

The Wire-haired Pointing Griffon

by Walter A. Dyer

I think that it was no longer ago than 1915, at the show of the Westminster Kennel Club in New York, that I had my first sight of a wire-haired pointing griffon. It was a new one to me, and I judged it was a new one to the majority of the spectators at the show. Some one informed me, with a great show of wisdom, that it was a cross between a pointer, a setter, and an Airedale terrier, a statement which even then I took with a grain of salt. Some one else said that it was a sort of otterhound, and I myself noted the resemblance, though I soon discovered marked differences. It was some months before I got at the truth of the matter, for there were then only a few persons in this country who really knew anything about the breed, and it was not my fortune to come into contact with them at the time.



It is still spoken of as a new dog, though we have had specimens of the breed in this country for ten or fifteen years. But its fame is spreading rapidly, owing to the well directed efforts of its friends and admirers, and I fancy it won't be considered a new dog much longer. The time has come, I think, to spread a little correct information about a dog that stands a good chance of taking its place alongside the pointer and the setter as a tip-top sporting dog for America.



As a matter of fact, the term "a new dog" was never more inappropriately applied. For though it may be no disgrace to us that we have so long been ignorant of it, the breed is as old as any of the gun dogs - perhaps older - and has been used for centuries in France, Belgium, Germany, and other European countries. And since it is our purpose to learn all that we can about the breed, it will be worth while to glance at its history, which, it seems to me, is in no way a dull one.

It should hardly be necessary to remark that the breed is in no wise to be confused with the Brussels griffon or the basset griffon. The term griffon is a generic one that has been applied to a number of rough coated dogs in France. Nor should it be confused with any of the French hounds which in some respects it resembles.

A word about these hounds will serve to keep the matter straight. There are two varieties of the Vendéen hound, a rough and a smooth. The latter is really a separate breed, being probably descended from the St. Hubert bloodhound. The former, called the griffon de la Vendée, resembles the English otterhound, though some what smaller. Similar, but usually darker in color and longer in body, is the griffon Nivernais. Both of these breeds have probably been crossed with the griffon de Bresse, producing a hound so like our wire-haired pointing griffon as to lead to natural confusion.

The main distinction to be kept in mind is that our griffon is not a hound at all, but a pointing

dog, more closely allied to the spaniel-setter family. Indeed, it has sometimes been called the French spaniel, and many of its setter characteristics are marked.

Fortunately, the history of the pointing griffon has been faithfully recorded by G. F. Leliman in his book, "Le Griffon á Poil Dur," which has been translated into English by Mr. Percival L. Rosseau, the judge and animal painter, and by Dr. E. B. Ilyus, one of the foremost American importers and breeders. The hound or coursing griffon was probably older than the pointing griffon, but the latter family is as old and as useful as the French pointer or brace, and was perhaps the first of all gun dogs. Doubtless it was used for various forms of sport before gun powder came into use.

The word griffon appears to have been first used toward the end of the sixteenth century. It is cited by Henry IV of France in a letter to de Montmorency in 1596. The breed is mentioned in a book by Charles d'Arcussia in 1598 in reference to partridge hunting, showing that the pointing griffon was distinguished from the hounds at that time. J.E. de Selincourt, in "Le Parfait Chasseur." In 1683 gives descriptive details of the breed and refers to it as a gun dog (chien d'arquebuse) and pointer, stating that it had its origin in Italy.



The pointing griffon was taken up by sportsmen and fanciers in a scientific manner about the middle of the last century. About 1847 the Marquis de Clerville established a strain in France that became famous. In Germany, about 1865, E. Bontant of Frankfort began breeding a strain of pointing griffons known there as the dirty-bearded Hessian, and exhibited them in 1878 as stichelhaariger (bristly-haired) Vostehunde.

The family, in fact, has been well known for many years over a large part of continental Europe where its useful qualities have long been well recognized, several groups being developed in different sections which have varied slightly under the influences of climate and diverse breeding. All came originally from the same source and all possess in common great endurance, keen scent, the rough, wire-haired outer coat, and the fine, downy inner coat. These groups are to be found as far east as Syria and the Danube country. The three principal branches are the spin one of Italy, one of the oldest groups, the French strains, which are the most numerous to-day, and the German Stichelhaar.

In France the full name of the breed is even more cumbersome than our English title - griffon d'arrêt á poil dur. It is believed to be allied to the French barbet, a rough-coated water spaniel. There are several strains or varieties in France alone, all probably descended from the now practically extinct but once famous griffon de Bresse.

The griffon de Bresse is described by Veto Shaw as one of the most ancient breeds of France, a favorite with sportsmen for centuries. It closely resembled the English otterhound, he said, though it is to be suspected that he has again confused the breed with the wire-coated hounds of France. Tradition has it that these griffons were prized by the Romans and Gauls, while the Greeks considered them lacking in beauty. I suspect, however, that this is mere tradition. The griffon de Bresse, according to Shaw, had the hard, wiry coat with which we are familiar.

The modern varieties of French pointing griffons are fully described by Robert Leighton in "The New Book of the Dog." He particularly mentions three strains or types now prominent, each associated with the name of a breeder. First, there is the griffon d'arrêt Picard, of which A. Guerlain of Crotoy, the Marquis de Clerville's successor, had the first famous kennel. Second, the

griffon Korthals, a Dutch and German rather than a French strain, of which E.K. Korthals of Amsterdam and Biebesheim was the earliest systematic breeder. Third, the griffon Boulet, brought to perfection by M. Emanuel Boulet of Elbeuf.

Leighton describes these three as more or less alike. Superficially they resemble the otterhound, but on close examination prove to be less hound-like. In some respects, he says, they are compact dogs, straight-legged, and wire-haired.

"The griffon Guerlain strain," writes Leighton, "is perhaps the most elegant in shape and appearance, owing to its shorter and less rugged coat and lighter build. This breed is usually white in color, with orange or yellow markings, rather short drop ears, and a docked tail, and with a height of about 22 inches. The nose is always brown, and the light eyes are not hidden by the prominent eyebrows so frequent in the French spaniels.

"By far the most attractive of all the foreign setter-spaniels, however, is the griffon Korthals, a dog symmetrical in contour, with a noble head not unlike that of our Airedale terrier in its length and squareness of muzzle and determined expression of eye. The coat is wiry, crisp, and harsh, never curly, with a dense undercoat. The color is steel gray with dark brown patches, often mingled with gray hairs; or white-gray with lighter brown or yellow patches. The height may be 23 inches and the weight fifty-six pounds.

"The griffon Boulet has many of the same characteristics as the Korthals griffon, the chief difference being that his coat is much longer and not so hard in texture. He is at present the favorite purely native spaniel in France. A decidedly rugged, coarse-looking dog, he is evidently meant for work rather than for ornament, yet his expression is friendly and intelligent, in spite of his wild and ungroomed aspect, with his broad, round head, square muzzle, heavy mustaches, and strong, overhanging eye-brows. The iris of his eye seems always to be yellow and the nose always brown. The ears are set on low and hang slightly folded, well covered with wavy hair. The shoulders project somewhat instead of sloping. The loins are slightly arched and end in a straight stern nicely carried, and not too shortly docked. The coat is fairly long and semi-silky, with out being glossy, flat rather than wavy, and never curly. Its color is that of a dead chestnut leaf or a dark coffee brown, with or without white; never black or yellow. For dogs the height is given at 21 to 22 1/2 inches, for bitches a little less. The weight averages fifty-six pounds."

The dog which we have imported into this country and which we have begun to see more and more frequently in the bench shows, is the Korthals griffon. Edward Karel Korthals, born in Amsterdam in 1850, began breeding this strain in Holland about 1870. He used his dogs for hunting in the marsh and dune country, where he found them to be more effective than any other gun dogs. The breed was then called, in his country, the smousbard Hollandais. Korthals began showing his dogs in Utrecht in 1875 and in Amsterdam in 1877. He raised seven great prize winning dogs which he called the patriarchs of the breed.



Korthals then moved to Germany where Prince Albrecht de Solmes-Braunfels became his friend and patron. The Prince leased the hunting grounds of Biebesheim in 1881 and installed Korthals there. Many fine dogs were raised here and were distributed throughout Holland, France, Belgium, and Germany. In 1886 Korthals drew up a standard of characteristics of the breed, on which our American Standard is based, and in 1889 the first Griffon Stud Book was published. In 1907 it was decided to class the German Stichelhaar and the Korthals griffon together as one breed, and a new Standard was drawn up.

This Korthals griffon is the only kind, so far as I know, that has been imported to this country. It is the dog that we know as the wire-haired pointing griffon. Personally, it would seem to me more sensible to change the name in our American registry to the Korthals griffon, since that is what it is. The name is less cumbersome and would lead to less confusion in case we would ever import any of the softer-haired Boulet griffons from France. With its long and honorable history, it is evidently absurd for us to refer to it as "a new dog."

Still, it is a comparatively new dog so far as American fanciers and sportsmen are concerned. An occasional specimen of the breed was to be seen here as long ago as 1900, and perhaps before that. Mr. M.R. Schneider of Massapequa, Long Island, was one of the first to import a pointing griffon. But the real history of the breed in this country dates back only about ten years, when Mr. Louis A. Thebaud of Morristown, N.J., went to France on a shooting trip and became greatly impressed with the character and usefulness of the breed. He imported several in 1907, and others since then. Dr. E.B. Ilyus of Lancaster, Pa., and other Americans took up the breed, forming a small but enthusiastic group who had the wisdom to import only the best, so that our American specimens are excellent types.

Friends of the breed have increased rapidly during late years, including both fanciers and sportsmen, so that now we have enough dogs in this country to insure a perpetuation of the strain regardless of war conditions abroad. Sixteen griffons were exhibited in the last New York show.

The breed has been fortunate in its friends here. They have exhibited at the larger shows pretty consistently, and so have given it advertising that it would not otherwise have had. "Furthermore," to quote a recent note in "Field and Fancy," the wire-haired pointing griffon has now commenced to attract attention to his powers in the field, and is being taken up in ever increasing numbers by field trial folk. It would not be surprising to find that wire-haired pointing griffons will soon make a name for themselves at all the field trials, whereas, at the present time, they must rely on the reputation of the wonderful gun work done by such dogs as Marquis de Merlimont, who is also a noted bench show winner."

In August, 1916 after a successful entry at the Rhode Island Kennel Club's show, the Griffon Club of America was formed, with Mr. Thebaud as president and Dr. Ilyus, as secretary treasurer, and an American Standard was adopted.

"Prior to 1910," writes Dr. Ilyus, "several individual specimens were brought to this country, but the credit of introducing these dogs to American sportsmen belongs to Mr. Thebaud who, through observation and experience in France, was convinced that they were especially adapted to our game and country. From the great dogs imported by him have sprung the now well known pointing griffons in America. In 1914, I imported my first griffon and since then I have imported a number of the best type of field and bench winning griffons in Europe. The Griffon Club of America has officially called the attention of intending purchasers and breeders to the great importance of informing themselves as to blood lines and type, as there are many dogs masquerading and being sold as griffons that have no claim to the name."

Among the top-notch griffons that have already achieved distinction in this country, on the bench, in the field, and at stud, may be mentioned Mr. Thebaud's Homère and Marquis de Merlimont, Ch Flambeau Panig, imported for him by Dr. Ilyus, and Kob de Merlimont and Fileuse de Merlimont, owned by Mr. Thebaud and handled by Mr. W. N. Gilbert Clark. Mamzelle de Moulignon and Miche de Moulignon, both European winners, were imported and are now owned by Dr. Ilyus; the ancestors of the latter were all European champions. Bolero von Gimbsheim, imported and owned by Dr. Ilyus has been winning consistently at American shows during the past

two years and is a perfect Korthals type. He is also a versatile field dog and one of the most perfectly trained griffons in the United States. Two American champions, Crappau and Kob's Fritzie, are owned by Messrs. Ralph Hornblower and H. Hollon Crowell. These are but a few of the notable griffons now before the American public. The winners at the last New York show, open classes only, were as follows: first dogs, Mr. Thebaud's Marquis de Merlimont; second dogs, Mr. Thebaud's Flambeau Panig; first bitches, Miss Alice Clark's Kob's Louissette de Greylock; second bitches, Mr. Crowell's Ch. Kob's Fritzie.

I have a weakness for rough-coated dogs for the intelligent, competent looking faces of the Irish wolfhound and the Airedale and Irish terriers. That first griffon that I saw in the New York show struck me as having that kind of face. He is a real dog, not a fancier's fad, and one which I am convinced cannot fail to make his way in the hearts of American dog lovers. It is a rugged and prolific breed, a bold, strong dog of decided character, notable for his faithfulness, his devotion to his master, his intelligence and great sagacity, his endurance, and his all-round utility.

In the matter of utility, the wire-haired pointing griffon is an all-round sporting dog. His versatility is remarkable. He may be trained to hunt all kinds of game, big and small in water, marsh, upland, and forest. He is a dog as well suited to rough work as the Airedale. His hard outer coat and dense undercoat form a protection against briars and dampness and make him a splendid water dog. He can endure extremes of temperature without loss of vigor. He is gifted with bird sense, endurance in the field, and a keen scent. He has an exquisite nose for finding scattered birds. He is a natural pointer and retriever and is easily trained to obey and to work systematically.



The griffon, in short, possesses a good combination of pointer, setter, and spaniel characteristics. He is perhaps too new with us to compare him fairly with the pointer and the setter under American conditions, but it is not too much to say that he cannot be beaten for all-round work, under all conditions, at all seasons of the year. He lacks something of the snap, dash, and style of the pointer and setter, but he is remarkably sure; he seldom makes mistakes. He is at present perhaps too deliberate and too lacking in spectacular style to measure up to modern field trial standards, but his friends believe that he can be brought up to the highest pitch of perfection by proper breeding and training.

The American Standard for the breed calls for a medium sized dog, symmetrical and well built. Head, long and heavy, wire-haired, but hair not too long; there should be a good mustache and eyebrows. Skull, not too wide. Muzzle, long and square; nasal bone, convex; stop not too abrupt. Eyes, large, not hidden by the eyebrows, very intelligent in expression, brown or dark yellow in color. Nose, always brown and large. Ears, of medium size and not hound-like, close to the head, set on not too low; the short hair on the ears is mixed with a few longer ones. Neck, rather long, without dewlap. Shoulders, rather long, well sloping. Chest, deep but not too broad. Back, strong, well developed at the loins. Ribs, slightly arched. Loins, well developed. Forelegs, straight, muscular, well placed, wire-haired. Hind legs, wire-haired; thighs long and well developed; stifles well bent, not straight. Feet, round and strong; toes well closed. Stern, carried straight or just above the level of the back, wire-haired, without feather; a fourth or a third of the tail is generally docked.

As has been stated, the griffon's coat is one of its most salient characteristics. The outer coat is wiry, crisp, and harsh, like fine iron wire, never curly or woolly; the undercoat is dense and soft. The characteristic color is steel gray, with brown patches often mixed with gray hairs; also white-

gray with brown or yellow patches. Dogs stand from 21 1/2 to 23 1/2 inches at the shoulder, bitches from 20 to 21 1/2 inches. The average weight is about fifty-six pounds.

The puppies when born are snow-white with liver colored blotches, changing later to the steel gray or roan.

Owing to the comparative rarity of the breed in America, and the expense at which they have been imported, values are high. Stud dogs are considered worth from \$1,000 to \$1,500, and promising puppies of winning parents bring from \$225 to \$250 apiece, and even more for exceptionally good ones.

Those who have so far taken up the breed in this country are extremely enthusiastic, and to a man they predict a brilliant future for it here when it shall have had time to make its worth known.

Mr. Crowell writes: "I shot over a griffon all last fall and can say personally that I cannot imagine a bird dog which could give a man any more downright good hunting than the little griffon I used. I do not hereby claim that she is the finest bred dog in the country, and do not wish to enter into any controversy as to her merits as against those of the pointer or setter; but I do know that she has a good nose, found her game, pointed it, and retrieved it, with about as little talking to and as few directions as any dog that I have ever seen."



Dr. Ilyus says: "The chief characteristics in which the griffon excels, and is superior to our setters and pointers, are his ready adaptability to all species of game, all climates, and all varieties of terrain, his exquisite nose, wonderful vitality and endurance, and the pronounced instinct which makes him the easiest of all dogs to train on game.

"As a retriever he has, in my opinion, no superior, and being very intelligent and affectionate, he makes an ideal man's companion."

Every dog has his day, and the day of the Korthals griffon in America is surely coming. Personally, I doubt very much whether he can ever displace the pointer and the setter; they are too well established with us for that -- they occupy a warm place in the hearts of too many appreciative sportsmen. But he will make his own place in his own way, and unless all portents fail, and history fails to repeat itself, it will most assuredly be a place of honor in the hearts of men.

It may be some time before you have an opportunity to see one at work in the field, but the next time that you attend one of the big bench shows, take a good look at the griffon, gaze into those brown eyes of his, rub your hand over his rough, hard head, and see if you do not agree with me that this is a real dog, a dog destined by nature to be a friend of man, whether that man fares forth with a gun or sits by the open fire with pipe and book, and likes to have a shaggy form on the hearth rug beside him.