

## Comfers

Before we talk about Comfers we need to build the picture leading up to her arrival with us. I had a life long interest in the different dog breeds, as a child we had Heinz 57s, then as a teenager setters, a Red setter and a Gordon setter. When I first left home I had an Old English Sheepdog called Alf who Mike inherited along with me and a ginger cat called Oliver.

My fascination with dogs preceded my fascination with horses both of which have shared my life for over 30 years. When I first studied the different dog breeds there were far less recorded than there are now and I knew each of them by heart. As I grew up spotting the different breeds was like a life long 'Eye spy' game, most of them I had ticked off by the time I was in my twenties but one alluded me - The Otterhound.

Then on holiday one year on Exmoor on a dismal rainy day we were sitting in the car in a carpark at Dulverton, windows all steamed up with Alfie's breath and there in front of me was an Otterhound, I forget what year it was but I know I was over thirty and it was one of the last breeds to be noted in my game of 'eye spy'.

A few years later when Alf had joined my childhood companions in the great kennel in the sky Mike and I made a short list for our replacement (or should I say NEXT dog as it is impossible to replace them). Top of our short list was the Otterhound - much revered from my childhood I was cautious as I had no experience of Hounds as a group. We called the Kennel Club who referred us to the Otterhound Club Secretary, then the late Harry Baxter, who referred us to a breeder.

On our way on holiday to the Lake District we called into the breeder. First we met a litter of pups then seven months old we were taken by one in particular who was a larger than life (literally) character his name is Texas but more of him in Duke's story. We explained that we only had a small house and we were sorely disappointed that it appeared the breed were too large for our circumstances, we then met the other hounds who were smaller including a couple of four month old pups Jason and Comfrey. Comfers was a shy pretty young lady and we were instantly taken with her, of slighter build we could see that she would probably not become any larger than our last dog.

We asked questions all of which were answered with serious consideration and the hound personality was explained to us, this description remains true to this day. The Otterhound is often described as the 'clown' of the hound group as they love to entertain you and act the fool for laughs, however, they are far from stupid or lacking in the ability to think for themselves. For centuries a small group of hounds have worked together as a team and this intelligence has remained with them. They will not seek your instruction for every move as maybe members of the pastoral group would but they have a great sense of family and 'pack' hierarchy. Anyone can be in the 'pack' Adults, children, cats, small dogs etc and they will be devoted and show affection to all, but will not be constantly demanding of attention happy to be around others but not the centre of attention.

When we bought Comfrey home we were able to relate to their ability for lateral thinking, she would observe that the last things we picked up before we went out were our car keys and wallet/purse so while we were getting ready for work she would hide them in her bed and lay on them. She never once destroyed anything but had worked out that we could not leave the house without them. It resulted in dialogue such as "Have you seen my car keys?" to which the reply would be "Have you looked under the dog".

This proved a great source of amusement to friends and family. Comfers loved children and when close friends with a young boy called Sam came to visit she would always sit next to him and if he had an afternoon nap on the sofa she would watch over him. Whenever Sam visited they were inseperable and invariably would sit together paw in hand.

We lost her at the untimely age of seven as a result of weak hips although neither parent had bad hip scores relative to the breed average. Hip Displaysia is something to be aware of in the breed and it is important to bear this in mind, however, Otterhounds consistently achieve double numbers before they leave us and many are still working a full day at the same age as we lost Comfers.



Comfers at five months



Comfers being 'mum' to Duke



Duke overtakes Comfers in size but she remained 'mum' this is my favourite photo taken at Tarr Steps, Exmoor on yet another holiday with our hounds.