

## Legal Regal Beagle

Barking and baying up a storm, Uno lived up to his name...  
- Associated Press, Westminster Dog Show

Never before has it been done; a beagle winning the Westminster Dog Show...who would have thought? Excited by the news, and knowing of my passing interest in the hound, my parents sent me several articles covering the story. Yes, a beagle can bay, but it can also do much more - as long as it has a nose in good, working order, that is.

When my children were fairly young (the oldest being a bout seven or eight), I broke down and got them a dog; or should I say, a hound dog. On several possibilities for the pet's name, "Scooter" was the name offered by my daughter; and so begins the first of our pets, the first of the beagles - with the second being "Billy" and the third being "Molly".

I remember distinctly that the purchase of Scooter began the adventure of owning a beagle; to purchase the pup, we had to drive to the outskirts of the city - to a dirt road, the present home of this litter. With a few minutes to make the choice - which was probably weighted toward my daughter's preference - we paid \$75 and took Scooter to his new home; and though seemingly going far to own a beagle, this was a bunny hop compared with months to follow.



Understand that Scooter was just the latest of several babies; my third oldest, Benjamin, was about two and Brian-Wesley was less than a year old. So to add another to the litter was, how should I ask it, *barking up a tall tree?* Already overwhelmed by a household of four kids, the notion of a puppy seemed like a challenge to put it mildly; after all, we knew who would actually care for the young

canine; but I also knew how special a dog could be to children - especially a puppy. Acting more on my own sentiment than that of the children's pressure, the decision to get a dog was never that difficult; but taking care of this hound was in every way a *different breed*.

We were somewhat prepared with a fenced backyard; but did not realize the relentless rooting of this tri-colored subterranean; why, he could have dug a well if his nose out him up to it. As impregnable as we thought the fence would be, it proved of little resistance to Scooter who, by the age of six months or so, was spending more time chasing squirrels and stirring the temperament of our neighbors than playing the pet in our otherwise contained courtyard. Feeble attempts at patching his penetrations and the occasional leash - in combination with a fence - was not enough; we simply could not keep up with the whereabouts of this hound hell-bent to follow his nose wherever and whenever it chose to lead him. On the one paw, such an indomitable instinct was something to marvel at; while on the other paw, it was such a force of nature as to defy all our wants, wills and whys. Without going into the *dog-gone* dilemma too much further at this time, let me choose the *higher trail* or *the trail less chosen* - the beagle at his best.

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In my recollection - which is not always complete or even realistic - the most amazing sight was a beagle on the trail...of something for which its nose was keenly interested. Call it a rabbit - which should be the choice of the beagle's nose - or any sundry of other creatures that loosely fit the description of warm-blooded, hairy, wild or domesticated. As we tried time and again to bridle the best of the beagle, the effort seemed to make little progress as the basic instincts could not be overcome by the likes of a leash, a loud voice, or any other human or manmade intervention. What began as the traditional approach to dog discipline soon gave way to a howl and hoot to urge Scooter along the trail of what came natural to him.

Trainable was not in the beagle's bark or bay, and the sooner that we realized it, the better-off we all would be. Blame ourselves for getting the feller in the first place, but to goad his game-spirit seemed to be the best way of appreciating who and what he was - every bit the nose of four legs, three colors, several barks, and several humans in chase or exasperation at the latest of his break-outs or bark-ups.

There were some lighter moments of comedy when the young Scooter would plow through our backyard shrubbery in a frenzied chase between us. How these moments arose I don't quite remember; but what I do recall is that his energy seemed inexhaustible and, on that basis alone, he would run wide-open with ears in full-horizontal to his rear and hind-quarters overtaking

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the frontals. With such poise, he could not be caught him - let alone stay on his trail - for he was everywhere that we were not and vise-versa.

On some weekends, we might pile the pup (or yearling) into the old van and go somewhere that could challenge both us and the pet at the same time. A park (that allowed dogs) or a trail (that did not), the setting seemed to be of little import either to the human or the canine kid. What was essential however, was an appointed volunteer to somehow hold Scooter to a perimeter of the leash's length with margin of outstretched and hyper-extended arm, white-knuckles and flexible shoulder joints. Walking Scooter was more like catching a fish; it was a fight from the start and, as for reeling in the line, it would seldom if ever happen. All this effort applied, the "privilege" of the task usually went to me; but on a rare occasion and as one of those rights of passage, my oldest son Matt would take the reigns of this bucking beagle. In truth, both of us grew increasingly weary and must have agreed along the way to let go of the leash or, if it somehow slipped from our hands, to let it go *out-to-sea* with the so-called *catch of the day*.

In the course of a beagle's trail comes the routine of rounding-up its chase; that is, of circling and corralling the critter. In such stages, the barking seems to cease (or to lessen) while the pursuit may take-on a bit of a leap as though to somehow pounce on the prey as a method to spook it out of hiding. Not sure of that is going on at the moment, my thinking is that the nose has sensed that the chase is confined and the critter lies silent as one form of protection. Whatever the details of this moment, the apparent leaping of the beagle is like no other; a kind of gazelle falter, the leap gives a degree of depth to the dog that is almost poetic and graceful compared to the usual trot and such.

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Another observation or trait was what I call flushing; intermixed with sniffing, flushing was a kind of gargling noise whereby the jaws seemed to savor the smell and, in turn, raise the intensity of the senses. In the usual position of the nose to the ground-stone, flushing must be the taste-test for scent in question.

Finally and certainly not unexpected, the baying of a beagle is unique and distinct; it marks the beagle as the hound for which he is born and bred. For the expert, such sounds can probably be interpreted miles from the action; but for the rest of us, this sound is simply a different kind of bark; it is a mix between a bark and a howl.

Scooter, Billy and Molly will never be forgotten; even now, several years after the last of these three, the memory of these beagles lives whether in a prized pedigree such as Uno or the basic beagle such as our own. Legal or not, regal or just a plain-old beagle, these hounds were once our pets and we were once their masters...or maybe it was the other way around...