

North American Magyar Agár Association Newsletter

An Independent Club for the Magyar Agár

Year Update

Audrey Hsia & Tom Koler

The last year has been a very fulfilling one for our club. Several hounds completed their show championships, including a grand championship, and Gil and Willow completed their Large Gazehound Racing Association Championships. And for good measure, Gil finished his NOFCA hunting championship. The accomplishments are so many that this update is in an abbreviated form taken from the California Magyar Agár Blog www.californiamagyaragar.blogspot.com where Audrey has kept us all up-to-date throughout the year.

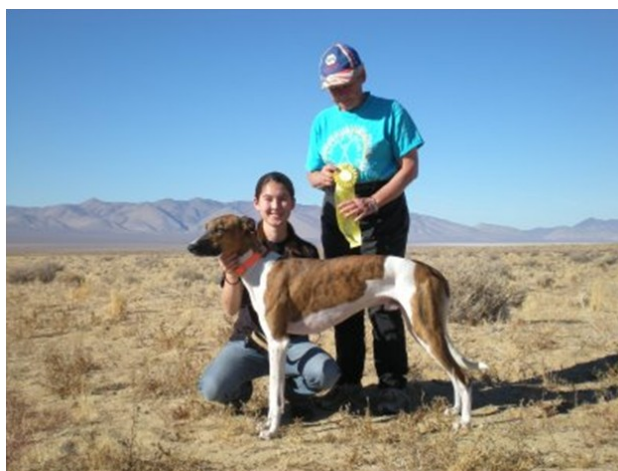
Top Magyar Agárs for 2008

LGRA Top Dogs:

1. Aranyagi Utonallo Fenseg "Gil"
2. Betcha-Katcha Nubia Willow"

UKC Top Dogs:

1. Aranyagi Utonallo Fenseg "Gil"
 2. Vakvagta Fecni "Fecni"
- ASFA Top Dogs:
1. Vakvagta Fecni "Fecni"
 2. Aranyagi Utonallo Fenseg "Gil"
 3. Betcha-Katcha Nubia



Audrey and Gil with his third placing at the Nevada hunt. Sally Barron was the field judge.

"Willow"

November—January

Gil placed third in his first hunt in Nevada. Fecni and Gil attended UKC shows in December where Gil finished three Best of Breed and one Best of Group. Not to be out-

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Newsletter Update

Tom Koler

This year started off with good intentions. In 2008, the newsletter's first year, we had two issues with some help from Hungarian and American authors. The only problem was that I didn't have enough time in the day to work on this publication, as the editor, through-

out this last year. Fortunately Audrey has been able to keep all of us up-to-date with her blog. Therefore I encourage readers to keep abreast of our efforts through a combination of this newsletter and the blog (www.californiamagyaragar.blogspot.com).

Eventually this newsletter will be more dependable in content and in punctuality. But this dependability will have to wait until I retire from my civil service job—hopefully in two to three years. Until then I hope that we can at least provide one yearly update

through the newsletter. If any readers are interested in contributing future articles, please contact Tom at tekoler@gmail.com.



Fecni and Gil showing off their Best of Group ribbons.

done by her buddy, Fecni took Best of Breed and a Best of Group. Meanwhile she has consistently shown her hunting passion with a high placement in her first NOFCA mix-hunt where she finished 5th out of a very competitive group of hounds. In December Fecni and Gil participated in a NOFCA hunt where Gil finished first and Fecni took second proving that the MA is here to stay hunting jackrabbits in California.

February—March

Gil took first place in a NOFCA mixed-breed hunt and thereby finished his NOFCA Coursing Championship, the first Magyar Agár to accomplish this feat. Fecni, meanwhile, consistently came in close seconds to Gil's first placements.

March was the "pups" (Luna and Gator) first racing month. Neither earned any points, but several observers commented on their strength and athleticism. Gil and Willow clearly will have some stiff competition in the near future.

April—May

The Easter Weekend races at the LGRA Sloughouse event resulted in Gil coming closer to his LGRA Championship, with Willow close on his heels.

Willow and Belle entered the show ring for the first time in April and both did very well. Gil and Fecni continued to rack up points. By the end of the month we had accrued the following:

Willow

- One Best in Group
- Best in a Mixed-Breed Show

Fecni

- Reserve Best in a Mixed Breed Show

Luna made her show ring debut in May and in the end she and Gil each took home a Best of Breed win. May was also a big month for Willow who finished the month with her UKC Championship.

Racing-wise, Luna made her announcement that she is one tough MA to compete against. In May we had six MAs competing and Luna went home with two points towards her GRC. Gil meanwhile finished with his GRC, another "first" for the MAs in America.

June-July

June was also another big month in the show ring for the MAs. Luna hit her stride and finished high in three shows. Without question she knows how to show her stuff.

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A close finish at Sloughouse. From left to right: Luna, Gator, Willow and Gil (photo by Dave Mills©)



Gil and Fecni with their one-two finish in a NOFCA hunt in December, 2008

Gil

- One Best of Breed

NAMAA Open Forum: The Weight-pulling Controversy

What's the Big Deal?

Tom Koler

This last summer our club president explored the possibility of entering MAs into weight-pulling competitions sponsored by the UKC. When Audrey told me about her intentions, I thought that it was probably not a bad idea—if done right it might actually help some MAs tone up. This assumption was based on my personal experiences in sports and training horses and mules.

Now I am not a veterinarian but I have been around mules and horses for thirty-some years, and last but not least, I was an aspiring athlete in my youth. This is not to say that these athletic events (working with mules and being a rover on the soccer pitch or miler on the track) are exactly the same; but if you bear with me you might understand the logic in my opinion.

I have seen and been the driver of mule teams pulling a variety of wagons and dead loads. The dead loads are actually called stone boats by muleskinners. I built one for Annie and Louie, two of our mules, when we lived in Washington State. It was composed of two railroad ties bolted together with two-by-fours and a deck of two-by-sixes. Training consists of making the mule become sensitive to the weight and learn to trust the driver. Mules are extremely bright and I have heard veterinarians claim they have an IQ equivalent to a four-year-old child. The old folk story of muleskinners beating their animals into submission is pure fantasy. Any mule has a memory as long as my arm, and my arms are as long as a gibbon's, and an abused mule will always find sweet revenge. Knowing that most MAs are about as smart as any mule (and probably more so), I quickly thought of my equestrian experience with Audrey's attempt at having Gil enjoy weight-pulling. I also thought of those days in the weight-lifting room building strength for running the mile and being a fast rover on the university varsity soccer

team (c. 1969-1970). Believe me when I say that my intention of working in the weight room was not to build up muscle mass but simply strength (you almost never see a bulky miler or soccer player that is a success because the athlete can carry only so much mass and be efficient).

So you might agree with me when I say that I was surprised at the negative reaction from the Europeans over Audrey's attempt at training Gil to weight pull. Some of the vitriol sounded like something Dick Cheney would say rather than what we Americans would normally expect from our more older and mature European cousins. What I have heard and read from calmer Europeans (and a few Americans as well) is that the problem that some individuals find with weight-pulling is tied to the concept of form and function. Since I know not a whole lot about this topic, I put out a request for knowledgeable authors on this topic. On page 6 we have a short declaration from Dr. Gorczyca who is a veterinarian who has sighthound patients; none of whom have been harmed in weight training and weight-pulling competition. Amy Sereday and Karen Ryder also speak eloquently on this topic in their two articles starting on the same page about their

This is the first newsletter with an open forum...we need to have a place to discuss issues that may be controversial in a constructive manner. Frequently it is nearly impossible to change people's opinions unless the discussion is done in a constructive fashion.

champion weight pulling Italian Greyhounds. If Italian Greyhounds can pull without being hurt—why not MAs?

From my catbird seat the concept is fairly straightforward. All animals function according to our physical form. Obviously the MA is built to run long distances with incredible endurance. We know that Magyar horseback riders/hunters expected their MAs to keep up with them on hunts that may be as long as 30 kilometers in a day. They are and

(please continue on page 4).

Editor's Comment:

This is the first newsletter with an open forum. I am starting this because we need to have a place to discuss issues that may be controversial in a constructive manner. Therefore I am asking readers to please send to me their comments and opinions. There is absolutely nothing wrong with disagreeing with each other just so long as it stays civil. If you disagree with the commentary in this forum, please send me your response with an explanation of why you disagree and we'll publish it in future newsletters. Frequently it is nearly impossible to change people's opinions unless the discussion is done in a constructive fashion. In future open forums we might discuss the pros and cons of hunting game (I am neutral about it but my wife, Lori, is dead set against it and therefore we don't hunt with our MAs) as well as any other topics that newsletter readers will want to discuss. Please send me your opinions to tekoler@gmail.com.

NAMAA Open Forum (continued)

What's the big deal? (continued from page 3)

never should be beasts of burden like some of the dog breeds from Europe. Herein I think is the misunderstanding between us and our European friends. As Audrey, Karen, Amy and other commentators explain, the hounds competing in weight-pulling are not forced by coercion to move.

I know that the video on Audrey's blog of my male MA, Gator, showed a confused hound with a rather perplexed look on his face. This is because it was his very first attempt at weight-pulling, and because I wasn't there it was probably very confusing for him. Obviously I need to be the one training him and not Audrey. Was this a mistake? In my opinion it wasn't because all of Audrey's efforts were done progressively in small steps with lots of positive reinforcement. The goal of this effort is to make it fun for the hound and if s/he doesn't like to pull, they are never forced to pull (in fact this is clearly stated in the UKC rules for weight-pulling).

What do I want out of my efforts in training our MAs in weight-pulling? I would like to help my MAs compete in weight-pulling as part of their training exercises. In the process they can build endurance (and not mass) for racing and lure-coursing. Nothing more than this.

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Audrey's Opinion

Audrey Hsia

I first became acquainted with the sport of weight pulling when I met my good friends Jason and Tiffany Crociani. The Crocianis raise, train and show Patterdale Terriers and one of their boys, Vinny, has consistently placed in the Top 10 of the UKC weight pulling All Stars. Jason is also a UKC weight pulling judge so I knew a little bit about the sport after we first met but it was not something that I was interested in doing at that time. About two years after I got Gil, I started to consider trying weight pull with him because I wanted to find an athletic activity that he could participate in during the summer months when it was too hot to race and there were too many rattlesnakes around to go hiking and hunting. I was hoping that a light weight pulling program would not only help keep Gil fit during the summer but would also give him something mentally stimulating to work at during the racing/hunting off-season. I knew that human runners, both marathoners and sprinters, often use light weight training

programs to enhance their performance. Dogs cannot lift weight but they can pull weight, so I also hoped that a light weight pulling regimen would help improve Gil's performance on the race track and in the field. However, I was very uncertain as to whether or not he would do it or enjoy it.

When I found out that my friends were holding informal weight pulling sessions in the evenings I decided to take him down there and let him try it. Since he had never done anything like this before we took it very slow and only had him pull the empty cart. Like most beginners he was a little unsure at first ("what's that thing that's following me?"), but he wasn't the least bit nervous or frightened. He pulled the empty cart two or three times and didn't seem too excited about this new activity but he enjoyed the outing and went along with it. At that point I was

unsure as to whether or not this was something that was worth pursuing, but Jason was very optimistic and impressed by Gil's first attempt so I decided to come back the next week for another session.

The next week we attended training Gil's attitude about pulling had taken a great leap, which was a surprise for me considering this was only his second session. As soon as I put on the harness and rigged him to the cart he started to pull before I had a chance to get myself in position and let go of his collar. It caught me off guard but I was pleased that he was so eager to go. Even when he reached the end of the 16 foot chute he was still going strong as if he was ready to pull that cart all the way home! I had to stop him and tell him that was all, but he was just so pleased with himself that he was ready and waiting to go again. With each successive training session Gil's enthusiasm and desire for pulling grew.

While Gil does enjoy weight pulling I have limited his participation to pulling only a modest amount of weight during competition and training sessions. I have been told that he could pull much more,

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but the goal is just to help improve his endurance and muscle development for running, not turn him into a body builder. Weight pulling is certainly not the sport for everyone, but for those who do choose to participate it can be a very enjoyable activity that brings a great sense of fulfillment to both the dogs and the owners.

The NAMAA Open Forum continues on page 6.

Year Update (continued)

Audrey Hsia & Tom Koler

(Continued from page 2)

Fecni took a Best Female and became a champion. Gil took four Best of Breeds as well as two Best in Multi-Breed Show awards. Nellie Belle, to our great delight, took her first Best of Breed early in July and then came home at the end of the month with two Best of Breed and a Reserve Best in Show. And Luna wrapped things up by taking two Champion-of-Champion awards and earning two legs towards her UKC Grand Championship.

In July there were five rarities shows and our MAs made a good showing. Gil, true to form, took all five Best of Breeds and for good measure he took three Best in Groups and a Best in Show. Luna also did her thing and came home with three Winners Bitch while her aunt, Willow, brought home the other two. And the final big win for us in July was Nellie Belle's UKC Championship.



UKC Champion Betcha-Katcha Ojeda (Luna) showing her stuff at a summer show

know that our MAs have excellent temperate, but it was really nice to receive formal recognition. The Magyar Agár has now been added to the breeds recognized by this society.



UKC Champion Betcha-Katcha Nellie Belle at the Gold Hills & Hounds & Hunters July Show

August-September

Gil received recognition for his coursing skills when he tied with Tea (an Ibizan Hound own by Kathy Kelley) for the Rare Breed number one in 2008 & 2009. The Rare Breed Perpetual Trophy of OFC is shown in the photo to the right. Congratulations Gil!

Gil also made us all proud when he successfully passed the temperate test by the American Temperate Test Society. We all



Gil's trophy for his first place tie for the number one Rare Breed Hound for 2008 & 2009 in coursing.

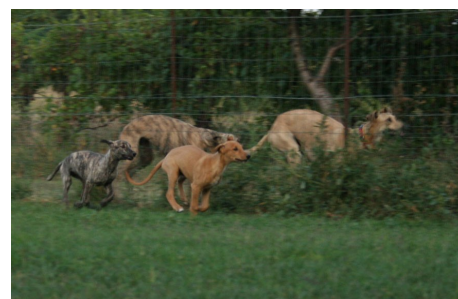
The highlight of September was our importing a new addition to our MA group. Kucorgó-Dombi Galagonyás arrived safely from Hungary. Galagonyás in Hungarian means hawthorn. So with a little fanfare we greeted Hawthorn at the San Francisco Airport. His sister, Gyopár, stayed behind to be imported later in November. Hawthorn went to Rita and Kyle Yates' home to live with their Ridge-

back Hounds and Luna where he is warmly referred to as the little "Dude."

At the end of September, Fecni and Gil entered the International All Breed Canine Association's Golden State Fall Sieger in Antioch. Shows under the IABCA are held in a similar manner to FCI shows in which all the dogs get a written critique and rating. Fecni and Gil split the Best of Breed wins for the weekend.

October-November-December

The last three months of 2009 were crammed full of all sorts of activities. After a highly successful campaigning our MAs at dog shows during the spring and summer, our attention turned to LGRA races. Unfortunately Gil had to "sit on the bench" this time around so that his toe injury could heal. Up



Gyopár (left) with her brother Galagonyás racing with their older family members at their Hungarian home

to October Gil was the leading MA in LGRA with a total of 7 points in one year; a very respectable total since 12 points are needed for the Gazehound Racing Championship. Meanwhile Willow was slowly whittling away towards her championship. The "pups", Luna and Gator, were starting to learn how to be better racers and we were all worried that Willow would soon be overtaken by the pups with wins. For the October races at Sloughouse we had five MAs competing. (Please continue on page 7)

NAMAA Open Forum (continued)

A Veterinarian's Opinion

Dr. Patrick J. Gorczyca, DVM

Recently I was asked how I felt about dogs being trained for or competing in dog pulling contests. After giving it some thought I felt that this was a very good activity for dogs. Unfortunately in today's world many dogs are not active enough to be physically fit and in top health. Most breeds of dogs don't perform the tasks they were bred to do. So for dog owners to be actively involved in some sort of exercise and conditioning program and competing in that event is good for both dog and owner. It really doesn't matter what sport you get involved in with your dog as long as you do it properly.

The dogs that I have cared for that are involved in pulling are in good health and are well conditioned animals. I have never had to treat one of these dogs for an injury or accident related to training or competing. As of yet I haven't read anything in the veterinary literature opposed to dog pulling or an increase in health problems related to the sport.

Not everyone likes the same thing so as long as the world keeps evolving there will always be somebody trying something new with themselves or their dog. If the dog isn't abused, is having fun and looks forward to training there is no harm in getting involved.

An Opinion from an Owner of Italian Greyhounds

Karen Ryder, President of Mid West Weight Pullers

I started pulling in 2002 with a 17 lb. Jack Russell Terrier (JRT) who is very shy and reactive, hoping to desensitize him to movement and noise for the formal obedience ring. What I got was a great little puller whose confidence soared when in the pulling chute. He not only went on to earn his UCD but also became UKC's third Ultradog. Needless to say I was hooked!

I have since put "Excellent" and "Supreme" weight pulling titles on the JRT, a Doberman, and two Italian Greyhounds (IGs). The IGs have been phenomenal pullers. It is not unreasonable to assume that when I go into the chute with an IG I'll be coming out with "Most weight pulled per body pound."

All the dogs I have pulled have been rescues and I have found that weight pull has built confidence for these dogs to go on and do other sports. A close bond has been formed with each of these dogs. It never ceases to amaze me what all these dogs have been *willing* to do for me. Not because I'm anything special but because of the trust this sport creates between the dog and the handler.

Even though the IGs routinely pull 50 times their body weight and more, I have never experienced an injury, nor have I ever witnessed an injury.

All sports have their "bad eggs" (i.e. people whose training philosophies and goals don't line up with your own) and weight pulling is no different. I find the people who make judgments on this sport do so because of the "type" of person they perceive to do weight pull or because they have no true knowledge of what goes into the training and conditioning of a weight pull dog. All we can do as competitors in this sport is to be understanding of someone's ignorance (ignorance is not stupidity, they are good people who just don't know) and act as good ambassadors for the sport and for the breed we choose to pull.

Italian Greyhounds Rule in Weight-Pulling!

Amy Sere day

You could hear the spectators cheering as he made the final push and the cart's axel crossed the finish line. I smiled at Lido, his tail wagging fiercely because he knew all that cheering was for him. He



Champion Lido showing his strength.

succeeded in defending his title as UKC Weight Pull All Stars Invitational Best of All Other Breeds. Lido holds this honorable title for both 2007 and 2008 All Star competitions. Not only did he win both his weight class and his breed category each year, Lido's percentage per pound of body weight was higher than all of the American Bulldogs entered and was sur-

I never had to treat one of these dogs for an injury or accident related to training or competing. As of yet I haven't read anything in the veterinary literature opposed to dog pulling or an increase in health problems related to this sport.

passed by only one American Pit Bull Terrier.

These achievements are the culmination of an amazing adventure for Lido and me. He is the first and only pulling dog I have ever owned. We learned this sport and went on the journey together. The more he enjoyed it, the harder I had to work to keep up with him. Two years later, he is one of the top weight pulling dogs in the country. Lido has made quite a name for himself and at 6 years old, he's no spring chicken holding his own against younger and stronger dogs. The secret of weight pulling is that it isn't a test of strength. Success in weight pull is about mental forti-

tude. How do I know this? How do I know that my dog is smarter rather than stronger? The answer is easy. My dog isn't a pit bull. He isn't a bull dog, or a malamute, a Staffordshire, or even a German Shepherd. My dog is Lido di Venezia and he is a 10 pound Italian Greyhound.

Weight pulling is a terrific sport and one in which sighthounds can learn to utilize their unique body type to their advantage and truly excel. Those long legs offer tremendous leverage and that deep chest holds lungs and a heart with

great endurance. Sighthounds are quite well-suited to this activity! The risk of injury is very low. In fact, I have seen far more injuries in racing and coursing than I have ever witnessed in weight pulling. Dogs compete well into adulthood with no physical limitations. In fact, the physical fitness required for pulling keeps dogs in excellent health. In addition, consider the concept of cross-training; using weight pull to condition for racing and vice versa. Pulling all winter means arriving at the track come spring in peak condition. Racing gives a weight pull dog the edge

of endurance over a 2 or 3 day event. If a race dog can push off with hundreds of pounds strapped to him, imagine how much improvement you'll see in box breaks! Lido is a fine example of this, as he is titled in both LGRA and NOTRA and has ranked in the Top 10 for Italian Greyhounds multiple times. In fact, his racing performance has shown significant improvement since he began weight pulling. He breaks from the box with speed and confidence, frequently leading over faster dogs in the first yards.

(please continue on page 8)

Yearly Update (continued)

Audrey Hsia & Tom Koler

Gator did extremely well and he split the first place with his auntie, Willow. The next day we could only run the pups and Fecni due to Willow and Belle having sore pads. Gator barely eked out a win by beating his sister Luna and thereby took top MA for the weekend.

In November we returned to Sloughhouse for the second weekend of autumn races. Again Gil sat on the sidelines and Fecni was in heat, so the weekend was to be a Betcha-Katcha event with all four BKs competing. Luna, unfortunately stubbed her toes and had a small tear in one claw that forced us to scratch her; so in the end it was Belle, Willow and Gator competing. Remarkably Willow hung in there and earned her last few points to earn her GRC. She is the first MA female in the US to become a racing champion (and Gil of course is the first male). Gator showed his work ethic with very solid runs finishing the year with a total of 8 points, squeaking past Gil



Gator and Luna taking it to the finish line at Sloughhouse. (Photo by Dave Mills ©)

by one point to be the LGRA MA for the year.

Thanksgiving weekend was packed full with six UKC shows. Luna, being the beauty queen that she is, took four Best of Breeds and two Groups finishing as a UKC Grand Champion, the first MA to do so. Gil and Willow each won a Best of Breed and Gil took a Group win.

The other big event for us in November was the arrival of Hawthorn's sister Gypsy. She arrived safely in early November and she is now very comfortable with her MA "uncle" Bukky, living in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.

We are all hoping that our MAs stay healthy for the next season which begins in January/February. Willow will be bred this spring with Gil so her racing season will be short. The top competition will probably be Luna, Gator and Gil with all three having an equal chance to take the

bragging rights home for the year.

All in all, 2009 was a benchmark year for the MAs. We now have five UKC show ring champions and Luna is the first MA Grand Champion. Gil and Willow are now LGRA champions and Gator is just four points away from finishing his racing championship. Fecni and Gil showed off their hunting prowess and their reputation amongst the hunting crowd has risen significantly. The MAs are now known in California to be excellent hunters. Although we only competed a few times in lure-coursing we are planning on being more active with this activity. The MA is not fully recognized by the lure-coursing association, ASFA, but we are making our mark with them as well. Next year will certainly be an exciting one for us and we're all excited about the possibility of having Hawthorn and Gypsy joining us in racing and in the show ring!



Fecni beating Luna out of the starting boxes at the October Sloughhouse races. (Photo by Dave Mills ©)



Belle, Willow and Gator close to the finish line. (Photo by Dave Mills ©)

NAMAA Open Forum (continued)

Italian Greyhounds Rule! (continued from page 7)



Amy and Lido

When it comes to training, there are many schools of thought among long time weight pull trainers, judges and handlers with far more experience than me. Certainly, I've learned a great deal from their sage advice. But as all sighthound lovers know, these dogs are unlike most others. You cannot get a sighthound to do anything he doesn't want to do. We were fortunate enough to have trainers that recognized the vast differences in Lido as compared to their malamutes. They offered their advice but made sure that together we kept an open mind and explored different training options for him. What follows are the ideas and concepts that have worked best for us and have brought Lido such remarkable success.

Competition weight pulling basically consists of asking your dog to pull a weighted cart or sled for a distance of 16 feet within 60 seconds. Sounds fairly simple.... and in many ways it is. Dogs have been used for this type of job for centuries and many working dog breeds have been developed specifically with this task in mind. But I'm of a stubborn ilk and think my skinny little dog can do anything he chooses, so here we are training a sighthound to pull and any idea of genetic learning is out the window. That being said, I truly believe that for many dogs, regardless of breed, the sensation of pulling and working is indeed physically satisfying. That is the real reward to aim for when training a great weight pulling dog.

Most working dogs have that innate desire, just as most sighthounds have a natural love of chasing prey. So the ticket is to make the whole experience fun while in the meantime, the dog is discovering this mystical joy of pulling. Then there is the matter of form. Instinct also helps working breed dogs to keep their heads down, a position that activates the shoulder and loin muscles and transfers the weight into the harness. Seeing where you are going is of less consequence to a working dog than it is to a sighthound, accustomed to keeping his head up and using his eyes as his dominant sense.

When we began training, I kept all of this in mind. I knew that Lido's style of pulling was going to be different and training him was going to be an adventure. I also knew that with a fairly athletic dog, I could pull with him and put a few titles on him with minimal training. I didn't want to do that. My goal was to explore the process with Lido and train a solid weight pulling dog. To pull well, Lido would need a command and a hand signal, one that would be clear, easy to understand, would lure his head down and tickle what motivates him most – FOOD. Treats hidden in my palm, I started clicker training him to target my finger with his nose. You cannot touch your dog in competition, but the command easily morphed into pointing to the ground with my finger. I know of a handler who uses a similar command with her Ridgebacks, reinforced by pointing to crumbs on the floor, which her Rhodesian Hoovers happily vacuum up. Much of our early training was spent around the house, Lido wearing his harness and me with a pocketful of treats playing 'wait', 'work here', click and treat. We repeated this game ad nauseum until Lido knew wearing his harness meant working for cookies. It is a game we still play today for fun and I begin and end each training session with it.

In the chute, every weight pull handler works their dogs in different ways. For Lido and I, communication through eye contact is the key to our success. I can look into Lido's eyes in the chute and know what coaching he needs me to give him.

I've seen handlers try to trick their dogs into pulling by pretending to leave the chute, hoping the dog will follow. Fear of being left behind might be enough to motivate the dog to pull on occasion but it defeats the purpose. How sad and disconnected! I don't ever want Lido to feel like he is alone in his task. He puts 100% of his heart into working for me and I owe it to him to give back everything I have. Lido and I work as a team. That is really the crux of any training advice I have to offer. The physical weight is important and requires conditioning, but weight pulling is less about physical strength than it is about mental fortitude. You must key into your dog and discover what YOU can do as his coach and trainer to elicit his top performance, time after time. Target training your finger may not work for your dog. She may be motivated by play and developing a command that mimics a game might trigger her. Perhaps your dog's button is watching you do something silly like joyously squealing while standing on your head. This takes some creative thought! You are training with a goal of making the entire process enjoyable, not just creating a focus on the reward. Teasing will not get you where you need to go. I have one IG who will gladly pull when I dangle a plastic baggie at the end of the chute. I have no intentions of competing with him and while he certainly enjoys the exercise at light weights, he does not find pulling fun the way many other dogs do. Just as with people, taste differs and each dog will prefer certain sports and activities over others.

It is a tempting idea to fall back on a sighthound's prey drive and while there is

Sighthounds are quite well-suited to this activity! The risk of injury is very low. In fact, I have seen far more injuries in racing and coursing than I have ever witnessed in weight pulling.

NAMAA Open Forum (continued)

no reason it can't be used carefully as a tool, there is a difference between baiting and rewarding your dog for a job well done. You cannot use bait in competition. At some point, the dog must learn to perform on his own and enjoy it, rather than pull out his invisible calculator and run up a cost benefit analysis of 'cookies to weight'. Laugh all you want, I've seen it happen! Teach a dog to pull and he will enjoy pulling. Teach a dog to tolerate pulling simply to get a reward and you will find yourself with a frustrated dog when the weight starts getting heavy.

Ah yes.....weight. It isn't ALL just about cookies and commands. At some point we have to add weight. The most important piece of equipment is a good, well-fitting harness. It is an important investment and one that often deters newcomers, who typically have to take the risk in purchasing a harness before they know if their dog shows an interest in the sport. Attending a pull can offer an opportunity to practice at the end of the day, but it isn't likely that many sighthounds will be there with a harness to loan you, and even then, an IG harness won't fit a Greyhound and a Ridgeback harness won't fit a Saluki.

Harnesses can run upwards of \$40 and are custom-fitted, though dogs of similar physique can often share for training purposes. In competition, each dog should have his own harness. Here is a suggestion: If you have a group within your breed that is interested in giving weight pull a try, chip in together for a median size harness for your breed and let everyone have a go at it.

Then there is a matter of the actual weight training equipment. Drag weight-ing is a great way to start. Some recommend milk jugs full of change, which mimics the distraction of a noisy cart. Actual drag sleds can be purchased. Old fashioned cylindrical window weights also work well. Whatever you use, the items are hooked to the rear of the harness using rope and a karabiner. Walk alongside your dog using a regular collar

on soft turf. Never drag weight on pavement or concrete. The weight used for dragging is considerably lighter than what is pulled in competition but the distances are longer, so the muscles are built up slowly, all the while reinforcing your pulling command and making the process fun for your dog.

Sessions should be kept short at first. There is always a temptation to forge ahead to "see what he can do" but just as in many other types of training, you risk discouraging your dog. Lido started by pulling a laundry basket across the carpeted living room floor. We would add weight to the basket. He soon graduated to a small wheeled garden cart which we modified for pulling and he can frequently be seen pulling up and down our street. Carts can be bought or made and weight can be anything from bags of dog food to bricks, even people. Your neighbors will stare at you. Just smile and wave.

We train Lido often, on flat ground and on a slight incline, on asphalt and carpet, even down the aisles of my husband's liquor store. We vary the weights in training, going from high to low to higher to lower. Lido learned very quickly that the weights will get progressively higher. If he believes the next pull might be lighter than the last, he will give it an honest try every time. On the same note, dogs quickly memorize exactly how long 60 seconds is and exactly how far 16 feet is. If you are training in a way that simulates a competition, ask the dog to pull farther and if he doesn't pull right away, don't give him long to consider his options before helping him to finish. If you make your training situations more difficult than an actual pull, it will give you both an instant confidence boost when you get to a competition.

Now that your dog has a harness, understands that working can be fun and is training to pull, it's time to consider entering a competition. There are a number of weight pull organizations in which sighthounds are eligible to compete. The rules differ slightly between organizations but for the most part the requirements for a

qualifying pull are the same. Each dog is weighed in prior to the start of the pull and is placed in his appropriate weight class. At the handlers meeting, protocol is discussed, the weight increments are set and handlers 'dial in' by informing the secretary of what weight their dog will be starting. The dog must pull increasing weight at the prescribed increments a distance of 16 feet within 60 seconds. Handlers may opt to pass (skip a weight increment) in order to limit the amount of times their dog has to pull. Some organizations do not have any restrictions on passing. A smart handler will thoughtfully plan out which weight increments he will ask his dog to pull in order to achieve the dog's best possible performance. As a handler, you may not touch your dog during the pull or use any form of bait. Organizations offer a variety of titles for pulls completed on the different vehicle types (rail cart, wheel cart and snow sled) and in varying combinations. Dogs earn those titles based on how many pounds are pulled in relation to body weight. On that level, dog and handler teams are competing only against themselves. Beyond that, dogs compete against one another not only within their weight class but also for most weight pulled overall and for most weight pulled per pound of body weight.

The structure of a weight pull, with its varying levels of competition, lends itself to a very supportive atmosphere. There will always be a few bad apples and believe me, we got our share of funny looks and giggles when we started pulling with Lido. But it wasn't long before the other handlers were giving Lido his first standing ovation. I've cheered and clapped and gotten teary eyed watching many dogs and handlers pulling together. It's just that kind of sport.

People often ask me why I participate in weight pull. Isn't it cruel? How could it be fun? I suppose at one time I may have thought the same thing. To those people I say "Come and watch. You'll see."

(please continue on last page)

North American Magyar Agár Association

Audrey Hsia, President
Sally Barron, Vice-President
Dr. Tom Koler, Secretary
Olivia Hsia, Treasury

American Editor: Dr. Tom Koler
tom@magyaragar.org or tekoler@gmail.com
Hungarian Editor: Dr. Annamaria Mózes
drmozes@gmail.com

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Tamás Batyja Column

An avuncular, friendly old man who is not part of the family, is called “batyja” in Hungary. Since several Hungarians have addressed me as uncle Tom, I have been finding myself more and more to be the proverbial uncle in this context. Given that I am a short distance from joining what the actuaries euphemistically call “senior years” I guess that I have to fess up and realize that I am just getting old. What a thought. At least I can still tussle with my MAs, including the hefty Gator. Running around the dog yard with Gator under my arm chasing his aunties is still a possible feat....but then again, running around the mountains in the Western US, Europe and Australia over the last thirty-some years has kept this old fart in shape. So I accept this avuncular title with respect and a grin.

Several readers of this newsletter, all five of them, suggested that I should write an editorial column and since we're almost able to get one newsletter out-per-year, I thought “why not?” Hence this is the first column towards this effort. I know that I am not the only one out there with MA stories to share, so I am leaving an open invitation to anyone who has the itch to write something or two, to please send me your contributions.

What I want to write in this short space are my observations about how larcenous our MAs are. No one warned me about these thieves when I was first researching the breed. During that first year of re-

search I wrote many e-mails to MA mentors in Hungary and Germany. The few Web sites in English that have narratives about the MA do not bring up this topic. And my mentors certainly did not bring up this topic. If I only knew then what I know now....

The first clue that Lori and I were to learn about MA thievery was the tourmaline incident. During the winter of 2006 I was working on an active landslide perched above Highway 50 in the Sierra Nevadas. On the westward side of the large landslide is a large pegmatite dike chuck-full of schorl (a black tourmaline). After spending a few minutes on the dike I was able to pocket a large piece of schorl. I thought that this was a good find and when I brought it home I cleaned it and put it on the kitchen counter to air dry. Big mistake. Within seconds of me leaving the kitchen, Belle was counter surfing and quickly located the large semi-precious gem. Off to the

dog yard she went with her prize and to my chagrin. Fortunately I was able to find the damn thing; but it was not the last loot stolen by our MAs. The most dangerous situation was the knife event. I had used two carving knives for some sort of cooking exercise and left them in the kitchen sink. I was outside when I saw Belle and Willow exiting the house with a carving knife in each needle-nose mouth. To say the least I was horrified. Pirates coming out of the house and Hungarians ones at that! Believe me when I say that we no longer keep expensive and/or sharp objects within MA nose range. Our greyhound and whippets always had some sort of mischievous attribute, but none of them had the same larcenous skills of our MAs.

Have any readers have had similar experiences? If so, it will be interesting to hear your stories—we might just put them in future columns.

NAMAA Open Forum (Continued)

What you will see is incredible bonds between handlers and their dogs. You will see wagging tails and big smiles. You will see the feeling of pride and joy that comes from this kind of teamwork. You will see what I see; another venue in which we can exhibit these versatile breeds and show the world all that sight-

hounds have to offer as top notch performance dogs.

If you would like more information about weight pull or finding a weight pull club in your area, please feel free to contact Amy and Steve Sereday at rialtogs@optonline.net.