

ASA NL Spring 1990

## Looking at the World through Function-Colored Glasses

—GAIL GOODMAN—

How we evaluate a dog depends on what we want to do with the dog. Over the years, listening to people has made me realize that people look at dogs very differently from one another as well as see different things when looking at the same dog. Insight into this fact evolved slowly as incidents accumulated.

"Oh," you say, "anybody could tell you that . . . just look at an entry at a dog show. There's so much variety in the ring judges have a terrible time making decisions!" I felt this way about open field coursing Salukis. In a positive sense I felt there was plenty of variety and our breed was in good shape with plenty of vitality for the future. Yet, Tom Donald, a Canadian falconer and Saluki owner, upon seeing the large entry at a hunt in Merced, commented "They're all alike, light boned, small game headed, alfalfa-field coursers . . ." So, where I had seen variety Tom saw a sameness which had never occurred to me.

Another interesting experience occurred in Roswell New Mexico, during the three days of Thanksgiving hunts in 1988. A hunter and longdog breeder, Weldon Haney, came up from Texas to see "the pure breds" run; he owned 3/4 Saluki x Greyhound. There we were, lined up in the gallery, Weldon helping me out by holding a dog. I looked over to my right and there was a guy with an NGA bitch. I thought she was gorgeous and proceeded to tell him so. She was beautifully marked and absolutely, elegantly aristocratic.

Weldon had driven all night to get to the hunt and he is a veteran when it comes to running dogs - any kind of running dog. And, he isn't shy. He looked at the bitch I was gushing over, then he looked down the line of the gallery. He came to another Greyhound, an older, heavier AKC bitch with powerful shoulders, low slung and workman-like. "That's the one I'd go with, she looks like she can run . . ." I realized whereas my eye would always be distracted by glamorous attributes, a hunter doesn't even see these things. If the total dog doesn't say "run," it doesn't say anything at all.

Are the Arab hunters and Saluki breeders any different? No, it appears they, too, look only for attributes indicating performance. Though we read every now and again that despite the emphasis on function, the Arab has an eye for a "pretty face" on a Saluki,

the more information I receive, the more I believe that is nonsense - a projection of non-hunting-Western-decorative dog orientation rather than a report of any authentic Arab attitude. Yes, poems and odes were written about Saluqis in the context of hunting, but it appears Arabs do not anthropomorphize animals (give them human qualities). Examples of the language images appear in the volume *Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990) in Chapter 10, Hunting Poetry by G. Rex Smith. These are formal stylized poems. As examples of similes Dr. Smith quotes:

"(A hound) like a flash of lightning throwing up white stones, as he gathers up the ground like something fried flying out (of the pan) . . ."

"(A hound) like a saker stooping on her sand grouse prey."

"(The Saluki's) tail is raised like a brown scorpion's . . ."

For metaphor Dr. Smith gives numerous examples. Here are a few:

"(The quarry) finds (the hound) an unjust judge . . ."

"(The hound) is our store-house during a barren year, when it comes round; such as he is, stored up as treasure for lean times."

And, finally (though there are many more examples referring to all the animals used for hunting), hyperbole, which, though referring to exaggeration, every person who has watched their special hound course recognizes as felt truth . . .

"Even if the quarry were to pass beyond the 'Ayyuq star (Capella) (the hound) would bring it down . . ."

" . . . the plain buzzes with the speed (of the hound), as he runs hard; he does not touch the surface of the ground as he flies along"

Ambassador Terence Clark owns two cream-colored Saluki bitches: one a petite, feathered and the other a larger, more powerfully built smooth. Ambassador Clark did a great deal of traveling throughout Iraq and met many Saluqi owners, breeders and hunters. His elegant little feathered bitch was absolutely ignored by all, never drawing so much as a comment . . . she was invisible to them. The smooth, Tayra, was always of interest, however. In my zeal to understand the Eastern Saluqi breeder, I repeatedly asked "What do these people

look for when evaluating a Saluqi?" Ambassador Clark wrote

The truth of the matter is that my local friendly hunters are not awfully good on the whys and wherefores. If I say 'Why do you want a puppy of my bitch, Tayra?' They don't describe Tayra's finer points or her colour or that she's smooth or anything like that, they simply say she is strong. When I show her for the first time to strangers and ask them what they think of her they generally ask 'Does she kill?' When I say 'Yes,' they are interested in details of how many, how quickly, by herself? It takes a lot of time talking around the subject before you get a nugget. (Baghdad, March, 1989)

In other words, does she have the desire to hunt? Is she fast and courageous enough to catch what she is after? Fast and tough enough to bring down game alone? What kind of endurance does she have? Nothing else is relevant.

Even among Western Saluki fanciers who share the same aesthetic tradition, there are differences in perceptions as well as breeding goals: some believe they can "improve" the Saluki, others wish only to attempt to perpetuate the Eastern hound into a Western future. Our varying perceptions became lucid as I was walking on the line at a recent hunt and a competitor made the comment "Well, I like a Saluki to be functional, but it should also be good to look at" . . . and I glanced at the Saluki the person was walking and its head looked like a flounder! It was so narrow from the momentary angle of my glance the eyes appeared one on top of the other! A flounder face! Yet, I am equally certain my own Saluki's heads appeared to others as an unformed mass of bone - coarse, gross, ugly! But, the assumption of the person was we share a perception of "good to look at." Clearly we do not.

Any preoccupation with how a Saluki looks (rather than how it works) is an indication of a non-hunter value-system. By hunter value system I mean that success is determined by numbers of creatures caught by the hounds. The non-hunter value system accepts the collection of points or trophies as symbols for dead creatures and measures of excellence. I do not classify NOFCA coursing enthusiasts as



hunters. And, within the non-hunter group (coursing, showing, obedience, companion) there are varying perceptions determined by the improve or preserve perspective. What is perceived as good to look at by one person is another's atrocity! What we perceive as variation others may see as sameness.

Finally, I'll share what I am learning about an Eastern versus a Western, a coursing versus a hunting evaluation of Salukis for potential "field" performance. I had a most fascinating visitor last summer - Ahmed Al-Maktum from Dubai, U.A.E. Ahmed is an athlete, sportsman, falconer and Saluki fancier. He was studying in Phoenix and I had been told by a mutual friend that I should contact him because he knew a lot about Salukis. I called and introduced myself and told him I had Salukis. He started to talk about dogs I knew of that he had hunted with and I felt like a fish being reeled in! I was listening to a "real Arab" who spoke English and really knew about Salukis! I absolutely had to interview him and asked would that be all right with him. "Sure, why not . . ." he responded, with typical Arab deference. I then asked would he like to see a few pictures of my dogs, and, graciously, again, "sure . . ." I put a few pictures in an envelope and posted them.

Two days later the phone rings. It's Ahmed. "I must see these dogs. I had no idea there were Salukis like these in America! When can I see them?" Well, I was deeply flattered but the photos I had sent were of the dogs when they were younger and in excellent running condition. And, I am a terrible housekeeper, living in chaos and cobwebs and all my dogs live in the house with me. I was concerned the situation might deeply offend a Moslem. Ahmed responded "No, nevermind, I know how Westerners live . . ." I told him since it was summer the dogs were very soft, fat, and out of shape and that I was afraid he would be disappointed. He answered "All I have to do is see them and see them walk and I'll know . . ." With that enigmatic comment I gave him directions to get to my house.

We have all read 19th and early 20th century reports of "slim," sometimes "starved" looking Greyhounds written by travelers of various nationalities . . . and we have all had experiences where non-sighthound fanciers have commented that even our well-fleshed out hounds look "skinny." Hence, it is hard to know in what weight these reported hounds actually were. In the 1880's, when Doughty traversed Saudi Arabia, hunger was the norm; the Bedu were hungry most of the year. But, the Saluki has always belonged to a wide range of individuals, as is the case today.

I have always been kidded by my coursing friends because I vehemently reject the attitude that a Saluki in good condition has all its bones hanging out. If a track Greyhound ever appeared at the starting box in the weight that many Salukis are brought to hunts, the Greyhound would not be

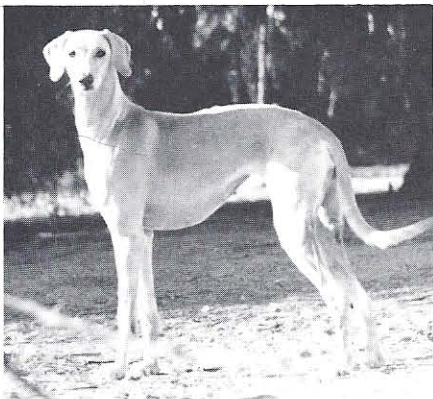
permitted to run. I have never run against a skinny Greyhound. Why should Salukis be any different, I reasoned to myself. My Salukis regulate their food intake; I have never made any attempt to limit them.

Of course, the joke is my chicken soup . . . people simply assume anybody who drags chicken soup to a hunt has fat dogs! And this has been going on for years; one competitor even looking under poor Barbor's coat to see whether he'd lost weight since last seen! What the fellow didn't realize is Barbor is always thin! But, the biggest joke of all is Moty. When I am late on the line for a course I tell people "Hold on, I have to roll my dog over!" By the end of the coursing season I can see the shadow of Moty's hipbones.

My point: No dog expected to put in a strenuous athletic performance should be "thin." I have never seen a thin field trial Pointer, Coonhound, Beagle, Foxhound or Greyhound. So, why thin Salukis? I simply rejected the descriptions that appeared in various interviews with American open field coursing enthusiasts as nonsense proposed by people projecting their own food neuroses onto dogs! I'd seen how quickly Salukis lose any reserve flesh they have during the days of travel and running and I don't like to see bones!

Though certain in my own mind I was right about how my dogs were fed and my attempts to keep their weight up during the coursing season, it was summer and honestly, Moty, Yonah and Azal were "pretty" heavy . . . their mother, Div, was whalelike, and her brother the same.

Suddenly the dogs start barking and I hear a car door slam . . . zero hour . . . the house was no cleaner, the dogs no thinner . . . and Ahmed was here! I went out to meet him and usher him into the house. He came in cautiously as "the puppies" bounced off of the chairs and tried to jump on him in hesitatnt excitement - they are not aloof! We walked slowly into the kitchen and Ahmed walked to the sink and turned around to face me as Moty jumped up on me to give me a kiss and check if I had somehow put something in my mouth or pocket that he might like a piece of. Meanwhile, Ahmed was silent, looking at the 4 dogs as they milled around. He



Yonah.

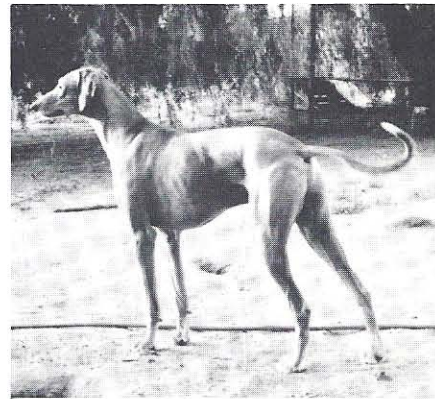


Saluki photographed by Mike Ratcliffe, Saudi Arabia, 1989.

looked at Moty - Moty, who gets rolled to the line; Moty, the brunt of all fat jokes - and he says "That's the dog I'd use for breeding! This is the best dog! Look at his back, look at his chest, look at the depth! That's the dog I'd use. Is he the best one? Is he the fastest? Which is the fastest?" Well, I was absolutely flabbergasted. Ahmed had found Moty! I was astonished that Ahmed valued his bulk rather than ridiculed it. "The flesh has to be there to turn to muscle" he responded when I told him how everyone made fun of Moty. Upon further consideration he liked all of the boys but Moty was his first choice!

Then I let the girls out. I have two littersisters to the boys: Bosem, lean and elegant with a floating sort of gait, and Yonah, Moty's summer twin. Ahmed made no comment on Bosem; all he could see was Yonah! "She must be fast . . . is she the fastest?" I explained she had broken her hock as a puppy and had never competed. "Oh, she would have been wonderful" he said. "She is excellent, excellent . . ." Yonah, by the way, is lovely, but Ahmed never said she was "pretty," only that he felt she would have been fast. As for their mother, he merely glanced at her and said "Oh, I have a Saluki just like her at home except she looks like she has two basketballs in her side! (As opposed to Div's one!)"

When I did the formal interview with



Moty.



Ahmed, the reasons and values behind his assessment became clear. I brought tons of photos with me but we only covered a very few. He looked at several photos of heavily feathered show-type dogs and disregarded all of them as useless. It became clear he did not care for feathered Salukis and I asked why. He answered "This is a different type of Saluqi. I have no luck hunting with them . . ." When I asked about heads he replied "I don't care how the face looks; that's how God wanted it . . ." But, he did say square muzzle shape was best. He would pick up a photo and say "This is good . . ." and I would ask "Why? What are you looking at?" He would respond "I can't tell you exactly, I can just tell you this Saluki is a good one . . ." For almost 3 hours, on and off and until we were both exhausted, I kept trying to pry from him precisely what he was looking for . . . assessing. Finally he gave me a deeply sympathetic look and said "I know what you are asking me . . . but I can't tell you. My father called me last week and wanted to know if I wanted him to buy me a particular falcon he saw in Pakistan. My father knows a great deal about falcons. He knows much more than me. I asked him 'well, does it have this and does it do that?' My father said 'I don't know.' I asked him all sorts of details and he said 'I don't know.' But, my father knows; he just couldn't tell me . . ." It wasn't until I went home, exhausted and depressed that I hadn't learned all I could have if I had only asked the right questions that I realized I had learned the way "an Arab" looks at a Saluqi: he looks at the whole dog! He does not consider the pieces at all, only the parts in relation to the whole. Either the whole dog is "a good one" or it isn't.

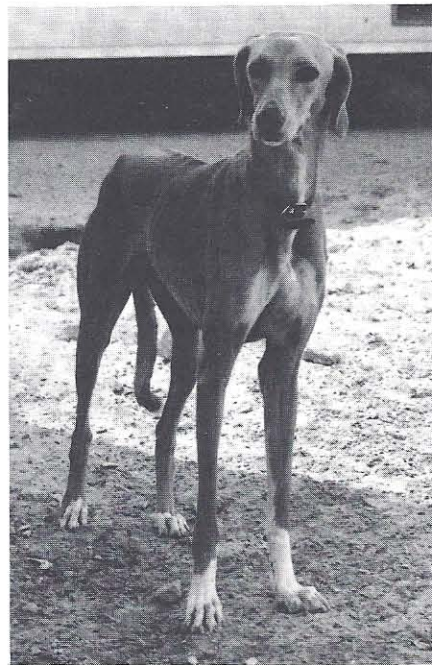
Any time I showed Ahmed a photo of a Saluqi with ribs showing he would look at it and flip it to the side, commenting "that's a weak dog." It became quickly apparent thin equalled weak; covered with flesh was good, strong. He even looked at puppies the same way. When I hesitantly offered a photo of Tarabin puppies in Israel he looked a moment and said "My puppies are strong like these." But it wasn't until I asked him about his cousin's hunting bitch Hamrah and her daughter, who to me looked like clones of one another, that the meaning of "weak," from an Eastern



Tarabin puppies.

Photo: I. Sella

perspective, became clear. I found these two bitches so beautiful and so much alike I kept mentioning them, how "pretty" they were. Ahmed gave me silent looks that said "what a pity this woman owns the dogs she does; she knows absolutely nothing about Salukis!" He had assessed the crop-eared Sloughi from the ASA NL cover as weak and he was losing all patience with my insistence that Shalalah was a good Saluki. He took the photo of the Sloughi, isolating her powerfully muscled shoulders with his fingers, then he took the photo of Shalalah and isolated the shoulder muscles and said "See, as weak as this Saluqi is, she's better than this one! After two days of hard conditioning Shalalah starts losing weight! She's no good . . . she's weak . . ."



Shalalah.

Photo: S. Leimbacher

And then I understood! Hunting trips are from two weeks to two months in duration. The dogs hunt multiple hares or gazelle (if the trip is to Sudan or another area) each day for weeks at a time! A dog that started the trip thin would never survive! A dog with no "reserve" would not endure the rigors of the hunt! Endurance is not one or two long courses; endurance is multiple courses over an extended period of time! Skinny is equated with weak, as in run-down! Fleshed out is a sign of strength, health and potential endurance: usefulness throughout the hunting trip. Ahmed had not looked at Moty as a dog he would take into the field, but as a dog he would begin with - begin to condition. He asked me about my conditioning regime and found it totally inadequate. He concluded it was a shame I owned such fine dogs; dogs that should be "really worked."

These are the needs of the hunter in the Arabian peninsula today, however, the Salukis of the Iraqi and Kurdish hunters who probably hunt on a regular basis are

also covered with flesh. I have not received any photos from the Middle East of Salukis belonging to hunters which are skinny. Not one! Mike Ratcliffe traveled throughout Saudi Arabia and photographed over 100 prized Salukis - some so valuable they were hidden from strangers (for fear the guest would "put an eye" on one and the host, in the tradition of the desert, would be obliged to offer it as a gift!). Not one prized Saluki was skinny. There was barely the shadow of a hip bone to be seen and no ribs!!! Of course, Mike's trip was during the summer months, but for the Salukis of the tents, they were on the move and I suppose in "normal" weight.

So, for the American coursing enthusiast who wants top speed and knows the hound will only have to run a maximum of three hares a day for possibly two days in succession, thin, skinny, or some such weight may be adequate, even desirable for the task. My own Salukis are often outrun by just such hounds. They are fast. But I feel the Saluki is a multi-game, multi-terrain hunter - tough in body and courageous in spirit. Speed is only one aspect of performance. Fastest is valued in "competition;" fast enough, again and again, is necessary to hunt.

The experiences I've shared with you here taught me how differently people look at Salukis and how what they value based on the tasks their hounds must perform determine the points they look for when assessing the hound. American hunters, open field coursing enthusiasts, Eastern hunters may look at the same hound with different eyes.

After a fun match recently a famous American Saluki breeder mentioned he had sent some "big males" to a person in an area having a coyote problem. When he made the offer of the dogs, the response was "those kennel dogs won't be any good on coyotes." The famous breeder said "I told him these dogs had all their instincts. Twenty years of sittin' in a kennel doesn't take the instincts out of 'em; they're born with instinct." That makes sense. Salukis are born with the instinct to chase, but there was still something bothering me. I turned the thought over and over. Then it hit me. Of course, 20 years of sitting in kennels doesn't take the instinct to chase out of a Saluki, it takes the ability to catch what it is chasing - the speed, the courage and heart to push beyond pain, the electric responsiveness in the field - away from the Saluki!

Though none of us can see the inside of a Saluki, without heart, courage, instincts to read game, terrain and find the way back along the course to its owner or home, regardless of all outward signs, we don't have a "real" Saluki. The only people who say it's easy to catch hares are those who have never gone out with their hounds and tried. Whether the hunt is for two days, two weeks or two months, the only way to evaluate a Saluki is to take it into the field . . . and see.

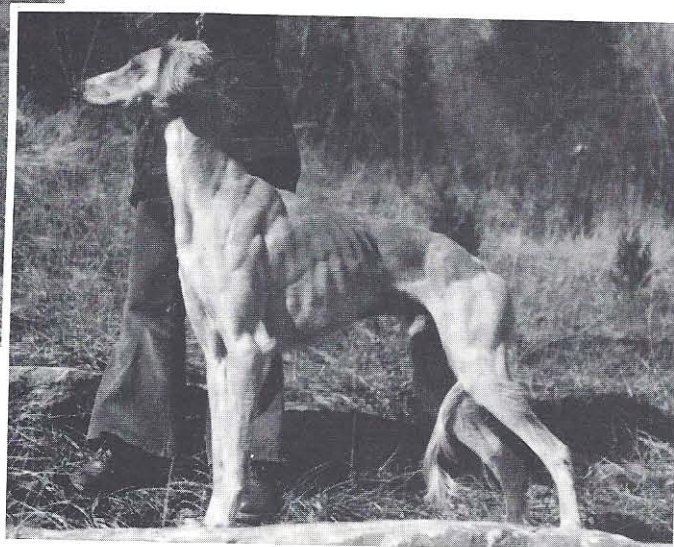
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**Div Tarabin** (import, Israel)

*With certitude and exuberance  
Div presented herself to Azal . . .*



**The Archives  
Azal  
of Davijoya**

*their puppies taught me  
what Saluki really means . . .*

**Midbar Bedvi Tarabin, NOFCA Coursing Champion, Courser of Merit**  
Winner of the ASA Scramble Cup, 1986

**Midbar Tarabin Beer Shevah, NOFCA Coursing Champion, Courser of Merit**  
Winner of the ASA Shadrack Coursing Continuum, Christmas Cup, and Ishtan Cup, 1986.  
Youngest Saluki to earn a CC title (at 20 months of age), owned by David and Susan Netboy

**Midbar MishMish bot Tarabin, NOFCA Coursing Champion, Courser of Merit**  
Winner of the ASA Mia Cup, 1988; Grand Courser 1988, 1990; NOFCA Saluki Top Ten (#5)  
Owned by Dan & Daniela Imre and Gail Goodman

**Midbar Tarabin Azal ben Azal, NOFCA Coursing Champion**  
Winner of the ASA Suki Cup, 1988

**Midbar ben Tarabin Ha Matoke, NOFCA Coursing Champion**  
Grand Courser, 1987; NOFCA Saluki Top Ten (#10)

**Midbar ben Tarabin Ha Zahav, NOFCA Coursing Champion**  
Grand Courser, 1988; NOFCA Saluki Top Ten (#6)  
Owned by Dan & Daniela Imre

**Midbar Barbor Tarabin, NOFCA Coursing Champion**

**Midbar Bosem Tarabin, 30 NOFCA points**

Barbor, Moty, Bosem, ben Azal, Bedvi



Gail Goodman

