



**ONCE THE**  
Bloodhound gets  
the scent, the owner  
has to be ready to  
follow - the more  
experienced trailists  
can be following three  
mile long trails

# On the Bloodhound trail

■ Trials get dogs doing what they were bred for

By Dave McFadzean

**THINKING OF** those floppy eared Bloodhounds usually conjures images of frenzied

**manhunts looking for some escaped villain or the like.**

The renegade running desperately through the hills or forest with the baying hounds closing in with every second as they home in on the escapee's scent. King Robert the Bruce once had one of these sleuth hounds and it nearly caused the fugitive king's downfall. His enemies having captured it used the devoted dog to track its former master through the desolate wastes of the Galloway

hills.

The legend relates that it was only a well aimed arrow from one of Bruce's men that finally stopped the faithful hound's pursuit. Nowadays, though these dogs take on a more benign and less menacing role but they still love to scour our hillsides, farmland and forests in pursuit of fugitive's scent.

More recently the hills and high farmlands around Glencairn, Dumfriesshire, resounded to the baying of these Bloodhounds during a four day series of trials. I was lucky enough to meet up with these doggy enthusiasts during their novice trials on the first day.

Those working trials are run by the Association of Bloodhound Breeders and there was certainly a good attendance of dogs and handlers on that first day in Glencairn. "We've got 13 hounds entered here today," explained competitor Jackie Wallace.

"These dogs are still taught how to recognise and follow a human scent. Initially, a line walker leaves flags with their scent impregnated on them at the start of a mapped route.

"We then follow a specific marked line on the map leaving our scent trail behind for the hound to follow," explained an experienced line walker.

"The countryside is just so lovely around here," said Pearl Tickell. "The farmers really do put themselves out for us with shifting cattle and the like. They are always so helpful and welcoming." One local farmer even literally went that extra mile to help them out and took on the role of line walker for a trial on his ground. Each day the trials get progressively longer and more difficult. "Today we have a mile long novice course,"

explained Jackie Wallace. "Tomorrow is the two mile junior course. The next day is a two and a half mile intermediate trial. Then on the final day there is a three mile senior stake for hounds that have won in the previous classes."

Once the dog picks up the smell from the flag both hound and handler are ready for the off. If all goes to plan the hound will

It's always possible that the wind will blow up in the afternoon. Then we can have a completely different picture altogether."

The first dog to go after the scent was a beautiful black and tan hound. His orange vested owner was very laid back about this imminent trial of both dog and handler. With a couple of good sniffs of the flag the hound

show me that it knows the person it was following."

The judges follow the competitor and hound keeping a close eye on the proceedings. "If they go off the line the judges are there to put them back on the correct route," explained a competitor. "They are also there for safety reasons just in case there is an accident or a hound gets stuck somewhere."

All the members of the Association of Bloodhound Breeders abide by a code of ethics which always puts the interests of their hounds first. There is also risk assessment plan for field work during trials. That covers everything from risks to hounds and handlers from bad weather, to dog welfare, to the dangers from traffic and electric fences. It is good to see these hounds still in action after hundreds of years.

Through the kind heartedness of local farmers and landowners these ancient beasts can continue to do what they do best, follow the human scent. More details of the ABB can be had on [www.associationofbloodhoundbreeders.co.uk](http://www.associationofbloodhoundbreeders.co.uk)

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**PEARL TICKELL**

replicate their line walker's route.

Roberto Messemeaker came all the way from Belgium to be senior judge at the novice trials. "I'm expecting to see lots of good runs because we have a lot of good handlers today," Roberto explained. "I will also be looking for different landscapes for the lines. I am hoping we have the same weather conditions for the whole day.

was off and running. I was quite surprised not to hear it baying for blood though just like we hear in the movies.

"We score them on three points," Roberto explained. "The first point is if they follow the line like it was walked. Then we score them on the time they take to get round the course. Then finally we score them on recognition of the line walker at the end. Then the hound must



**THERE IS** no mistaking the trademark floppy ears of the handsome Bloodhound



**THIS ORANGE** vested, laid back owner knows that success all depends on his dog's sniffing power

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