

RUNNING HOUNDS PRESENTS A REAL CHALLENGE UP HERE
August 26, 2003

I heard through the grapevine that a young sportsman from Blue Mountain Lake has a new bluetick pup. I was hit by a few twinges of nostalgia immediately upon hearing the news.

A bluetick, for those unfamiliar with hunting dog vernacular, is a large breed hound. Its expertise is in scent tracking wild game. It announces its progress with unmistakable howls of glee and purpose. To aficionados of the sport, the sounds elicit as much pleasure as bagging the quarry.

Legend has it two companions were at ease one fall evening on a rural veranda when the strains of a pack in hot pursuit began to waft over the nearby hills. "Listen to that music," one remarked to the other. "Where?" The other replied, "I can't hear a thing for those damn dogs abarking."

I grew up with hounds and some of my most memorable experiences were a result of hunting with them.

All hounds, small or large, love to trail game animals. Therein lies the problem. They do not wait to see what game it is you are interested in before giving chase. The owner soon finds the dog is not the only one doing the chasing. It's the rare and lucky dog owner who learns his pup prefers to chase the same game that he does.

Sure, in most cases, the various breeds are basically bred to concentrate on specific game, but it may be awhile before that fact can be impressed on the dog.

All good hounds have two inherent traits. The first is that they do not, as my dad used to say, "listen well. It's hard to call them to you and if they can be called off a track, you don't want them.

The other is homing instinct. If a hound cannot find his way back home or to the point where it was dropped off, you don't want it.

It's hard, exasperating work training a young hound regardless of the breed or game it's trained on. Much depends on the season of the year and the terrain you're working with. It's much easier if the area is interspersed with roads. There is no question that the area here in the Adirondacks presents the greatest challenge to both master and hound.

Hunting with hounds is a sport that publicity seeking, praise driven individuals should forego. Few will be the number witnessing or recognizing outstanding performances by man or dog. Like most other forms of hunting, fishing or trapping, only the individual can truly know and appreciate the true caliber of the outcome.

I am inwardly smiling when I think of the hours of hard work ahead of the owner of the bluetick. I am both glad the prospect of such a task is behind me and envious I will not see all the effort come to fruition.

During World War II there was a dearth of cottontail rabbits in our area due in large part to an explosion of red fox. I had a young long-legged beagle that showed no aversion to running them. I ran one old fox dog almost every night after school with no luck. Finally, everything clicked and my dog circled him right around to me. I knew I was elated and pleased with myself and was sure the dog would be too when he came upon the track and spotted the enemy finally within reach. I could not believe it when he

barreled up, stopped, took one sniff of the dead fox and, rather nonchalantly, lay down to rest!

I will be interested in learning how much chasing the owner of the bluetick will do in relation to how much the dog does before it's trained. One thing is for sure – the owner will see a lot of new country before they are both through.