

A Priceless Pair

Guided by an intuitive sense that has taken shape over their cumulative 74 years in the sport of brace beagling, the husband-wife judging team of Sonny and Diane Price is looking for the hounds they'll call back for second series. Patience is a virtue considering the dew evaporated hours ago turning the running grounds of Ozark Beagle Club in the Arcadia Valley of Missouri into a sauna.

"We like the same kind of dog — a good dog," says Sonny, who mentored Diane when she was training to become a judge.

In their judges' books, Beagles get marks for style and a good, clean mouth. They must show enthusiasm while working and bark on the rabbit's tracks. Wagging tails count, and so does making progress on the rabbit's trail.

After Diane became an American Kennel Club (AKC)-approved judge for brace beagle trials, she judged her first licensed trial in 2000, paired with her mentor, at St. Mary's Beagle Club in Pennsylvania. "I recall one dog that I really liked," she says. "Sonny told me, 'That dog will let you down in second series.' He did let me bring her back, but she did exactly as he said and let us down. I felt like I fell on my face that day, but I learned a lot."

Sonny got hooked on brace beagling field trials when he was 13 years old, learning from his uncle, Bill Cotton of Tarentum, Pa. "We would hunt with our dogs on Saturday and then run them in a sanctioned trial on Sunday," Sonny says.

Sonny and Diane Price watch their Beagles track a rabbit at their home running grounds in Fyffe, Ala. In the foreground is FC Cotton Hill Miss Maddi ("Maddi"), followed by FC D&D Lissa ("Lissa").





Diane and Sonny pose with her dogs, from left, GR CH Marquis Smokin' At Kingsfield ("Smokie"), a German Spitz, and Kingsfield Ms. Palmer ("Palmer"), an American Eskimo Dog puppy, and his brace Beagle Maddi.

At age 18, Sonny finished his first Field Champion, a male named Hilvue Johnny Walker. When his uncle died in 2003, Sonny carried on his kennel prefix, Cotton Hill, as a tribute to the beagler who inspired him. Sonny's passion for running a good dog in field trials led to his start in breeding. Sonny has finished 32 Field Champions, 12 of which he bred.

A partnership with Dennis Langevin of D&D Beagles in Seakonk, Mass., began in 1998. Sonny runs their Beagles at trials in the South in the fall and winter, and Langevin takes over at Northeast trials in the spring and summer. Both breed litters and raise puppies.

Sonny, Langevin and Art Moskaluk co-owned FC Dan Art's Charity, campaigning her to win the 15-inch female class in the 2012 Purina Top Brace Field Trial Beagle Award. "Charity" was only a few points short of winning the whole award.

Although Diane is not a partner in Sonny and Langevin's Beagles, she loves the hounds. "I got my first Beagle when I was 16. We used to hunt with them, and I would show them in AKC fun matches," she says. "When I discovered Clearfield Beagle Club (Curwensville, Pa.), I was thrilled to find a place to go and train hounds. I attended my first field trial there in 1988."



Some of Diane's German Spitz dogs are, from left, GR CH Marquis On Top At Kingsfield, GR CH Fyrebust KoKo Kisses, GR CH Kingsfield Here For The Parti, and GR CH Marquis Smokin' At Kingsfield.

Since then, Diane has finished five Field Champion Beagles and bred six Field Champions.

Diane and Sonny had known each other 15 years when Diane called him in 2005 looking for a puppy. Sonny, who had moved to Alabama in 2002 to work for Bailey Bridges as a production manager, met up with Diane a few weeks later in Buckner, Ky., at the Bluegrass Beagle Club.

"We hadn't seen each other in five years, but we chit-chatted just like old times," she recalls. "Instead of a puppy, I got Sonny."

Diane's mother, Irene Clever, was a dog lover who urged her daughter to participate in junior showmanship. When Diane was 8, she helped her mother breed a litter of Toy Poodles. Diane later showed Afghan Hounds, her mother's breed.

More recently, Diane has turned her attention to establishing the rare German Spitz breed in the U.S. Recognized by the United Kennel Club (UKC) in 2006, the breed also is enrolled in the AKC Foundation Stock Service and is working toward full recognition.

Diane owns the first German Spitz born in this country, UKC/INT CH Sheminee American Dream, and the first UKC Grand Champion and Best in Show winner, GR CH Marquis On Top At Kingsfield. Since 2009, she has finished five German Spitz UKC Grand Champions and four UKC Champions, three of which she bred.

A longtime Spitz lover, Diane first showed and bred American Eskimo Dogs under Kingsfield, the name she also uses for her German Spitz. Since 1998, she has finished five AKC Champion Eskies, one International Grand Champion, two UKC Grand Champions, and eight UKC Champions. She has bred six AKC Champion Eskies, one International Grand Champion, five UKC Grand Champions, five UKC Champions, and one CKC (Canadian Kennel Club) Champion.

Looking to the future, Diane is optimistic that the German Spitz will one day become recognized by the AKC.

Meanwhile, Sonny is focusing on starting "next year's contenders for the Purina Brace Beagle Derby Award," he says.

One more thing is on Diane's list. "I am still waiting on one of Sonny's Beagle pups," she says, grinning. ■



Lissa follows the rabbit scent.