

THE DACHSHUND FOR FINDING WOUNDED BIG GAME

Most dachshunds used for finding wounded deer in North America are out of European bloodlines. They are bred to the European FCI standard rather than to the AKC or CKC standard which means that they are higher on the leg, not as long in the body, and generally more athletic than the beloved "wiener dog" of the United States. According to the FCI standard, the ground clearance behind the front legs should be one third of the total height at the shoulder. A European bred hunting dachshund can jump over logs, climb mountain ledges and handle just about any cover or terrain that his handle can negotiate. As is true in Europe the great majority of blood tracking dachshunds in North America are of the wirehaired coat variety, but these "wires" do not have a monopoly of talent.

The value of a good wire double coat is that the coarse outer hairs protect the dog from briars and shed snow well. The dense short under coat that comes with it keeps the dog warm and like a beaver's undercoat keeps him dry when swimming across a creek or working in the rain. The problem is that "wires" do not always have this ideal double coat. Coats do not breed true 100% of the time. A Sire and dam with perfect coats will produce a certain number of quite short-haired dogs that look almost like a smooth dachshund, or worse fluffy coated dogs that collect burrs and snowballs when ever the occasion arises. The shorter haired dogs are well adapted to the South, but the fluffy-coated ones are to be avoided at all costs.

Smooth coated and long haired dachshunds can work well in cover where an English pointer or a English setter would fit in. When selecting a working dachshund it is best to think about ability and functional body structure . Coat type is a matter of convenience and personal taste.

One of the best arguments for selecting a dachshund tracking prospect is that they are easy to train and eager to please. Learning to stay on the right scent line is the most difficult thing a tracking dog has to learn, and a good dachshund picks this up more quickly than most breeds of hounds that are not as handler oriented. Living in the house as part of the family enhances the bond that makes handler and dog a successful working team in the woods. They are small, convenient dogs in the home and this same handiness carries over into the field. A dachshund will ride with calm patience on an ATV or even on a horse. They are also easy to work with at the end of the long tracking leash. They won't drag you though briars or "help" you over a barbed wire fence faster than you wish.

The size of a dachshund, as compared to other breeds of tracking dogs is something to consider for many reasons. In most states and provinces, outside of the Deep South and Texas, dogs must be kept on a tracking leash at all times. In this vast "always on a leash" area there is no special advantage in having a larger, stronger dog that can bay and hold a wounded deer, elk or bear until the handler can arrive to put it down. Certainly in poisonous snake country, a big dog does have an advantage. The big dog will take a bite on the leg and probably survive; a smaller dachshund will take the bite on the neck or body and survival is less likely.

Most standard dachshunds in the USA weigh between 20 and 25 pounds, but there are also miniature dachshunds, 13 pounds or less who have demonstrated excellent tracking abilities. They can be a good choice for the bowhunter who expects to track a few wounded deer for himself and his friends. Generally these small dogs will tire sooner than the standard type if asked to do a great deal of tracking, day in and day out. Because of their smaller body mass they are quicker to chill in cold, wet conditions.

Nose is obviously very important in a tracking dog, and of course the intelligence and manner in which the nose is used also determines the outcome of a tracking assignment. Most dachshunds probably do not have the extreme scenting power of the blood hound and related breeds such as Hanoverian and Bavarian mountain bloodhounds. However a good tracking dachshund can successfully handle a 24 hour scent line with little or no visible blood, provided that is not too dry and windy.

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