



Two Coursing Tales I Will

NEVER FORGET

BY GEORGE BELL

It was just another ASA breed hunt called the Mia Cup at the end of the 1975 coursing season. I don't recall whom Sally and I were running that day, but as I remember, it was the first time we had a hunt this far south from Merced, CA. There were 3 fields of competition in the alfalfa fields in Corcoran, CA about 15 miles north of our home in Alpaugh. The 3 fields had completed their judging, and I believe I was ASA huntmaster. All these details at the time were not important. I had asked John Cogan to judge the run-off between the 3 Saluki winners, and he agreed to do so. He was not a NOFCA judge at the time, but it was permissible for a non-NOFCA judge to officiate in a run-off. All he needed to do was call a winner because no points were involved in the run-off. How hard can that be? John had several years experience in the field with Salukis and an Afghan hound.



The 3 Salukis in the run-off were the winners of their respective fields: a very young bitch called Lotus. She was a Lobo daughter out of Srinagar Shendi of Paul Stakel's breeding. The second Saluki in the run-off was the very famous Cirrus, (Srinagar Cirrus al Talat), a legend in his own time. The 3rd Saluki was a very famous dog-named Jaadan (Euphrates Springtime Jaadan) making his presence known in the field of reproduction by this time. One William H. Lupton, who had coursed Jaadan several times before, but never at a hunt, owned Jaadan. Organized hunts were just something Bill never participated in at least under NOFCA.

Of the 3 hunt fields used today, our competition used this field so I was familiar with the tendencies of the hares in this field to escape the coursing Salukis. The hares earlier in the day ran to the east in this field to reach the levy that bordered a canal and this alfalfa field. The hares ran south on the levy dirt road until the hares reached a dirt bridge that crossed the canal to the East. This eastern field was a grape

vineyard, and the hares would dive into the vineyard and immediately lose the dogs. Hares set up in their territory with a plan. They don't just squat anywhere, as they are where they are for a reason. The reason is a plan to escape predators. Jackrabbits can easily outrun a coyote.

So on the run-off, dogs stepped to the line in their random blanket colors: Jaadan was yellow on the left, Lotus was pink in the middle, and Cirrus was blue on the right. The gallery and the hunt dogs moved south through the field. The hare broke out of the alfalfa on the left side of the line, which made Jaadan closest to the hare which was heading directly for that levy to the East. Jaadan with his speed was much closer to the hare and he wrenched a turn on the hare, but the hare made another dash for the levy. When the hare reached the levy, in expected fashion, the hare headed south down the levy road unencumbered by the alfalfa now with Jaadan still in the lead, Lotus 2nd and Cirrus 3rd. No surprises so far.

Cirrus is very well known for this as he can generate a lot of velocity once he lines out on a hare and he went by Lotus first and then Jaadan, and now Cirrus was in the lead and the hare was heading for that dirt bridge to cross the canal. Cirrus caught up to the hare before it could reach the dirt bridge to cross the canal and probably escape. The hare had no choice but to leave the road and go back into the alfalfa field that was its territory. Cirrus was still leading, with Jaadan 2nd, and Lotus 3rd. Cirrus forced another turn, and Jaadan cut off the hare with an unassisted take.

The usually stoic judge John Cogan seeing this screamed "no, no, no," and crumbled to his knees on the ground. Those of us left in the field looked at each other in jaw-dropping shock and were concerned but what could we do but head for the cars and leave John alone in the field. John's reaction was an indication of how seriously he took the responsibility of judging and was why I'll never forget this course. If you've ever read John's writing, you already know he is a gifted writer.

John regained his composure by the time he reached the cars and looked for the trophy cup

and picked it up and declared the winner of the Mia Cup was Cirrus. No one had to ask what happened. We all saw it and as far as I know haven't mentioned the course since for at least another quarter century. Probably John figured he knew at the time Cirrus pulled the double go by on the levy, forced the hare off the levy and put another turn on it in the field. John had Cirrus as the easy winner, but Jaadan caught the hare. Now, who won the course? John did have the right winner, but I went over and over that course, as I'm sure everyone who saw it did.

Jaadan had a fat toe after the course. And, he was entered in the Grand Course 3 weeks later, which he tried to run in, but the fat toe washed him out of the event in his first run. It was his last hunt, but Jaadan sired 2 of our top show dogs, Bachrach and Twyx, that together sired over 130 champion show Salukis. There were bunches of champion Salukis out there that call Jaadan, grandpa.

Cirrus, the veteran, did what he almost always did and that was to vanquish all opponents in the field. He was the reason I favored him to sire the litter to Shahin. That leads us to the story of a previous coursing run-off of the 1971 Christmas Cup that took a whole 2 years to actually run the Salukis off.

"The Christmas Cup" is by far the most sought after open field breed challenge coursing trophy for the ASA Saluki fanciers. It was the first of 6 challenge trophies donated to the ASA by Srinagar in 1965, and whether or not you supported Winafred Lucas, or Srinagar, you would be proud to have your dog's name engraved on the Christmas Cup trophy. Like the ASA's membership over the years was always 500 members, so too was the Christmas Cup entry of 60 Salukis always expected each year.

The 4 fields in Merced, CA were won by 4 different Salukis for the 1971 Christmas Cup Hunt and as was usually the case, at least one field did not finish until dark, and so the run-off did not happen on the day, but at least we had the winners of the fields, and they would all 4 compete to be the winner of the Christmas Cup at their first opportunity. The opportunity didn't happen until the 1972/1973 season. We learned at the time to never postpone 4 dog winners

for a run-off again, because there is always at least one dog that is a no show. The Alexanders' Cirrus won one field, another winner was Lundeberg's Shah, (a Red Prince son, so was a half-brother to Jaadan), and another winner was Jo-Anne Van Arsdale's Lasa who won the 3rd field. The Alexanders in a sense had 2 winners as they were running Shahin, who won the 4th field for the owners Dan and Laura Belkin while the Belkins were in the UK attending coursing meetings. The Belkins had left the direction that if it worked out Shahin was to be bred to the top coursing male during the Belkins almost 2-year-stay in the UK. The Belkins formed a committee of coursing people who would conduct the selection of the dog to be bred to Shahin.

The drama of who would win this runoff continued for months and into the following coursing season in order to arrange the Christmas Cup run-off, as the Alexanders now lived in Washington State. Finally, I said I would buy 2 pups from the litter if Cirrus were the sire. The committee had no other offers, and the years were passing, so the breeding took place. The Cirrus-sired litter was born in the spring of 1971. The Alexanders generously allowed me the first 2 picks, and I selected the red grizzle bitch that was Vida and the silver grizzle dog that was Lobo.

At last the day came and all 4 Salukis, Shah, Lasa, Shahin, and Cirrus, were able to meet after another hunt to run-off for the 1971 Christmas Cup in 1972. Three Salukis wore colors, and the 4th wore no blanket at all. Let this run-off finally get underway.

The hare came out of the alfalfa in front of the 4 contestants and they were off, the only petite bitch Shahin took the lead off the line, and the 3 larger males jostled for position and followed suit. The Salukis were gaining on the hare, Shahin still led the boys, and the hare veered off to the left and Shahin picked it up in front of the boys. There wasn't much of a competition. between Cirrus and Shaw, because the course was over almost before it began, and Shahin's litter was on the ground now anyhow. The runoff proved that the little bitch Shahin had plenty of speed off the line, and the big boys didn't intimidate her. The non-intimidation

factor is indeed a valuable attribute in coursing, especially in the bitches, as some of these girls will not be intimidated by any male.

Looking back now 45 years later, Lobo and Vida are behind the top 6 BIS Salukis of all time in the US. Cirrus and Shahin were selected as parents for their coursing prowess, and at the time of the breeding, we didn't know much about the show world. The fundamentals must have been there for the ring as well, as later when Bachrach was shown (He was Vida's son), he became the top winning show Saluki of all time in the US. He was the last one left over in the whelping box, and no one wanted him.

In the field, Bachrach and his littermates were used wisely in coursing breedings, and he lives on through Darius in the field who is the highest-pointed coursing Saluki in NOFCA of all-time.

After all these 45 years later, I find it is always good to look back and compare the good ole days to the way it is done now. When the hunts were in the alfalfa fields of Merced, the catch rate of the hares was 33 %. When we moved the hunts down to the desert, the catch rate was reduced to about 10%. The hares are faster in the desert and run longer. The Saluki hunts in the desert tend to start out as tail chases, and there are usually no quick takes. So in retrospect Shahin and Jaadan were speedsters off the line, but Cirrus had more velocity once he got going. We found that in Cirrus' case, no other Saluki could beat his time on a 3/8's to a half-mile lure chase.

I've lived in the coursing world for almost 25 years and the show world for 24 years. After judging sighthounds around the world for 23 years and judging NOFCA field sighthounds for 44 years, I've come to the conclusion that once you've bred for what wins in the ring in today's world, the same dogs will not excel in the field. Forty years ago, the same dog could win in both worlds, showing and coursing. Both worlds are becoming more specialized as I look back. The coursing Salukis are still gorgeous and are becoming even more improved at coursing through the infusion of the Desert Bred Salukis from their countries of origin. We find the exclusive show Salukis are becoming more

extreme in their movement with the advent of TRAD, tremendous reach and drive in the ring profile trot. I myself was in denial of this fact when I was breeding show Salukis. I found each generation must be tested in the field of their endeavor. If you are breeding to satisfy show judges, you may be doing a disservice to the purpose of your dog's intended function. When was the last time you saw a Whippet or Greyhound racing dog with TRAD? The faster dogs have a more restricted profile gait.

Breeding sighthounds to have tremendous reach and drive (TRAD) in the profile gait produces dogs with loose jump joints (pasterns and hocks joints); unfortunately, these sighthounds lack speed in the field. The show judges in general love TRAD and despise a restricted gait in the profile trot. This one fact begins to separate field and show dogs in the ring now. This unfortunate situation can only serve to divide the breed in show and field.

In the 1971 photo below:

Shahin with Dan Belkin

Fleur with Marian Alexander

Vida with George Bell

Those of you in the *American Saluki Association* should feel most fortunate that for the past half century, the ASA through its support of Open Field Coursing, literature, and hunts have reminded us of the many-faceted potential of the Saluki. It gives new meaning to the phrase: "Use it or lose it."

Gone are the days when a NOFCA coursing sighthound can achieve a coursing championship and also be capable of winning an AKC all-breed Best in Show.

The best courser and fastest dog in the Cirrus x Shahin litter was Mujib owned by the Snyders, and perhaps the prettiest bitch was Star Bolt owned by Corey Johnson. The Alexanders owned Fleur, a very competent hunt winner and a beauty; Hawkeye, owned by Jo-Anne Van Arsdale, was slower to mature but in the end, he turned out to be one of the better coursers. Both Lobo and Vida won the Christmas Cup and were owned by the Bells.

Lobo with Sally Bell

Cirrus with Charles Alexander

