

The History of the Bracco Italiano



The Bracco Italiano is one of only two native Italian Gundog breeds, the other being the Spinone, and they both belong to the Hunt, Point and Retrieve Group of dogs. The Bracco is a classic and ancient breed with paintings and writings about it dating back to the fourth and fifth centuries B.C, and is considered an antecedent of many of today's' modern sporting dogs, more specifically European pointing breeds. The Bracco Italiano (BI) originated in Italy and it is believed in most circles to be a cross between either a Segugio Italiano (a coursing hound), or sight hounds brought to Italy by Phoenician traders from Egypt, and the Asiatic Mastiff or Molossus.

Referred to by its admirers as "noble," this was a popular hunting dog during the Renaissance, being bred by both the Medici and Gonzaga families, and was often given as a gift from Italian government officials to VIP's in other countries such as France and Spain. They were sought out by the aristocracy, accompanied net hunters of the Middle Ages (driving game into the nets) and later were teamed up with falconers who used them to flush the falcon's quarry. With the invention of the gun the Bracco Italiano's role changed to that of the hunter, pointer and retriever to which it has remained faithful until the present day.

Although the breed developed to accommodate the hunters' needs the Bracco has remained very true to type. At the end of the 1800s and the early 1900s the breed nearly became extinct. It was saved primarily by the efforts of the SABI (Societa Amatori Bracco Italiano, the custodians of the breed in Italy) and an Italian breeder, Ferdinando Delor de Ferrabouc. The Italian standard for the breed was released in 1949 and the Bracco is actively promoted in Italian working events these days.

It is thought that the white-and-orange Bracco variety originated in Piedmont and the roan-and-brown in Lombardy; in fact people spoke of a Lombard pointer (the roan-and-brown) and a Piedmontese pointer, lighter in color and build, probably due to the mountainous terrain there. They are strong, deep chested dogs with muscular hindquarters, ranging in height from 21.5 to 26.5 inches and weighing from 55 to 88 pounds. Their coat is glossy, short, dense and fine, and comes in all white, orange and white, orange roan, a bronze /brown (known as monks-robe) with white or bronze brown/roan.

He has long, folded ears and a slight stop, with a nearly convex muzzle and a distinctly roman-nosed profile. His tail is docked to slightly more than half its length. The body is somewhat typically pointer-type, but somewhat longer and lankier. He is heavier-boned than many retrievers, with large feet. He is admired as an all-purpose family gun dog, being docile when in the home, obedient and loyal, making a fine family and house dog that doubles as a hunting companion, becoming energetic when he hears birds or gun. He is happiest when doing a job and is a true, sporting dog with a well-developed brain - not, therefore, necessarily suitable for homes where his hunting ability is allowed to go to waste.

This is definitely a breed that needs to work, being a strong and powerful animal, combined with a friendly nature and the need to please. The Bracco has a serious countenance, is intelligent, slightly stubborn and very diligent in the hunt with his ample, swift and extended trot. Strongly and harmoniously built with a vigorous appearance, very distinct even in the hunt, head held high with a noble expression, the Bracco Italiano is compliant, gentle and calm in the home. Bracco Italianos do not mature mentally until about two to three years of age, and not physically until 4-5 years. They are very sensitive and gentle-natured in the house and become close friends with children. They don't tend to cause any difficulties with other dogs or household pets. They are happiest being with their family members, and do not deal well with being ignored.

Training a Bracco requires patience and a calm nature by the trainer. They are intelligent and quick to learn but can be stubborn if they think they know a better way and will lose ground if not handled correctly or forced. Like so many other members of the HPR group, the Bracco needs careful training - it is all too easy for such an intelligent dog to go "deaf" and do his own thing (on the other hand, they can often teach their handlers a thing or two). "Gentle, but firm" is the key to success with training this breed - you are unlikely to come across a breed which gets more upset at criticism and chastisement than the Bracco Italiano, and once he knows he's made you happy, he's thrilled.

They have superb noses, being an "air scenting" breed, and hold a staunch point as well as retrieve well to hand. It is said that when hunting, the Bracco should appear to be "led by his nose." Their calm good nature does not mean they cannot be a deterrent to unwanted strangers with their occasionally-used deep bark. They are tireless in the field and appear not to expend energy unnecessarily. They enjoy water, are strong swimmers and can prove to be a very versatile dog.

They are presently recognized by NAVHDA and the UKC as well-as ENCI and FCI in Italy and Europe. In Italy the Bracco Italiano is held in high esteem as a working gundog and today the breed enters more field trials than any other breed. Up until now, it had been practically unheard of by most in the United States - currently it has a small, but growing group of supporters and breeders. The desire in the US is to continue the quality and care that the Italians have taken in creating this wonderful ancient breed.

