

Noble breeding

MIKE TRIPPITT explores the Devon connections of a breed of dog whose history means it should be more familiar to us

From Norfolk's Sandringham royal estate, through rich parkland in Nottinghamshire to the moorlands of Devon, the Clumber spaniel has been loved by royalty, nobility and country folk for over three centuries.

Yet, the chances of us encountering one in the towns and lanes, or on the moors and coastal paths of the West Country are small. If we do, we might even mistake it for a St Bernard puppy or a retriever/spaniel cross.

In truth, the Clumber, the heaviest of the spaniels, has been recognised as an independent breed since 1879, though with only 265 Clumber puppies registered with The Kennel Club in 2017 (compared to 35,068 Labradors, 23,317 cocker spaniels, and 30,887 French bulldogs) it is unsurprising that they are seen rarely.

"Most members of the public have not seen a Clumber before," says Rod Weston, co-founder of the Walking With Clumbers Group. "They do not know the history of them. They tend to be



ABOVE: Jackie Crawford with Clumbers Tamar (left) and Baron (right)

quite intrigued when they find that they were developed on what is now a National Trust property back in the 1700s."

The second Duke of Newcastle is credited with originating the breed on his Clumber Park estate in Nottinghamshire during the 18th century. The Clumber's keen nose and determined mind make an ideal working dog to flush game from heavy cover.

Rod Weston's Walking With Clumbers Group has organised walks at Killerton in Devon on two occasions as part of its programme to get Clumbers and their owners together. But Rod is puzzled why there are so few around given that they also make great pets.

He explains: "They have a brilliant temperament and are ideally suited to be pets. They are much more laid back than other spaniels. They require less exercise at about an hour a

day, and are more than happy to spend the day sleeping indoors. They are brilliant with children."

The road from working dog to handsome companion has not always been smooth for the Clumber. When the Victorian middle class embraced dogs as a desirable accessory and invented the dog show, many breeds fell victim to breeding that enhanced what were perceived to be desirable looking characteristics.

In the last ten years The Kennel Club has changed over 70 breed standards to reduce hereditary health conditions and in 2011 introduced compulsory health checks for any Crufts entrants in 15 breeds of concern. Clumbers were one of the 15.

Devon's Jackie Crawford has owned Clumbers since 1983 and been breeding them for 25 years. She is a member of The Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme and on the Clumber



Mike Trippitt with his Clumber spaniel Farley



ABOVE: Rod Weston (right) with the Walking With Clumbers group

Spaniel Club's health and welfare sub-committee. At her home in Throwleigh she has eight working Clumbers. The health of the breed is her priority:

She reveals: "Coming from a farming family, I wanted something that was healthy. You do not want something that is not very good." She says that in the 1980s few people were hip scoring their dogs (hip scoring is a measure of any evidence of abnormal development called 'Hip Dysplasia'), but she met another Devon breeder Margaret Doncaster who hip scored all her dogs.

BELOW: An hour a day is sufficient exercise



Jackie Crawford followed suit and took a strong interest in reducing the problem of hip dysplasia in the breed: "I set up my website in 2004 and started putting all the hip scores of all Clumbers in the UK that I had information on, because it wasn't public and you could not get that information."

Jackie says that since 2008 there has been a "sea-change" in attitudes towards health testing within the breed. More information is available than ever before on eye tests, hip scores, EIC (exercise induced collapse) and PDP1 (enzyme deficiency in dogs causing metabolic disorder).

This proliferation in health testing together with careful breeding using dogs from across the globe to increase the gene pool gives responsible UK breeders like Jackie Crawford the best chance of breeding out genetic health problems that can affect Clumbers.

Jackie says: "I don't want to breed anything with issues. I try to breed as healthily as I can. You cannot guarantee anything, but you can try your best." Lovers of these beautiful, friendly, happy dogs will say amen to that. ♦

Information about Clumber spaniels can be found at:

The Kennel Club -
thekennelclub.org.uk
The Clumber Spaniel Club -
Clumberspanielclub.co.uk
The Working Clumber Spaniel Society -
workingClumber.co.uk
Jackie Crawford's website -
abbyford.co.uk



Clumbers have an insatiable appetite for carrying

Who is the Clumber spaniel?

The Clumber Spaniel Club says there can be no parallel to the Clumber as a companion. Its website says: "He mixes well with other dogs of other breeds and is easily trained. "In general the breed is long lived and will serve the boss and his family to the end. He will take about two to three years as a wild and loving youth before settling down into a truly aristocratic, good natured, dignified companion who, when he senses the time is right, will play the clown." But it warns: "He does have a tendency to slobber and he is very good at snoring!"



Clumbers love water

THE CLUMBER SPANIEL AND ROYALTY

The Clumber spaniel's heritage is in the aristocracy, and it has long been a favourite with Royals. King Edward VII had Clumbers and George V bred them at the Royal Kennel for work on the Sandringham estate.

Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert had seven Clumbers at one time, the monarch describing them as "such dear, nice dogs."

HRH The Princess Royal is president of Working Clumber Spaniel Society.