, I found myself rereading some chapters to fully absorb all the information.

The following are some of the chapters and points that I found very interesting reading.

"Breeding better versatile dogs" The author discussed the importance of genetic diversity to a breed and that inbreeding should be avoided at all costs. His definition of inbreeding is the mating of dogs which have the same dog appear twice in the first 3 generations or potentially the first 14 dogs. He considers line breeding is when a great dog may appear multiple times in the 4 and 5<sup>th</sup> generation. His rationale for avoiding inbreeding is that detrimental recessive genes can be

brought forward and are very hard to remove from a breed after they are fully discovered, maybe years later.

He comments that the “popular sire “syndrome is a common mistake for reducing genetic diversity. That is where a popular sire is overused more than a reasonable amount and the potential of too many dogs in a breed carrying those same genes.

Bob discussed the importance of mother-lines and how great bitches possessing desirable traits often only pass these on via sex linked or X chromosomes to her son who can only pass them on to his daughters. He believes the quality of the mother of the litter is responsible for 60-80% of the litter’s outcome, as do many experienced breeders and is another reason to only breed top quality females. It is a mistake to breed a mediocre female to an outstanding stud and expect his quality to shine through. If it does will it continue to the next generation with the progeny carrying half of the original average genes?

Bob referred a number of times to the “drag of the breed” or pull of the average. It reinforces the point of making sure the ancestry of a proposed breeding pair is chock full of truly excellent dogs possessing the abilities you’re looking for. He strongly believes the first 14 dogs have the most influence on a litter with parents contributing 50% each, grandparents being 25% and great grandparents being 12%. Dogs appearing multiple times in the 4 or 5<sup>th</sup> generation on both sides of a pedigree can increase the influence of those genes through what would be linebreeding.

Interestingly there is a chapter titled “the best don’t always produce the best”. He referred to two related outstanding bitches he bred and owned. One failed to produce dogs of her quality and in hindsight he puts this to the lack of quality of too many lesser dogs in her mother-line. Again, it reinforces the point of making sure the female is actually worth breeding.

He is a big believer in using software such as Breedmate and Compuped in helping decide the degree of linebreeding with modeling back to 10 generations. He also uses a charting technique called Endpoint where every dog in the first 3 generations of a proposed breeding is listed with its single worst attribute. Maybe its softness of temperament, lack of water love, weak pointing or retrieving instinct etc and this helps him to ensure the same weak trait is not overrepresented on both sides of the proposed pedigree.

This is very valuable, but I would go a step further and make a comprehensive list of all the positives and negatives of conformation as well as working abilities of the first 14 dogs. This allows you to try to never double up with the same fault but

also to double up on as many positive qualities and therefore strengthen them in future generations and truly breed for improvement. This may sound like an arduous task for the first-time owner, but experienced breeders have a wealth of accumulated knowledge and do this all the time.

It is worth noting that the new breeding regulations initiated by the DKV are very much along these exact same principles!! It must be remembered that the Deutsch Kurzhaar has had a relatively closed Zuchtbuch registry for over 100 years and today many, if not most dogs, have a degree of relatedness.



related.

Throughout the 1960's Axel vom Wasserschling or derivatives were behind much of the breeding," he was the "popular sire syndrome". Throughout the 1970's breeders were looking for outcrosses and used a number of Von der Forst and Brickwedde dogs. Starting in the 1980's it was a relatively unrelated swartzschimmel WS Ciro vom Bichtelwald that provided the outcross improvements they were needing. He provided size, bone and substance with a strong head and depth of chest. Interestingly even he had Axel vom Wasserschling way back in his pedigree. My point is, today nearly 30 years later, virtually every line of DK breeding goes back to these dogs and are therefore quite

It is always a worry to read a book that confirms how you think, but I believe the following quote to be true. "outcrossing is the safest breeding but is unlikely to reproduce as well over time because of the pull of breed average", "linebreeding is the best effort to raise the bar for a breed BUT only if one is honest about the dogs being produced and used". Again, linebreeding to mediocrity can only produce the same. The book shows various pedigrees of his Cedarwoods dogs that demonstrates linebreeding versus inbreeding.

The chapter "Raising a versatile puppy" outlines a very good training schedule of what a well socialized litter should be exposed to. It is broken down into multiple timelines from 8-10 weeks through to 5-12 months. This is more about exposure, socializing and confidence building. I totally agree that formal obedience training isn't necessary until the pup has developed some bold independence at 5-7 months.

I totally agree with non formal training and avoiding any need for repressive corrections, however at all times making sure your training is not reinforcing or repeating major mistakes that will only have to be corrected at a later date.

“Preparing for hunt tests” was an excellent chapter that even though geared for NAVHDA tests could easily be adapted to other versatile dog tests. The techniques were all very sound and a solid foundation, but I think its common for any experienced trainer to develop his own checklist or training schedule to achieve his goal of a finished dog.

I totally agree with the authors statement “I’m convinced that what we see as super performance dogs are more made by the owner/handler and the efforts or exposure the dog received from 8 weeks to 8 months”. There is a window of opportunity to mold a pup correctly in the first 6 months or so that influences the dog for life and can’t be completely recovered if missed.

An excellent pup is often wasted in the wrong hands and a mediocre pup will always develop to higher standards in experienced hands. That is why German breeders place more emphasis on litters that all test well in the hands of various owners of mixed abilities indicating strong natural abilities, rather than a single star that was professionally trained. I would argue good trainers have a sharp eye for what is natural ability versus what is man made and are well aware it’s only the dog’s natural ability that can ever be passed on in breeding. Personally, I believe the great dogs are bred and are lucky to fall into the hands of people that can make the most of their gifts.

The author outlines “a gentle force retrieve method” that I think has a lot of merit. He openly admitted “his own personal dislike of this training” and “I must come clean, I have paid other trainers to do this on 50 dogs of my own”. I applaud the honesty.

Forced retrieving is a North American phenomenon as are E-collars and both were developed by retriever field trial people to train dogs for their complicated test scenarios and I understand the logic.

Our tests are hunt tests where we harness the dogs desire and initiative to track and recover the game !! so don’t diminish this desire in any way. I see dogs every testing season that fail retrieving subjects and were force fetched. I personally witnessed this past fall at different tests, six mature dogs avoid retrieving and fail the test. The doozy was one that collected the duck, took it to the opposite bank and ate the breasts completely with the owner watching hopelessly just 30 ft away. I remain less convinced of its merit every year.

Reliable retrieving is so much more than pinching a dog’s ear to hold something, any dog worth keeping should first be developed to like or have desire for game. A

dog going out to catch a bird or rabbit is for itself, holding it and carrying its prize back to the owner and sitting in front to hand it over on command is trained and purely obedience that should be trained separately. I would highly recommend trying the authors gentle methods with the ONE important proviso, your dog must be trained to be obedient to one command and you expect a response every single time where you have developed a strong love and respect with the dog. That will result in a dog where sit means sit, come means come and fetch becomes just another command to obey. If you can't train to this level or the dog has zero desire, resort to force fetching.

In summing up I would highly recommend this book to any versatile dog owner. It's not complete, as I doubt any book can be, but it is well worth the asking price to include in your arsenal of books and refer to, time and time again in the future.