

The "Vizsla" It's Genealogy and Eugenics - by Dr. I.S. Osborn, DVM

*This article was taken from the October, 1987 issue of "The Vizsla News." Dr. Osborn, DVM, was one of the most prominent breeders from the early 1950's to 1970. He was a veterinarian and expert breeder and the largest importer of the Vizsla. In an attempt to date this material, a member of the Vizsla Club of America, Thomas DeRoo, concludes it was probably written in 1955. The article has been condensed; however, the spellings and grammar remain as written..*

Historically the Vizsla is older than most breeds and its existence was known in 10th century. As the breed was developed centuries ago, we have no definite information as to its ancestry. However, there seems little doubt its ancestors were the favorite companion hunting dogs of the various Asiatic tribes that invaded the lands of Central Europe until the 10th century. It has been established that the history of the Vizsla is closely akin to that of the early Hungarians, or Magyars, the ancient hunter-herdsmen who fought and lived in the great Carpathian basin one thousand years ago.

Primitive stone etchings, estimated 1,000 years old, show the Magyar huntsman with his Vizsla and falcons. The Vienna Chronicle, a manuscript of the early Hungarian codes and laws dating from the time of King Lajos (Louis) the Great (1342-1382), contains a chapter about the falconry of the nobility with a picture of the Vizsla. Hungarian historians mention the favorite Vizslas of their heroes. Documents of the Turk occupations of Hungary (1526-1686) deal with the Vizsla breed, chiefly in the correspondence between the Danubian provinces and the court of the Sultan of Istanbul. There is a little hamlet on the Danube that dates back to the 12th century, proving that many Vizslas were found in its environment. The spread of the Vizsla has changed little since then until 1945.

The golden Vizsla was the favorite companion-hunting dog of the early barons and war lords and, with the evolution of the nobility and large landowners, the breed was preserved in its purity through the centuries. The Vizsla presents several specific breed-marks, apart from the characteristic rusty-gold coat, that have never been found in any other variety of pointer. As late as World War II, the Vizsla enjoyed protection in selective breeding, as only the remnants of the aristocracy and the large estate owners were permitted by custom to breed the dogs.

At the end of World War I the breed was almost extinct but was preserved by such men as Dr. Polgar Koloman and Dr. Kubes of Czechoslovakia, Dr. Ferenc Korbas, Count Esterhazy and the large landowners as the Mihalyi's of Eastern Hungary. Under the leadership of Dr. Koloman, careful selective breeding established the breed between the World Wars when, once again, the Vizsla was threatened with extinction.

The breed is called the Hungarian Vizsla, not because of its origin in the country of Hungary as we know it today, but because of its origin in the Greater Hungarian Kingdom which existed prior to World War I and covered both Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The Vizsla was so closely held by the nobility of Czech and Hungary that it wasn't until the Russians came after World War II that specimens were taken out of the country.

The name, Magyar or Hungarian Vizsla may possibly suggest that all of the import Vizslas in this country come from Hungary and that would be an honor which all members of the breed could not claim and should be made clear at this time. We imported one male specimen by the name of "Hess von Schloss Loosdorf" from Count Piatti of Austria and, while this dog is a member of the Hungarian breed, he nevertheless would be of the Austrian Strain, as he was bred and born in Austria and his ancestry is of different lineage. This is especially important when one goes into the subject of eugenics, as it is a simple method of keeping the various strains and breeding pedigrees separate. In this country we now have the bloodlines of Czechoslovakia, Austria, Italy, and Yugoslavia, and sooner or later these bloodlines will blend and form American Strains.

We have just one Vizsla in this country that actually did come from Hungary and she is an aged specimen that was brought over by the former leader of the Hungarian Democratic Party. This Hungarian diplomat now resides in New York City and his female is not only a genuine Hungarian specimen but also the first Vizsla in the U.S. I have heard that there may be a genuine Hungarian specimen in the Kansas City area. No one has yet been able to make the proper contact behind the iron-curtain in the Hungarian sector and obtain a sizable quantity of their complete pedigree registered stock.

When the Russians came in 1945, the nobility feared for their lives and made an attempt to escape from the country. Many were put into prison and others did escape, a few taking their favorite Vizslas. These people fled to Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia, Italy, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Once these refugees were settled, they began to match up what few Vizslas they had in an attempt to save the breed. However, these people left in such haste that many neglected to bring their official pedigrees and registration papers with them. Thus, many of the offspring of these fringe Vizslas are without a complete and official pedigree. In some instances only the common "call names" are listed with no registration numbers of the sire and dam.

It is of course impossible now to have these pedigrees officially filled out. Vizsla pups of undetermined ancestry can now be found in certain pocket areas where these refugees settled in the countries bordering the iron curtain. In many instances they were forced to breed dogs of practically no pedigree; however, in some cases they were more fortunate. Most of the pedigrees on these Vizslas are from one to two and a half generations in length.

It is estimated today that there are about 50 Vizslas in Austria, 60 in Germany, 50 in the U.S., a number in Italy and Yugoslavia, a few in Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, South Russia, and less than 100 in iron-curtained Czechoslovakia.

The first American importer of the Vizsla was a Kansas City gentleman and board member of the club who located two specimens in Italy. Credit is due this enthusiast for introducing the breed and creating national interest by showing at the International Dog Show in Chicago. I understand that this gentleman has since imported an outstanding male specimen from Ankara, Turkey. He was elected to the office of the first President of the Magyar Vizsla Club of America and can honestly be called the "father" of the breed in the United States.

The breed was recently established in Austria when "Betyar" met up with "Panni XV." The "Betyar-Panni" litter (Csilla von Komlod, Csitri, Csatt, Csitt, etc) became the foundation stock of the American strain and several of their pups are now in the United States. "Panni" was very fortunate and had a complete pedigree but the papers on "Betyar" are no doubt lost forever.

While serving in the Austrian Army during the occupation of West Hungary, Officer Hofbauer managed to obtain a male Vizsla pup from the forester in charge of Count Esterhazy's kennels. This pup was subsequently listed by the Austrian Kennel Club as a Vizsla with Ung.#1 as registration number. Mrs. Elizabeth Mihalyi, noted portrait artist, endured much hardship to escape from her Hungarian estate and the Russian Armies with her "Panni XV." The disintegrating Mihalyi family charged their mother with the duty of saving "Panni" above all possessions. Mrs. Mihalyi found asylum in Austria and inquired of the Austrian Kennel Club if there was a male Vizsla in Austria. The club was most anxious to save the breed and thus Mrs. Mihalyi was introduced to the Hofbauers of Vienna. The "Betyar Panni" litter resulted and this offspring was rather closely bred and the Austrian strain was established. The names of "von Schloss Loosdorf," "Komlod," "Nadudvar," and "Davavology" are some of the well known descendants of "Betyar" and "Panni." Panni XV, now 14 years old, lives with Dr. and Mrs. Caravenna in Austria.

Many Vizsla pups of the Austrian strain have now been imported into the United States. The lack of complete pedigree is an unfortunate circumstance as a minimum of 3 generations is required for registration in this country. However, I believe that two generation dogs could probably be listed and their pups could then be registered. Registration of a dog refers to the recording of its ancestry in the stud book.

Here I skipped some of the article regarding specific dogs and their pedigrees.

Perhaps one of the greatest advantages of the Czech strains is not only the Championship background or the complete six-generation pedigrees, and the fact that we have been furnished with a complete breeding and evaluation record on the ancestors of each animal. This perhaps will not interest the novice, but the initialed or experienced breeder will be able to read the pedigree and thus be able to concentrate certain valuable and desirable points of an ancestor or ancestors.

Another advantage of the various iron curtain strains is the existence of established specialized abilities within the breed itself. With no other hunting breeds has this ever been accomplished, but then these traits were developed over centuries of time and not just within a period of a few short years. The countries of Czechoslovakia and Hungary are very similar to our own Midwest, only compressed within the area of a few states; the hills, the mountains, plains, lake regions, river valleys, arid sections, the warm summers and the snow of winter.

Within these various districts their Vizslas were bred to conform to the requirements for use in a certain given area, in addition to just pointing and retrieving. By breeding to outstanding stud dogs that would excel in a certain particular use, these breed masters were able, through the centuries, to develop certain strains more suitable to the environment in which they lived. The lake and river region of Northern Czechoslovakia require a rather large dog with a strong neck and forequarters and weighing up to 75 pounds, capable of retrieving the large 10 pound hares and geese, and rugged enough to stand cold water. The plains regions were best suited for a smaller and faster dog, weighing about 50 pounds.

Some strains are very, very sharp and others were developed along show lines. Most strains are developed for use as a medium range, medium sized gun-dog; however, in one district an extremely fast and wide ranging strain was developed for fast field trails, as seen with the English Pointer, who run in this particular area.

The Vizsla breed is just getting a start in this country and as yet we do not have representative specimens of all these different iron curtain strains in this country. To obtain such would not only require a fortune, but is in fact impossible at this time. In fact, we have been trying to import field trial specimens of the far ranging type for over a year, but as yet have been unable to penetrate and make contact in the remote section. However, we do have sufficient outstanding, highly blooded specimens of their medium ranged, medium sized, choke-bore-nosed gun-dog to definitely establish the breed in this country. Perhaps in the future we will be able to offer a wide ranging extremely fast Vizsla to the field trial fancier and quail hunter of the South, as well as the medium ranged, medium sized, partridge, pheasant and duck dog for the other section.

Throughout the ages the Czech and Hungarian breed masters were far more interested in field work than show types. Hunting capabilities were always paramount. Breeding was carefully considered to produce only the best puppies and never on a

commercial scale. There were no so-called "puppy factories." Only the best pups were saved from a litter and those that were undesirable were destroyed.

At this time we must not in the least be concerned with white markings. Our first obligation is to preserve the natural hunting instinct and we shouldn't care much about a white toe, or toes, chest if the dog has a good nose, ranges well and has plenty of bird sense. If the great breed masters of Czechoslovakia and Hungary found it undesirable, and perhaps impossible, to breed out the white in the past ten centuries, I see no reason why we should try at this time.

The chief rival of the Vizsla in the field are the English Pointer and the German Shorthaired Pointer, and neither attempts to breed out the white.

We Americans like to improve on things and there are no doubt some among us who honestly believe they can do more for the Vizsla in a few short years of selective breeding than the old master, the breed wardens themselves have done in the past 10 centuries. The white could possibly be bred out. The breed has a striking appearance with a surplus of eye appeal, beautiful golden coat, dignified aristocratic bearing, pleasing conformation, good disposition and style. All the earmarks of a terrific bench prospect. But let us not forget the past history of the beautiful Irish Setter.

Originally the Irish Setter, like our Vizsla, was a dog of striking color with white markings on the chest and feet. Even today traces of white do not disqualify. He was imported mainly for use on upland game and played an important part in the early days of field trials. They were outstanding field specimens. However, many fanciers attracted by the dog's good looks began to breed for bench only, and his working qualities were ignored. There has been so much concentration on breeding beauty into the red Irish Setter, that his gun-dog abilities have been almost forgotten. The Irish Setter Club of America has been making advances toward field utility in the past few years, although it is unlikely that the breed will attain the popularity afield that it once held.

Any specialized attempt to breed our Vizslas strictly for the show-type will eventually invite degeneration in character, strength, and hunting ability. Only by selectively breeding completely trained outstanding male and female specimens can any hunting breed be improved or kept up to the proper standard. For over a thousand years the Vizsla has been a robust, brush-busting companion hunter, full of fire and ready to please. Let's keep him that way!

Dr. I.S. Osborn