

An Open Letter on My Opinion on Why We Haven't Been Growing

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I have been meaning to write for some time now about what I've noticed about the sport over my lifetime as a field trial Beagler in the 1950s until now. In particular, my opinion as to why the sport of Brace Beagling hasn't grown in recent years. One would think that with fewer places to hunt and with limits on how many hounds a person can own in most areas, the brace Beagle would become more popular.

The seeds we sowed set in motion what we face today. I remember my early days when we would go to the club and everyone would turn their hounds lose. We would have a "Texas Turn-Lose." Everyone would watch hounds run, there would be many lines going at once, and it was a lot of fun all day long. I often hunted my hounds during the rabbit and pheasant seasons while running them at trials when we held them. Then by the 60s things started to change a little. Club Beaglers were looking at breeding more for specific characteristics, plus the area where we used to hunt was starting to develop. Fewer folks could get out to hunt but they still liked to run their hounds.

In the late 60s I moved to Southern California where very little hunting was possible unless I drove out to the desert. It was hot and dry during the summer with very little scent. There were also a lot of jackrabbits there and my hounds often got on a jackrabbit line. I remember one Beagler telling me that he really enjoyed his old field champion but since she was too fast he couldn't keep her for anything but a pet. He had trouble walking in the field and didn't hunt plus was limited on hounds he could keep. The tide was changing.

This was an era when beagles started to slow down significantly plus we had issues with animal control about how many dogs could be kept in the city limits and how much care you needed for commercial kennels. Animal control was always at my place inspecting for cleaning and health. Fewer younger folks and a lot of potential new Beaglers who were interested simply walked away because of all the hassles.

Next came the 70s. Hounds were close trackers and good hounds were getting difficult to find, clubs were just starting to lose new members, finding open running or hunting areas with rabbits was a bit tougher, and there was less emphasis on making beagling a family activity. I used to take my young children to the club just so they could have fun. At the time I hoped they would enjoy the sport like I did and often my oldest son and daughter begged me to go along even though there weren't a lot of kids their age at the trials.

I moved East in the early 80s and my new club was very serious and mostly focused on the older Beaglers. No kids around and I caught a lot of static when I did take my kids to the events. There was even a resistance to holding kids only family events, something that was very popular when I was young. With competition intense and not much interest in running the older family hound, my own kids started to lose interest, and this became a one person sport for me.

As I see the sport now, even with less availability of good training and hunting areas, we let a generation of kids get away from us for a number of reasons. These are likely not all the issues, but I think these are the major ones. Not everyone will likely agree with this list and I will probably catch some static from my club members. However, it's time to start a dialog on how to solve the problem before it's too late to do anything. I'm not sure there is a cure for these problems down the road.

- Competition from gundog clubs
- Not much room for error on the part of a brace hound (gundogs are a little different story)
- Field trials are expensive and keeping hounds more expensive
- The economy isn't that great for a potential new Beagler who might want to get into the sport
- Very few kids or family events
- No interest in hosting fun trials for age group hounds
- Beagles aren't the quietest hound when you live in town