

ADDICTED TO DEERHOUNDS

Part 2

Fleet was a very lucky Deerhound. She was immensely brave for her twenty nine and a half inches and had many close calls while hunting. Nothing daunted her and she was fortunate that although she sustained injuries during her twelve years, none were permanent and that left her able to trot around the show ring up to veteran class. Fleet always performed well in the show ring and we enjoyed her success. She did not enjoy the scene at all and would hide her head tightly between her legs when she saw us coming with her show lead. Fleet's beauty and hunting prowess did eventually lead her to be deemed by Tasia Noble and Kenneth Cassels as one of the best all round Deerhounds and nearest to their ideal. (*Dog World December 12 1997*) To have such doyens of the breed compliment a Deerhound we bred was such an honour and quite humbling.



Fleet 1985 aged 2

From the 1950's in the UK there was a staunch group of enthusiasts who coursed hares with their Deerhounds. Tasia told us about the great fun that was had by all at these meetings, particularly the meeting on Dava moor.

The practice of hare coursing with Deerhounds in the UK was instigated by a Deerhound breeder in the UK named Kenneth Cassels. Although hares were

not deer, he maintained it gave the dogs a chance to enjoy themselves and at the same time tested their agility, determination and speed, all of which are very important aspects of function in a Deerhound.

I often think of the old poem 'Gelert' and the lines in it that say, "*That day Llewelyn little loved the chase of hart and hare.*" The skill of catching and killing a deer, gave the breed its name, but this is not all they loves to chase. The hopping movement of kangaroos totally fascinates Deerhounds and they find it hard to resist chasing them. Deerhounds absolutely love chasing rabbits but their size limits how many they catch, never the less, their tails wag, they smile and they are incredibly happy trying. They are super on foxes and hares are often far too good for them. The Brown Hare in particular has great stamina with the ability to jinx very quickly, although the Deerhound loves to chase them he is often disappointed by his efforts.

Kenneth heard from Tasia about the hunting trip she had with us and he was keen to see for himself how Deerhounds performed in the Australian bush. This he did for the first time in 1985. On this visit he judged our Championship Show, his challenge winners were Atlas hounds and that certainly boosted Chas's ego!

The show had a good number of entries and the depth of quality of the hounds exhibited was very good. Prefixes such as Tabrahil, Clachtoll, Ballincrea, Casbairn, Stringyridge, St Ronans, Liathghorm, Jacobite and the list goes on. All helped create a feeling that Deerhounds were moving right along.

After the show Kenneth joined us for a camping trip to western NSW. We had a great pack of Deerhounds at this time and Kenneth likened them to the hounds Tasia owned in the 1960's. Our dogs were joined by the resident Deerhound named Moses (Nelungaloo Hot 'n Handy). He was nothing short of brilliant at his job and lived to a ripe old age to prove it. This trip left a lasting impression on Kenneth and he returned to visit with us many times to enjoy the same.

I know nobody who has the same feeling for Deerhounds as Kenneth. Old age has now overtaken him but he has left a lasting legacy in his book called 'The Most Perfect Creature from Heaven.' The book includes chapters of the time he spent with us enjoying the Australian wide open spaces.

Kenneth's dedication to Deerhounds has been unwavering and he has experience with the breed that is only gained through years of seriously observing Deerhounds in the field. He is in some ways the opposite of Chas who tended to be less emotionally involved with the breed.

In the eighties and nineties we were breeding quite a lot and it sometimes felt as if there were Nelungaloo puppies everywhere. In fact, there were! It seemed like an eternity since Reiver first arrived in the train dog box, now we were sending puppies interstate and around the world in aeroplanes. The world of Deerhounds was upon us literally.

In the late 1980's we bred a litter from Tallahassee and Moses. There were only five puppies in the litter. We had three from this litter namely, Swift, Spring and Flamingo. Exhibiting our dogs was losing its attraction but hunting certainly was not, particularly as these three dogs were masters of the art. Kevin would take them out every second night in summer and they would nearly always catch a fox or two, he called them his 'magnificent three'.

We bred all three and they produced some lovely Deerhounds that were to influence kennels both in Australia and around the world as well as introduce us to other people who were passionate about the breed.

Well known Australian breeders Helen Putrino and Jocelyn Thompson had offspring of Spring and Swift respectively and then there was Flamingo...

As a young puppy Flamingo went to live out west with her famous dad, Moses. I was never sure whether she was the one to have gone or her sister. Most breeders will be able to relate to that dilemma. We saw her again at nine months old and my heart jumped a beat or two. She came running up to our vehicle and the first thing that ran through my head was why I had ever let this beautiful bitch go. She was the type I most admire, tall dark, elegant and built for speed. The next day I plucked up the courage and asked if we could have her back and hooray, they let her come home.

Flamingo settled back with us very quickly, it was as though she had never left. Her first litter was a good one. Liz Goff from Canada came to Parkes and picked Jamboree. Judy Carver chose As I am. We kept gorgeous Allissa and Sundown flew to Esther Buhler in Switzerland.

The following year Esther and her husband Beni made their first trip to visit with us. We were still camping and hunting as much as ever and it was super entertaining visitors from near and far. Kevin's list of 'stories' told by the campfire became longer and dare I say more exaggerated each time he told them. Great fun was had by all. There always is a certain feeling about camping with Deerhounds; they seem to bond in a different way to when they are at home.

I have lost count as to how many times Esther and Beni have visited us. Esther has been so influential in the success of our kennel in Europe. Apart from Sundown, Esther and her friends have imported many puppies from Nelungaloo and her male dogs have been used at stud throughout Switzerland, Germany, Italy and USA. Her untiring support for Nelungaloo has provided opportunities for us that we otherwise never would have had.



Parkes 1990's walking the dogs...Kevin, Esther and me

In 2001 we sold our farm at Parkes and moved to Tarcutta. Our new farm was smaller, less work and more aesthetically pleasing. It was so nice to leave the wind and dust behind. We contemplated having fewer dogs. That was a bit of a joke! Life without our Deerhounds was unimaginable.

With a little less work to do we now had the opportunity to travel and not only catch up with old friends but to finally meet people we had been in contact with but never actually met, we could put faces to names. Our travels certainly have not been your average tourist type holiday, rather they have been trips filled with Deerhounds and interesting Deerhound owners from all walks of life.

So now it is 2013. We have five gorgeous, strong, healthy Deerhounds and their lives are pretty good. We still look forward to our copy of 'Deerhound' arriving but wish there was more input from newer club members and breeders. Knowledge is gained through enthusiasm, discussion and critical comment. The magazine is a perfect forum for this.

At present there are some very beautiful Deerhounds around the world and that is fantastic for the breed, especially as now it is becoming easier to either import a dog or bring frozen semen into Australia from another country. We are no exception as we have recently imported frozen semen from a dog we admired when I judged the Norwegian Breed show in 2011.

There does however seem to be problems developing with the general health of the breed. The big three, namely heart problems, torsion and bone cancer are being joined by numerous new diseases that I have never heard of. Genetically this is a bad thing as it limits the number of dogs that can be bred. I do not think I could stand to have a dog that was always at the vet and I am becoming increasingly bored with articles about Deerhounds having blood tests and being diagnosed with this and that illness.

I wonder if this deterioration in the Deerhounds general well being is a direct result in the change of Deerhound enthusiast's attitudes over the past fifty years or so. Culling seems to have gone out the window and with so few Deerhounds being tested in the field I cannot readily figure out how anyone can determine correctness of type or mental and physical fitness. I think there may be something going wrong!

Virginia Hawke