

You always remember your first...

by Robbie Pattison



When I got my first Saluki in 1968, I knew nothing about the breed. I had decided I liked the look of sighthounds, but my limited research had turned up little about sighthound personality, and I ended up with a Saluki completely by chance. I had inquired half seriously about getting a Greyhound or perhaps a Whippet, then ran into an old Pony Club friend at a horse show, and discovered that he had a litter of Salukis on the way. A few weeks later, 'Jay' – Counterpoint Abu Sahr – arrived on my doorstep.

I had done no reading about the breed (not that there was much information available); I had not even thought to ask what Salukis were like. My first clue that Salukis might have been made from a different mould came within moments of Jay's arrival. My friend plunked the eight-week-old puppy down on the lawn, I made the usual enticing puppy noises, and Jay, in his own inimitable Saluki way, sauntered off in the opposite direction. I spent the next 14 years trying to teach him to come when he was called.

Today, 38 years later and 14 litters down the line, I still marvel that I ever went on to get a second Saluki, or even that I persisted with Jay and didn't try to find him the proverbial "good farm home." It wasn't easy. Jay was destructive,

claustrophobic, very vocal when he was unhappy and completely conscience-free about anything he did.

When he was 10 months old, I took him to obedience class in self-defence. Obedience had more of an effect on me than it did on him (I went on to be an obedience instructor; although Jay eventually acquired two obedience degrees, what he learned best was to behave well in public, as long as he was on a leash), but it was altogether a worthwhile experience, and I always strongly recommend obedience classes, and puppy classes in particular, to people who buy puppies from me.

Would it have made a difference if I had been better prepared when I got Jay? There's no way of knowing for sure, but I suspect I could have avoided quite a few of the bumps I encountered along the road of first-Saluki ownership had I taken a little driver training beforehand. Today, like most breeders, I try to encourage prospective puppy buyers to learn as much as they can about Salukis before they go ahead, and when I tell them about my favourite hounds, I am careful to describe their warts along with their beauty

of books on canine behaviour and training and puppy raising – deciding what makes sense and what doesn't, what is pertinent information and what is breed-fancier puffery. In addition, there seems to be a trend to seek information in small, bite- (or is that byte?) sized portions – to excerpt what we think we need to know instead of reading the whole book and keeping things in context.

I am reminded of all the interviews with Stanley Coren I heard when his book *The Intelligence of Dogs* was published. Invariably he was asked about his ranking of the various breeds according to their 'intelligence' – Border Collies coming out on top and Afghans at the bottom – and seldom, if ever, was it pointed out that the list appears in a chapter called "Working or Obedience Intelligence" or, in other words, trainability. Adaptive, linguistic and instinctive aspects of intelligence are discussed elsewhere.

I admit, when I got my hands on the book, the first thing I did was look up the Saluki (mid-range, tied for 43rd place with the Finnish Spitz and the Pointer and, amazingly, just a notch behind the Australian Shepherd), but I

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spots. To my delight, I find that puppy buyers tend to be better informed now than they used to be, and more interested in learning about the breed. The first question asked is no longer, "How much?" but "What are Salukis like?" And when I tell them that having a Saluki is like sharing the house with a 28-inch Siamese cat, they often don't even sound surprised.

There is more information out there now, though breed- and even sighthound-specific material is still in relatively short supply. The problem comes in sifting through those stacks

find it frustrating that the message most people come away with is that Border Collies and Golden Retrievers are smart and Afghans and Bulldogs are dumb, not that the former simply do better than the latter in obedience trials; this is hardly earth-shattering news. Nor do I agree with Coren's decision to consult only obedience judges when he came to compile his rankings. His research could have been more extensive.

In the end, of course, the best information about dogs comes not from books, but from the dogs themselves.