

The Bloodhound

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Bloodhound

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The hound, the dog which evolved for the hunt, is an ancient type, extending back to the origins of the human and canine partnership. There are numerous breeds and varieties with diverse roles according to the style of the hunt and the nature of the quarry. Sometimes the hound participates in the kill, but at other times leaves it to other sorts of dog in the pack or the hunter himself. Hounds often pursue their quarry, such as a raccoon or mountain lion, until it goes to ground or takes to the trees. Foxhounds generally pursue until the fox seeks shelter in a den or other hiding place. Coonhounds were specifically bred in the American south to run in packs, actively baying so the hunters could follow their progress according to the tone and intensity of the baying and tell when the raccoon had been treed.

Hounds are broadly divided into the sight hounds such the Irish or Russian wolfhounds or the racing Greyhounds and the scent hounds such as the Coonhound, Foxhounds and Bloodhounds. Other than their common chase hunting function, which requires tenacity and endurance, these two classifications have little in common. Sight hounds tend to be larger for longer stride, more lightly built, with a decided stop to the skull shape to provide better binocular vision and relatively low levels of olfactory acuity. The scent hounds tend to be more massive with pendulant ears and a more plodding gait, and have been bred over centuries for the greatest possible olfactory acuity, their defining feature. A few breeds such as the Rhodesian Ridgeback are considered to be intermediate types.

Prior to the advent of firearms, the terms hound and hunting dog were more or less synonymous. In more recent times the hunter equipped with a shotgun or rifle, especially the bird hunter, generally makes the kill himself, relegating to the dog the task of locating and indicating the prey or retrieving downed birds. Thus pointers and retrievers emerged as new breeds, the gun dogs. Hunting dogs, both hounds and the gun dogs, have historically been the province of the rich and higher classes, which employed gamekeepers to persecute the working man or tenant farmer with the audacity to hunt for the purpose of putting food on the table. Historically hunting was sport for the noble or rich, and poaching for those of the working or peasant class.

Although the concept of the formal breed, with the rigidly closed gene pool, is a modern creation, over the centuries individual patrons or communities evolved uniform types for particular hunting traditions such as packs of foxhounds. In general there was a great deal of regional variation, and bringing in outside breeding stock was common in the pursuit of superior performance.

The Bloodhound evolved early in the Middle Ages from relatively large deer and boar hunting hounds as a specialist man-trailing dog. In this era the "Chien de Saint-Hubert" or "Dog of Saint Hubert" was first bred in Belgium by the monks of the Saint-Hubert Monastery, from ancient stock, and became emblematic of Belgian



canine affairs. Since St. Hubert is the patron saint of the hunter the Belgian national canine organization became the *Societe Royale Saint-Hubert* and the St. Hubert hound is incorporated into its emblem. The modern Bloodhound is the direct decedent of these dogs, and when the original St. Hubert lines died out in the nineteenth century the breed was later reconstructed from Bloodhound breeding stock.

Although many tend to think of the Bloodhound in terms of a pack of savage dogs in full cry chasing down an escaped slave, prisoner or fleeing criminal, as portrayed in the movies, the reality is quite different. It is certainly true that such packs of dogs were once common, and a few remain, but they were generally different sorts of dogs, often Bloodhounds crossed with Mastiff style dogs or other much more aggressive hound varieties. Often packs were made up of different types, some primarily for the chase, others for the attack at the end of the trail.

The typical police or search Bloodhound today works as a single on lead dog, which is generally relatively docile and friendly, although there are exceptions. Even the most staunch Bloodhound enthusiasts describe the breed as gentle and inquisitive, but not especially intelligent. Lack of intelligence is in my mind something of a misnomer, the breed has been created to be single minded and obsessed with the trail to the exclusion of all other things. Attempts to train other behavior run against this grain and frustrates the misguided trainer, which is more the result of misapplication and misunderstanding of the nature of this particular beast; the dog simply wants to get on with his track. Generally the breed is subject to genetic defects and very short lived, often expiring at about eight years old.

The Bloodhound, like other working breeds, has degenerated into show and working lines. Show lines tend to be lethargic, emphasizing size and wrinkles, with 100 pounds being fairly typical and much larger dogs not unusual. Some working trainers tend to prefer more mobile and agile dogs in the seventy to eighty pound range, which are likely to hold up better over longer distances and be more mobile in rough country, where sometimes the dog needs to be helped up a rough section or over a fence. Other equally well regarded authorities indicate a preference for larger dogs. Show breeders tend to emphasize the gentle giant persona, with some substance, but reports of nasty Bloodhounds circulate, as with any breed. Formal obedience competition is not their forte, and many individual dogs take serious convincing that one must not follow the crossing deer or other animal track. Some individuals, as in any breed, seem to have a propensity for dog aggression, which many handlers seem to be able to deal with if the dog is good in his work. In the words of Jerry Nichols, noted breed authority and a retired police Bloodhound handler with many years of experience:

"The Bloodhound today is primarily used by law enforcement and Search and Rescue. A Bloodhound can be a large and very powerful dog. Some can reach 150 pounds while the average is around 110-120 lbs. We have always trained handlers to work with these dogs on a long lead. The Bloodhound is a hunting breed and once it is given the scent to follow, it can be relentless running a man to ground even if it kills them. The lead keeps the dog from getting to far ahead and allows the handler to keep control of the dog. When they are on a trail these dogs can tune out what is going on around them to the point they could run right into traffic unaware of the dangers. I am aware of only a few prisons in the south that may still run their

Bloodhounds off lead followed on horseback after escapees. For Law Enforcement and SAR, it is typically one dog and one handler."¹

Bloodhounds, and to a lesser extent other breeds, are able to work in difficult or unusual circumstances, such after rainfall or snow, and can persist over asphalt and other hard surface segments. Often this is in areas where there has been extensive human activity; the ability to sort out the one person's odor is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these dogs. They can easily follow a child when picked up and carried by an adult, and persons using a bicycle. They are able to detect scent hovering over a body of water and search downstream to pick up the odor.

There is an enormous amount of Bloodhound lore out there, and a little bit of mythology, making it difficult to cite realistic operational expectations, what a good well trained Bloodhound in typical service can be expected to be able to do, that is how old a trail the dog can effectively follow over useful distances. Such things are like war and fishing stories, tend to get better as they are told, and as the storyteller feels compelled to match the exploits of other storytellers. Reviewing what has been written, my general perception is that about a week is an extreme outside limit under ideal circumstances and conditions. This means that a few exceptional, expertly trained and handled dogs can under favorable circumstances work favorable trails that are a week old or even somewhat older. (Schettler) These are experts with well trained dogs talking about once or twice in an active lifetime of experience, not routine expectations. More realistically 48 to 72 hours, under favorable circumstances, is beginning to push what a good dog can be expected work on a routine basis, anything beyond that being more or less a bonus.

Even when entirely enclosed, the forced air ventilation system in a modern car or truck continually expels passenger compartment air with the scent rafts and other components of odor, which means in principle that a dog can follow a vehicle with a party of interest. There are of course severe limitations, the person who is able to drive many miles at highway speeds is almost certainly beyond any dog's capability, but in instances of lower speed, shorter delay time and shorter distance it is sometimes possible; there are reliable reports of criminals under favorable circumstances being located and convicted after such a search.(Stockton, 2004) In rural areas one strategy is to traverse a highway by vehicle, stopping at each intersection to have the dog sniff and indicate direction.

How practical is all of this? Bloodhounds are indeed sometimes capable of following a person in a vehicle, but many authorities, including a well-known author, portray this as of marginal utility, say that is simply not practical in the real world. On the other hand there are well documented instances of police handlers that have been able to indicate the path of a vehicle with an abducted person, or the body, for a number of miles on a limited access highway, identifying the correct exit and leading to the find. Much of this was video recorded by television reporters.

Not every Bloodhound is an excellent working candidate; just as in any other line of work breeding must proceed according to selection for proven excellence on the track. For police work, or any other specialty, a good dog is a good dog, and a not good dog is just a waste of time. The Bloodhound is the ultimate specialist, created and maintained for man trailing, that is seeking out a specific person from a known point of presence, usually in modern police or search work as a single dog on a harness and line. The Bloodhound is not used for man aggression, building searches, or substance detection; these things are left to the patrol dogs such as the Malinois. While capable of wilderness area search and rescue the Bloodhound, because of size, bulk and working style, is not as well adapted to disaster scenes resulting from terrorist bombings, earthquakes and similar disasters.

¹ Jerry Nichols, personal communication.

Many police searches are handled by an available patrol dog, a Malinois or Shepherd, because he is there and because he will alert aggressively or engage when the suspect is found. When the trail is older or the available dogs are not suitable a good Bloodhound is often the dog of choice. Since the Bloodhound is not man aggressive sometimes an apprehension dog, such as a Malinois, serves as a backup to deal with a potentially aggressive suspect. Lacking an apprehension dog, an "over watch team" can provide the cover and step in to make the apprehension.

When a person has departed from a known point a well-trained Bloodhound is often the dog of choice, but it is not automatic. Just as the bite and aggression must come from within a Malinois, but is only useful when the response is encouraged and controlled through discipline and training, a Bloodhound must not only have good working selection in the breeding, he must be schooled and trained to know that he cannot go back to the game following instincts of his ancestors and must follow the trail indicted by the handler through the personal scent item. One year of training prior to useful deployment is often cited as a reasonable expectation, just as in so many other areas of life, great Bloodhounds are born and then made through training.

In exploring the world of search and trailing one quickly comes to appreciate why the sport community generally sticks to tracking or area search exercises: for tracking you can do most of the training alone and special skills are not necessary in the decoy for the area search exercise, which involves little wait time. Trailing is different in that as the dog advances there are hours and even days of delay between laying the trail and sending the dog on his search. In this era of busy lives, finding people to send out to trail and waiting for the dog, even if they come back to the end of the trail later, is difficult.

American police agencies must work within budgets, and the primary limitation on Bloodhound deployment is creating situations where a specialized, single purpose dog can be provided enough work to justify the cost of maintenance, training and the dedicated handler; the specialist must compete for budget dollars with the multipurpose protection, search and drug detection capabilities of a Malinois or Shepherd.

Many Bloodhounds are owned and trained by individuals devoted to the breed and serve on a voluntary basis, both through civilian search and rescue groups and for police agencies. Individual police officers making available personally owned and trained Bloodhounds are not uncommon. To give a sense of how common police Bloodhounds are, it is reported that at the time of this writing there are three Bloodhounds in service in California handled by police officers and about another dozen in civilian hands regularly available for volunteer service. These are relatively small numbers when compared to the dual purpose patrol and drug dogs.

In contrast to European superiority in patrol dog breeding and training, America is on the whole the leading nation in practical Bloodhound breeding, training and deployment experience, with enterprising Americans touring Europe to run seminars, in reverse of the usual flow of working canine instruction.

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