

AMA²

American Magyar Agár Association

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

January – March 2008

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Hello from California & Missouri

The purpose of this newsletter is to hopefully open another means of communicating with unknown (to us anyway) Magyar Agár enthusiasts in the United States. We are a very small group that has become enamored with this rare canine. Five of us live in California and another in Missouri. We have heard rumors that there are other Magyar Agár owners "out there", but in the meantime we only know of three bitches and a male living in northern California. And a puppy will be imported from Germany to Missouri this spring, giving us a total of five MAs. Please use this newsletter in helping spread the word that the Magyar Agár has a solid paw set in the Great Valley and Sierra Foothills of Northern California and the Ozarks of Missouri.

Tom Koler, newsletter editor

Message from the President

Greetings from northern California! The past two years have been very productive ones in introducing the Magyar Agár to the United States through the efforts of Tom and Lori Koler. Sally Barron and I joined this effort a year ago and we are now the proud owners of Fecni and Gil, who we co-own with the Kolars. Fecni was imported from Budapest last spring through our collaboration with Annamária Lóky, the breeder, and our Hungarian/German translator, Marianne Böröcz. In August, Gil was also imported from Budapest through the help of Marianne and Andrea Lugosi, the breeder. December was a big month for us when Fecni was entered in her first US hunt at a rare breed hunt in Bakersfield. With little fanfare she represented the Agár very well by winning the hunt to everyone's surprise and our great delight. And then in January Gil and I entered our first rare breed dog show in which Gil won Best in Group and Best Reserved Dog at the tender age of seven months. Meanwhile Willow continues to rack up points in LGRA and for her efforts she was awarded Best Magyar Agár for the 2006 season. For more on these successes please read the "Bragging Rights" column on page four of this newsletter.

Tally ho!

Audrey Hsia, pro tem president

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History of the Magyar Agár

The Magyar Agár (MA) is a long distance racing hound. He was bred to be a dispatcher of game shot by horseback riders on an open plain or open stand of hardwood timber. Hungarians tell me that the MA was expected to accompany the hunters for distances of usually 30 kilometers (19 miles) and up to a maximum of 50 kilometers (31 miles) in a day. The game in most cases was hare and deer. Through most of Hungarian history the Magyar Agár was not solely owned by the nobility. Every Hungarian, if he so wished, could own and hunt with an MA. Although the MA was not limited to some cultural or aristocratic status, the MAs found with the nobility were much bigger than those of the landed peasants. Magyar Agárs owned by the peasants were known as farm agárs or simply as hare catchers. These smaller versions of the MA are now extinct. Today the MA is popular with European racing and show ring enthusiasts who are untiring in their support for this rare breed.

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Figure 1: The Magar Agár or Hungarian Gazehound although similar to the English or American Greyhound, it is more robust with a longer body length to height ratio and it has a larger head with floppy ears. The sturdiness of the MA makes it an excellent open field and lure coursing sighthound. This is Devaj Torpedo (Jule) belonging to Friederike Honstetter and Karl Sewastianiuk, Germany (www.magyar-agar.de).

The modern Magyar Agár is a robust and energetic sighthound (see figure 1). The word agár in Hungarian means gazehound or windhound. For example the Afghan hound in Hungarian is Afghan Agár. Magyar, of course, is the Hungarian name for Hungary and for the nomadic Eurasian tribe that settled in the Danube River basin in 896 AD. Therefore there is sensitivity among some Hungarians when the MA is referred to as the Hungarian greyhound rather than gazehound or windhound. We will return to this point shortly.

Tradition tells us that the Magyar Agár first arrived in northeastern Hungary and the Great Alföld (Hungarian Plain) a little over a thousand years ago. Although they have lived throughout the Great Alföld, they have had a strong hunting history in the three counties of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar and Somogy (see Figure 2).

The breed has always been popular with Hungarians and I commonly hear about their memories of the MAs. For example, a close friend tells me of spending her childhood summers in a small country village where MAs roamed the streets and fields. As my friend says, these were true socialist hounds during Hungary's socialist era; they belonged to no one and they were free for the taking. Every day a grandpa, uncle or father would grab one or two MAs and off to the fields and woods they would go to hunt for hares and thereby provide meat for that evening's meal. In addition to being available for hunting, the village MAs were remembered as gentle hounds that stayed close to young children as the children played. Unfortunately the MAs also stayed too close to chicken hutches and at times they were suddenly unpopular due to their taste for socialist chicken.

The Hortobagy Puzsta District is one of many homes of the MA. This UNESCO heritage site is located in Hajdú-Bihar.

Physically the Magyar Agár has a similar conformation to the greyhound standard (the standard is available on the www.magyaragár.org Web site). The major differences between the MA and the greyhound are the large head with floppy ears, a body that is longer than it is tall, longer tail, courser coat and a heavier musculature. The amount of "greyhoundness" in the MA is *the* point of controversy among European breeders and enthusiasts. This issue revolves around the fact that greyhounds were bred with MAs in the 1800s and early 1900s. Some prefer an "old fashion" variation of the MA with its robust frame and musculature². One example of this variation is Bitter-Lemon Baka in Figure 3. Some FCI judges recognize the "old fashion" version as the best for the standard while others do not. Bitter-Lemon Baka has won many show ring titles in Hungary and he is renowned as a runner who "runs like the devil."

The Magyar Agár is, historically speaking, a breed with a history that is eleven hundred-years old. There are oral histories that indicate that the Magyar Agárs were with the Hungarians (i.e., Magyars) much earlier when this nomadic tribe lived in the Ural Mountain Range of Eurasia. But there is currently no empirical evidence to help prove this hypothesis. The earliest archeological evidence for the Magyar Agárs has been found in the Carpathian Mountain Range located along the northern and eastern Hungarian border (see Figure 2).

Historians have a good perspective of the Magyars and in a sense the Magyars were the Hell's Angel's of the early Medieval Age. The Agárs by association with these mercurial nomads were part and parcel of the Magyar's reputation. The following quote from Johnson (1996) gives us a perspective of the cultural environment that the early MAs lived in:

"The Magyars, a nomadic tribe that made its debut in Europe in 896 AD by spilling over the Carpathian Mountains onto the Hungarian Plain, were a wild and recent addition to Central Europe's collection of peoples. With distant roots somewhere in the depths of Central Asia, these combative nomads spoke a language from the Fino-Ugric family that was incomprehensible to their neighbors. Their eventual settlement on the Hungarian Plain in the central Danube Basin...took the Magyars quite some time to abandon their nomadic ways."

Johnson's description of the Magyars can give the impression that their livestock and hounds needed to be able to depart at a moments notice. The horse used by the Magyars when they first arrived was technically a pony from the Eurasian steppes. The dogs that accompanied the Magyars were a variety of oriental breeds that became part of the Magyar horde as it traveled from the Eurasian steppes and into Central Europe. Did the Magyar Agárs exist before the Magyars reached the Carpathians? Currently this remains open to debate. With time the pony evolved into the Hungarian Horse and the Magyars became the premier cavalrymen of Europe known as the Hussars. The Agárs conformation from the Medieval to the Modern Age has remained the same until the introduction of the greyhound in the 1800s. To the Hungarians the Hungarian Horse, Hussars, and Magyar Agárs are interconnected through their rich history.

² The FCI will be convening a panel of Magyar Agár judges in 2008 at a meeting on the Bodensee of Southern Germany to discuss and better define the MA standard.



Figure 2: *Counties of Hungary (map source: www.wikipedia.com).*



Figure 3: *Bitter-Lemon Baka is a handsome example of what some Magyar agár enthusiasts believe represents the old fashion agár with the heavy musculature, coat and head. Photo provided by Miklos Hegedüs, owner of Baka.*



Figure 4: Fecni racing in her first LGRA event, Sloughouse, November, 2007. Photo by Dave Mills©.

The hunts are judged and points are awarded toward a Championship for the dog. The number of points awarded depends on the number of hounds entered and slipped. The highest number of points that can be awarded to a single dog at a hunt is a first place of 40, which requires a minimum of ten hounds. The game is Black Tailed Jack Rabbit in his natural terrain.

In summary, the Magyar Agár is a breed from Hungary with an eleven hundred-year history. This large gazehound when compared to the greyhound has a heavier musculature, thicker coat, longer than tall body, longer tail and a larger head with floppy ears. In other words, it is a big, robust gazehound. The MA has been used by Hungarians of all different social-economic strata ranging from the nobility to the landed peasant. Its primary role in life until modern times was to dispatch hare and deer for hunters on horseback. Hunts were typically 30 to 50 kilometers long and the MA was expected to keep pace with the horses. These are truly rugged long-distance sighthounds.

Johnson, L.R., 1996, Central Europe (Enemies, Neighbors, Friends): Oxford University Press, New York, 339 p.

Article by Tom Koler

Bragging Rights

Fecni

Fecni's NOFCA Hunt:

Fecni's first National Open Field coursing Association (NOFCA) hunt was on December 29, 2007. This hunt was sponsored by the California Rare Breed Association (CRA), under the NOFCA umbrella. To be eligible to participate the dog must be a purebred sighthound of one of the recognized sighthound breeds. In addition the breed must have been admitted to NOFCA by a vote of the membership. NOFCA itself is an association of clubs devoted to Open Field Coursing and each member club represents a breed or breeds of sighthound.

CRA sponsors the hunts for the sighthound breeds that are recognized, but not numerous enough to have their own club. This includes the Afghans, Ibizans, Scottish Deer Hounds, Magyars, Aswalks, Sloughies, Pharaoh Hounds, and Galgos.

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The format of the hunts is very straight forward. There are preliminaries and finals. The morning of the hunt, at least an hour before daylight, we meet for breakfast and draw the hounds for the preliminary courses. What this entails is placing the names of all of the dogs entered in a container (usually someone's hat) and randomly drawing them out one by one. Each course contains three dogs, so the first three dogs drawn are course one, next three are course two, etc., until all of the dogs are drawn. If there are an odd number of dogs entered, say for example ten dogs are entered, the last four drawn will run as two braces. No dog runs alone. When each dog has run its preliminary course, the course winners (and any other dog the judge wants to see run again) are again randomly drawn into courses (three dogs each course, or if an odd number, braces) and they run again. The two scores are added together to determine the winner.

After the preliminary courses are drawn, the "hunt" goes to the field that we will be using that day.

In California we have a "Mediterranean Climate"...a short "wet" season and a long "dry" season. The rains come mostly in December, January and February with an occasional storm in November and once in a while in March. The rest of the year it is dry. Our self imposed "season" is from the first weekend in November to mid February. Consequently the fields we use can be very wet or very dry. Mostly we hunt on land that is being left fallow for assorted reasons and occasionally we hunt "farmed" property.

Fecni:

This particular day Fecni drew the third course, a brace, with a very good, experienced Ibizan hound. The field we were hunting was very dry, with some areas of long grass and some areas of Sagebrush and Tamerask.

The way we work the field is that the three hunt dogs are in front in slip leads, with the Huntmaster (who directs the field and calls the rabbit) and the rest of the participants line up (this is called the Gallery), some on each side of the "hunt" dogs, and slightly behind them and then we walk through the field. The Huntmaster directs where everyone goes. When a rabbit is sighted the Huntmaster decides if it is courseable and calls Tally-Ho. The hunt dogs are released and they run the rabbit until they catch it or loose it. The judge scores each dog in the course. When the dogs return the next course is put on the line.

This was Fecni's first time and she was happy and excited. She was not quite sure what was going on but she liked it. We had walked about 45 minutes when the first rabbit came up. Fecni went crazy... She almost jerked my arm off... She didn't get it that it was not her turn. The second course went off and Fecni was even more excited... Then it was her turn. She was Pink dog (the dogs are jacketed left to right, Yellow, Pink, Blue, so the judge can tell them apart).

We were on the "line" about 15 minutes when a great rabbit came up right in front of us. Fecni sighted and flew off of the line. She closed on the rabbit and forced a turn to the right. The rabbit headed toward the sagebrush area of the field and got away in some trees and heavy cover. It was a moderately long course, about a ½ mile or so and she led the whole way. The best part was that she came right back to me (I worry about novice dogs getting disoriented and having a tough time finding their way back).

Then the day got long and started to get warm... We walked for several hours without finding any more rabbits, then we found one and got the last preliminary course off.

I was worried about Fecni getting tired but she was alert and enjoying herself. When the preliminary scores were announced Fecni had won her course and she advanced to the final. In the finals she drew two good Ibizans, the first finals course and she was "Blue".

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We went back on the line and started hunting. It took us a while to find another rabbit. We were once again working the long grass along the edge of a small ditch when a rabbit came up. He came up slightly behind and to our right. The Huntmaster called "Rabbit Right...Tally-Ho".... I did not see the rabbit but Fecni did. I let her go and she ran right at the rabbit who had run into a disked field next to the one we were working. Fecni was awesome... She closed on the rabbit and turned him to the right toward the field we were in. The rabbit tried for a shallow ditch but Fecni got up on him and forced him out of the ditch and onto a dirt road along the edge of the field. She ran him quite a way before one of the Ibizans went by her and ran the rabbit into some brush and lost it...

Again she came back to me without a problem. We walked about another hour and found the last final rabbit.

I was very proud of Fecni. She ran two great courses, she had enough speed to get up on the rabbit and turn it, she is very keen, she ran very well with the very good Ibizans she drew. And she did win the hunt and collected 40 NOFCA points and a first placement.

This was our only hunt this season because she banged up a toe (not in the field, at home playing in the yard), However I am already looking forward to next year and out Lure Coursing/Racing season starts in March and I think we will be ready.

Sally



Figure 5: Willow and Belle at Sloughouse, Spring, 2007. Photo by Dave Mills ©.



Figure 6: Aranyagi Utonallo Fenseg (Gil) at his first dog show, Santa Rosa, California.

Gil

Aranyagi Utonallo Fenseg, aka "Gil" started the New Year with a bang! At the tender age of 7 months, he and I attended our first International FCI-style conformation show in Santa Rosa, California hosted by International All Breed Canine Association (IABCA). The first show of the day had Gil winning a 2nd place position in the puppy hound group out of a total of five dogs; not bad for a first timer! However, things were to get even better as the weekend wore on. The second show of the first day,

The first show of the day had Gil winning a 2nd place position in the puppy hound group out of a total of five dogs; not bad for a first timer!



Figure 7: *Gil showing his best at his first dog show, Santa Rosa, California.*

All in all, Gil's first conformation show performance earned him the title of National Puppy Champion. So, Gil is now, officially, "Nat. JuA Aranyagi Utonallo Fenseg."

Gil showed against four other pups and took Best Hound Puppy! He not only continued on to the next round of showing, but ended up placing as the Reserve Best in Show Puppy!

The second day of showing, Gil and I were pretty exhausted but we pressed on. And it's a good thing we did because Gil ended up repeating his winning streak and took home a second Reserve Best in Show Puppy! All of the judges had nothing but good things to say about our little prince, and he was very well-received by the other spectators and exhibitors. All in all, Gil's first conformation show performance earned him the title of National Puppy Champion. So, Gil is now officially "Nat. JuA Aranyagi Utonallo Fenseg."

In addition to showing, Gil also got his start in field training. We attended his very first NOFCA hunt in late December in Lost Hills, California. Although Gil didn't have much luck sighting the rabbits he still had a good time roaming the fields and meeting the other dogs. In addition, we attended his very first ASFA lure coursing trial in February at the age of 8 months. The trial was held at a lovely park in Livermore and was hosted by the Northern California Irish Wolfhound Club. Gil showed keen interest in the plastic bunnies early on, and after waiting patiently for his turn, he was allowed to run the course part way. During the course Gil showed himself to be fast and focused despite his young age. Once we got home he as pretty tired but I think he has decided that he wants to do it again.

Audrey Hsia



Figure 8: *Nellie Belle winning her first LGRA point, Sloughouse, California. Photo by Dave Mills©*

Nellie Belle and Nubia

The 2006 racing year began for us in October, 2006 with Betcha-Katcha Nellie Belle and her sister, Betcha-Katcha Nubia qualifying at the Sloughouse Event. Although stuffing the two girls into the starting boxes was a full-body contact "sport" the two litter sisters ran cleanly for the entire year. Within a few months this became much easier sliding into their boxes with little effort by the end of the year. Nubia (AKA Willow Bee) outran her sister by just a needle-nose length to collect two points for 2006 and she currently has five points for the 2007 racing year for a career total of seven points. Belle eventually collected her first LGRA point by beating Fecni this last October. In December it was a very pleasant surprise to learn that Willow won "Best Magyar Agár for 2006" even though the MA was provisional within the Large Gazehound Racing Association (LGRA) and her only competition had been Belle. Just the same, we hung her LGRA plaque on a wall for all of us to appreciate. Recently the MA has been fully accepted into LGRA.

For the past few months we have been hampered with minor injuries and the girls have not run since October, 2007. But starting this March we will be competing again. One challenge for the girls is to get qualified for ASFA lure coursing (Willow is qualified by Belle isn't) and work through the paperwork to be able to compete MAs for the first time in ASFA.

Tom Koler

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News from Europe



Puppies from the O-Litter are now available from Friederike Honstetter's and Karl Sewastianiuk's Betcha-Katcha Kennel in southern Germany. Betcha-Katcha's Niknak Paddywak was bred to Betcha-Katcha's Mignon this fall and the litter arrived January 10, 2008. There are four male and seven female puppies available to good Magyar Agár homes. If you are interested, please contact Friederike through their guestbook on their Web site www.magyar-agar.de.



We hear that Gil's litter mate Fenyes and Nellie Belle's and Nubia's sister, Nookie, have been spending a great deal of time enjoying the snow in the Tyrol, Austria. The photo below shows the two beauty queens soaking in the sun's rays.



AMA² Update

The American Magyar Agár Association is still an unofficial organization although our small group has agreed in general about our goals. We welcome others who are interested in joining with us in making this an official organization recognized by the various racing and rare breed associations. If you are interested, please contact Tom at tom@magyaragar.org.

While we are in our formative stages of getting this off the ground the following individuals hold pro tem positions:

Audrey Hsia, President

Lori Koler, Vice President

Sally Barron, Treasurer

Livia Hsia, Secretary

Tom Koler, Newsletter Editor & Membership Contact

Trasi McCart, Education & Historian

Letters to the Editor

Please send your questions and comments to Tom at tom@magyaragar.org.

Next Issue – April-June 2008

If you are interested in writing an article for the AMA² newsletter, please contact Tom at tom@magyaragar.org. Number 2 of Volume 1 will have an article written by one of our European friends and we will continue to provide updates on our MAs.

Tom Koler, Ph.D.

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Figure 9: Greyhound Specialty Event, Sloughhouse, September, 2007. From left to right: Tom Koler, Audrey Hsia, Lori Koler, and Sally Barron. Photo by Dave Mills ©.

