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## THE FUNCTION CREATES THE BREED

by Cesare Bonasegale

*The origin of dog breeds is strictly connected with the functions they have to perform.  
To maintain the breed, those who are not hunters, should make use of simulated hunting trials*

**The Italian version of this article is available on the “Giornale della cinofilia”**

Dog breeds are born thousands of years ago, diversified on the basis of the different functions they had to perform. Their number could be counted on the fingers of one hand: flock guardians, flock driving dogs, guardians of the house and hunting dogs. These specializations were spontaneously created by choosing the dogs more fitted for the relevant function.

The corresponding morphological characteristics came out spontaneously too ... and I refuse to believe that the breeders of thousands of years ago knew the genetic rules of an aware selection which even to day our breeders ignore. Actually therefore the morphological differences were in line with the functions the dogs had to perform (see for instance the dog size necessary to perform what the dog had to do). Other differences came occasionally from groups of dogs formed in very far places, with which they met during periodical travels (transhumance): some directly inherited from the wolf, and others created by spontaneous mutations of which nobody can tell the origin (see the different carriage of the dog ears: vertical like the wolf or long and pendant like the hunting dogs).

Only thousands of years later there was the effect of the bizarre esthetical

preferences which gave birth to various groups within the different functional specializations, creating the present astonishing number of over 400 breeds.

Apart from this, however, the fact remains that the fundamental differences among dog breeds are due to the functions dogs had to perform, with the addition of the pet dogs, whose role was to give and receive love.

That's why “function” is – and must remain – the fundamental reason to exist of each breed.

Even if breeds born to hunt the fox in its hole (see the Dachshund) or to hunt the woodcock in the woods (see the Cocker Spaniel) become “pets” because they are no longer used for those tasks, their original function is still their reason to exist.

And what about if in one country foxes are no longer hunted, or if pointing breeds are preferred for hunting woodcocks in the woods? Dachshunds and Cocker Spaniels should no longer exist?

The solution will then consist in maintaining a simulation of those types of hunting (the bloodless hunting of foxes in their den has been practised for many years!).

In other words, if in a country there are no more the conditions to practice hunting with pointing dogs, these type of dogs can be employed in simulated

trials using domestic birds (quails) artificially positioned in the field, thus verifying their ability to search and to point game. Obviously it will not be an ideal test... but better than nothing. If instead somebody will keep on breeding pointing breeds which are no longer used for hunting, the breed name should at least be modified: a Spinone which has become a “pet” should be called a “by product of the Spinone”.

When I read in the reports issued by SABI International members that outside of Italy the majority of Bracco Italiano are not used as pointing dogs, but have become “pets” or are used for other strange functions, such as “search dog”, I am deeply disappointed.

I insist that the fact that those Bracchi Italiani have typical morphological characteristics is not enough: a Bracco Italiano is such only if it maintains its functional capacity as pointing dog and its typical gate (the thrusting trot). If not, it is only a “by product of the Bracco Italiano”.

Mind you though: also if you are not a hunter, the pointing dog function can be simulated by the use of domestic bird game. The result will be a sport as (and probably more) amusing than agility or obedience.

And Bracco Italiano will remain a pointing breed.