

**THE GERMAN  
WIREHAired  
POINTER**

# *A Feathers and Fur Hunter*

By **M.J. Nelson**

**I**N THE LATE 1800s, German breeders set out to create a new breed of hunting dog. They wanted to produce a dog that would find and point upland game, hunt fur with the same intensity and tenacity as it looked for feathered game, retrieve waterfowl, be easy to train, guard its owner's family and property but also be a devoted companion and pet. In other words, the perfect hunting dog. Nothing like setting some very high goals! While they may not have achieved total perfection, according to the people who own a German Wire-haired Pointer, they came pretty close. What's more, they developed a dog that is not just a fine hunting dog but also is successful in a variety of other performance activities and dog sports.

"Wirehairs are athletes through and through. They don't ever get 'worn out.' They want to be WITH you more than anything in the world. Anything you do, they want to do it also. They are also wicked smart with high drive and energy. They absolutely need a job and several jobs are even better. Training several different activities allows them to keep learning without having to be too repetitious in the training as they are very easily bored and prone to making up their own routines if they think yours are dumb. You definitely have to be smarter than they are and that is a significant challenge for anybody. I frequently have to figure out how to train a dog in a specific skill by making it HIS idea. A wirehair, if he knows what you want AND thinks it's a good idea, will literally do backflips for you. While each individual dog has its strengths and weaknesses and areas in which it will shine,

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**Wink (Ch Weidenhugel  
PG's Scotian Ice JH), one  
of Laura Reeves' German  
Wirehaired Pointers,  
brings back a chukar.**





Truman (BIS National BISS GChg Reece Afterhours The Buck Stops Here JH RN CA V Superior ROM), Angie Johnson's German Wirehaired Pointer, on a very pretty, classic point.



Sawyer (Ch Windswept's High Brass CD MH NA OAJ Versatile Superior), Lori Sargent's German Wirehaired Pointer, has an issue with being more interested in making friends at every event except those involving birds. He is dead serious about hunting.

Sawyer, when he's not busy making friends, is also a pretty good agility dog.



Spirit (MACH2 Vom Grafenauer's Free Sprit VCD1 RA XF MXG MJC JH V CGC NJ-R RATN), Ashlee Trotter's German Wirehaired Pointer, is an example of the breed's versatility holding titles in seven different dog sports.



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as a general rule, a Wirehair is a dog that does and should love working at anything," said Laura Reeves who owns or owned Henry (Ch BISS Scotian Private Reserve MH), Wink (Ch Weidenhugel PG's Scotian Ice JH) and Maverick (Ch Weidenhugel PG's Scotian Ice JH).

"The GWP was bred to be a versatile gun dog. Not only were they used on many types of game but many types of cover. Today this is just as important as it was when the breed was developed because many owners want their dogs to be a jack-of-all-trades. Wirehairs can excel in many sports with their athleticism, medium build and intelligence, drive and their willingness to please. However, they must have a job and while most people can't be hunting every weekend or every month—there are such things as 'hunting seasons'—other sports give this breed the chance to channel that drive and also spend time with their owners. I always tell people you can take the dog away from the hunt but you can't take the hunt out of the dog and for that reason, GWPs generally do really well in sports like coursing, barn hunt and dock diving. They're also really good agility dogs because of their athleticism and willingness to work with you but also because, like most pointing breeds, they have that streak of independence which allows them to work well away from you," said Angie Johnson who owns Truman (BIS National BISS GChg Reece Afterhours The Buck Stops Here JH RN CA V Superior ROM), and Marley (Ch Reece Afterhours Pretty Is As Pretty Does CGC RN JH NA NAJ V NAVHDA N/A Prize I).

"I'm not a 'one-trick pony' and I want my dogs to be versatile as well," said Ashlee Trotter whose dog Spirit (MACH2 Vom Grafenauer's Free Sprit VCD1 RA XF MXG MJC JH V CGC NJ-R RATN)

**Maverick (Ch Weidenhugel PG's Scotian Ice JH), another of Reeves' GWPs, makes it clear that there's a bird in there.**



**Hope (GCh RipsnorterNCladdagh BackFld N Motion JH JHR NA III UT III RN VX,) one of Lisa George's GWPs, demonstrates the breed's capabilities with waterfowl.**

**Jagger (U-Ch GCh Ripsnorter's Can't Stop the Reign NAIII CA,) another of George's GWPs, charges through cover on a hunt.**



has titles in seven sports and Creek (RATCHX3 Vom Grafenauer's Fluid in Motion AX AXJ OF T2B) who is training in four other sports besides the two in which he already holds titles. "I love a dog that can play any silly game that I find fun and interesting. That said, I found bird hunting difficult, not because the dogs had any trouble with it but because areas where hunting is allowed are at least an hour's drive from where I live in the suburbs of Chicago. I also have a personal issue with bugs. I'm pretty bug-phobic so training in the spring/summer/fall in fields where ticks are prevalent takes more effort for me. One thing I've discovered is that whenever a dog has trouble learning something, you have to break it down into small enough pieces for the dog to succeed as success is motivating. Once the dog realizes there are 'wins' to be had in the form of rewards or fun or a bird, they start to buy in and try harder to understand what is be-

ing asked of them. German Wirehaired Pointers want to DO something and I've found it doesn't matter all that much what they are doing as long as they're active so for me, participation in a particular dog sport is just a matter of deciding that it is worth the effort to pursue that activity."

**"A** GWP will generally adapt and do most anything we ask of them. They are much better at this than I am. I do well in the show ring but that's about it. Luckily for the dogs, my father and my children enjoy doing other things with them. My dad hunts with them and the kids hunt and do obedience. But, I've found that as much as they love to please us, they get bored if a game is too easy. Some have a stubborn streak if it's not a sport they enjoy. Usually it's a matter of finding a way to make it exciting for the dog. I had a dog once that couldn't handle even the softest correction. We all learn from mistakes but he would just quit if he even felt we were upset with him. We had to find ways to keep everything positive and take things a bit slower. Some dogs only like to retrieve certain objects, birds for example rather than bumpers. But at different levels, they don't have a choice so we have to find ways to get them interested in objects they don't like," said Lisa George who owns Hope (GCh RipsnorterNCladdagh BackFld N Motion JH JHR NA III UT III RN VX,) Jagger (U-Ch GCh Ripsnorter's Can't Stop the Reign NAIII CA) and JT (Ch RipsnorterNCladdagh BringN' Sexy Back NA I UT I) among others.

The fact that this is a breed so willing to please can sometimes be a negative according to Lori Sargent. "Sawyer (Ch Windswept's High Brass CD MH NA OAJ Versatile Superior), my most titled dog had a problem with friendliness, if you can call that a problem. He is very social and wanted to visit the people at the show rather than concentrate on what he was supposed to be doing. This was true in any activity except the field. He is dead serious about hunting birds. One thing you have to be aware of with this breed. If they are getting tired of doing an activity or an exercise, they will make up different things to do that aren't usually what the

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rules require and the same is true if you repeat an exercise too often especially if the dog knows that exercise. So you need to mix up the training just to make it more interesting for them. I needed someone to mix up the training for me in obedience because I was the problem in that sport. I found much of the training for competitive obedience to be boring so I can guess how the dog felt about it."

"As a handler, I was often Henry's greatest detriment in the field," said Reeves "One time at the hunt test at our national specialty, I prevailed upon a friend who was a much better field handler to run him in the master test. Henry was very attached to me so I couldn't actually walk the test to watch or he would ignore his work. So, I sat on a hill in my truck. He was doing a nice job, found a bird, pointed it, the gunner shot the bird and the handler said, 'Henry, fetch.' Yeah, well, Henry didn't know 'Fetch.' He knew 'Take it.' Like a total idiot, I had failed to mention that to my friend. Wirehairs, particularly males, are not really swift about changing their routine. At one point, the handler was on his knees practically begging, 'Henry, FEEEEETCH!' I'm not sure if he dog took pity on my friend or if he actually heard me inside my truck with the windows rolled up screaming 'Henry, TAKE IT!' But, he finally went and got the bird and returned it to hand. He passed that day. I, frankly, would not have given him a qualifying score. But the judges probably gave him an orange ribbon purely on the strength of the amount of entertainment he provided for them. For me, the most difficult thing has been training the honor in the field. My dogs don't think any other dog should be ahead of them and allowing another dog to retrieve their bird is a real issue for them. Oddly enough, Henry quit retrieving when we started steadying him to wing and shot for senior and master. He had always been a completely natural retriever who had needed no force breaking but he shut down on retrieving until we were finished with training him to be steady. Once we took the pressure off, he went back to retrieving



Gwp trot spirit ski - Spirit even does a little skijoring with his owner.



Marley (Ch Reece Afterhours Pretty Is As Pretty Does CGC RN JH NA NAJ V NAVHDA N/A Prize I), Johnson's other GWP, with a nose full of bird scent.

reliably. That is, as long as he got the correct command!"

This is a breed that has to be kept busy, according to Trotter. "These dogs are active and energetic. They want to do something and if their physical and mental needs are not met, they can become destructive. Back when the breed was used for hunting primarily to put regular meals on the table for their owners and their families, they were out hunting with all the physical and mental exercise that activity demands. Now that we get most of our food from the supermarket and hunting seasons are only a couple of months long in most cases, they still need an outlet for that energy and dog sports provide a nice outlet. So, I train in a class environment one or two days a week and at home two to four days a week. But you have to keep things interesting and fresh for the dogs. Drilling the same things over and over can be very depressing for a dog and destructive to their motivation. The same can be said for me, by the way, which is

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why I do so many different sports with my dogs."

"In almost every sport there has come a time when one of my dogs didn't want to do it or I could just tell they didn't have their full enthusiasm. I have found that taking a break from the sport or even just taking a few steps back in their training can help alleviate the stress the dog may be feeling. For example, in tracking, if the dog is getting easily distracted and going off the track, we shorten the track and or make the prize even grater at the end to encourage enthusiasm and completion of the job," said Johnson.

**D**espite the breed having a reputation as a fine hunting dog, there appears to be some erosion in the overall field ability according to Reeves. "We are in a place in the breed as a whole today that has put some strain on the traditional emphasis on dual purpose dogs, particularly in the field. Fewer dogs are competing to the highest levels and also pursuing show careers. I think the games are tougher, the stakes higher and the evolving membership of our parent club has moved the base to a degree. You can still find dogs doing it all, in the show ring, in the field and in performance events which I applaud to the highest mountaintop. We still have breeders dedicated to that objective. But, the overall consistency of performance 'quality,' not just title acquisition, particularly in the field is slipping some. Which saddens me."

Temperament may also be an issue. "In my opinion we need to monitor temperaments a bit more closely. German Wirehairs can be a bit sharp. Being a German breed, that's not totally unexpected. But, I'm seeing dogs that cannot be around other dogs and dogs skittish about noises, even some tough with people. My kids are eleven and twelve. They train and perform with my dogs. I want to feel safe that my dogs are sound enough in temperament so anyone can compete or just live with them. If we are only breeding dogs that can reach those top titles regardless of the temperament baggage they may carry, we will have problems," said George.



