The Hound Group can be confusing. The FCI, for example, classifies sighthounds and scenthounds separately – sight hounds in Group 10 and scent hounds in Group 6. In North America and Great Britain, the Italian Greyhound is classified in the Toy Group; the FCI classifies this breed as a sighthound (Group 10). When discussing hounds in Europe, I refer to the FCI standards and groups.

We must remember that neutral Switzerland did not suffer from two World Wars, so that Swiss breeds developed in relative peace and quiet, unlike German and French breeds.

It is said that Hounds from Switzerland (Laufhunde) are among the oldest members of the Hound Group. According to a 15th-century letter to Ernst, Elector of Saxony (1441-86), Swiss working dogs were among the best. Images from the 17th century show packs of hounds “with the same color and the same size, big heads and very long ears.”

Three centuries later, German dog writer Richard Strebel wrote in Die Deutschen Hunde (German Dog Breeds, 1903-05) that Hounds living separately in a restricted area in Switzerland therefore developed separately.

Inheritance

The Swiss Kennel Club (Schweizerische Kynologische Gesellschaft; SKG) was founded in 1883; at that time, the Hounds did not look very promising. After the French Revolution (1789-99), Liberty, Equality, Fraternity applied in Switzerland as well and the nobility had to share their hunting rights with civilians. In the 18th and 19th centuries, this noble pastime became the so-called Fleischjägerei – “meat hunt.”

In Enzyklopädie der Rassehunde (Encyclopedia of Pedigree Dogs, 2005), Dr. Hans Räber stated: “In the 1890s, there were hardly any purebred hounds available.” Most huntsmen didn’t care if their dogs were purebred or not, and in some parts of Switzerland, working with Laufhunde became forbidden because their hunting behavior damaged the fields and crops.

Development of the Swiss Hounds began in the 1930s, but took time and effort.
Obviously, France managed its inheritance better. Dozens of packs of Chiens courant existed in the 1880s, each pack consisting of 10 to 100 dogs.

Undisciplined Dogs

In the 1890s, it seemed that purebred Hounds were marked for death in Switzerland, despite the breeding of Schwyzer, Berner and Luzerner Hounds. Some Hounds were exported to Scandinavia and, thanks to cross-breeding with native Hounds, the Stövares (Scandinavian Hounds) were blossoming. But at the same time, the Thurgauer Laufhund quietly disappeared in Switzerland, and the Aargauer Laufhund gave way to the Jura Laufhund (Bruno de Jura).

In 1903, J. Staub of the Swiss Kennel Club founded the Schweizerische Laufhunde-Club (Swiss Hound Club) and in 1907, an appeal was made to save the Swiss Hounds from extinction. Then something remarkable happened: the breed club bought good-quality Swiss Hounds and gave them to prudent breeders and huntsmen. Working test rules and regulations were put together, and a series of obligations established: a) only one dog at a time when hunting; b) the dog had to be under control when searching for game; c) a dog that disappeared while hunting must return to its master within half an hour; and d) the dog must return as soon as the horn blast was sounded, regardless of whether the dog was searching. Using these rules, the breed club tried to exclude disobedient dogs and forced owners to properly raise and train their hounds.

Four Varieties

Development of the Swiss Hounds began in the 1930s, but took time and effort. In 1937, only five Hounds were entered in the Swiss stud book. Dr. O. Vollenweider succeeded in gathering 11 Hound fanciers in the city of Solothurn, in northwest Switzerland. Dogs suitable for breeding were selected and, in 1933, a breed standard was published. In the standard, the varieties were distinguished by color and coat pattern.

In 1944, 150 Swiss Hounds were entered at a hound exhibition. (As a neutral country, Switzerland was not involved in the World War II) It was no longer forbidden to work with dogs that gave tongue, and Hounds more than 20 inches (50 centimeters) at the withers were no longer ruled out.

Attempts to save or restore the Aargauer Laufhund were unsuccessful; in 1933, the breed’s standard was cancelled. Four varieties remained: the Bernese Hound, Jura Hound, Lucerne Hound and Schwyz Hound. Their names connect them to Swiss cities and areas (Bern, Lucerne, Jura), or to Switzerland.

Excellent Nose and Strong Passion for Game

In 2008, I visited Animalia, a two-day dog show in Lausanne, Switzerland. About 3,500 dogs were entered, so it seemed a perfect opportunity to watch the Swiss Hounds. Unfortunately, only one variety was present, the Jura Hound (Bruno de Jura). In the Netherlands, dog shows without national breeds would be unthinkable. But it was indicative of the status of Swiss Hounds: they are working dogs, not show dogs. They hunt fox, roe, hare, rabbit and sometimes wild boar.

Game laws differ among the Swiss cantons and, in most, it’s now forbidden to hunt with large Hounds. Swiss Hounds possess an excellent nose and a strong passion for game. Great stamina means the dog can follow a track over long distances. Large Hounds don’t bother about borders and hunting grounds of any kind. There is a saying that pointing dogs hunt for their master, hounds hunt for themselves.

Exports

It is said that between 1902 and 1922, about 1,200 Swiss
Hounds – mainly white-yellow Schwyzers – were bred in Norway. Some years, there were more Swiss Hounds outside Switzerland than in their country of origin. In 1993, around 1,000 Lucerne Hounds lived in Sweden.

France is another importer. Seventy-five Jura Hounds were entered at a show in Lyon in 1976. Not surprisingly, the Jura is found predominantly in France and Switzerland, and extending into Germany. From the 15th century, Swiss hounds were also exported to Italy. According to Räber, they were frequently crossbred with their Italian cousin, the Segugio Italiano.

Schweizerischer Niederlaufhunde – Small Swiss Hound

The Small Swiss Hounds are like smaller versions of the large Swiss Hounds. They are lower on leg, an inheritance of the French Bassets. A characteristic of low-legged dogs is that the forefeet may point straight ahead or turn slightly outwards.

Now and then a Small Swiss Hound will have a Dachshund-type head instead of a typical hound head. Like the large Swiss Hounds, the small ones must be of true hound type.

In 1895, the Swiss canton St. Anton banned hunting with large Hounds. The canton of Graubünden followed suit, and ruled that the maximum height for Hounds should be 16 inches (40 centimeters). In 1898, a group of hunters came together with a view to forbidding hounds over 15 inches (38 centimeters) at the shoulder. Voices were heard that the Alpine Dachsbracke could be used to keep down the height at the withers. Opponents protested against the plan, saying, “… a purebred Hound is as far away from a Dachsbracke as a sighthound is from a spaniel.”

Nevertheless, development progressed quickly because in 1903, at a dog show in Lucerne, it was possible to divide the Small Swiss Hounds on the basis of their color. It is estimated that there were 150 Hounds entered at this show.

Rules and regulations for working tests were drawn up, and the first test for scenthounds was organized in 1916. The Swiss Hounds, large and small, were not out of danger, however; annually, only a few dozen were entered in the Swiss stud book.

A Keen Nose and Melodious Bark

Swiss Hounds share three Hound characteristics: a keen nose, a desire to track down quarry, and a melodious bark when working. These traits are thoroughly described...
in hunting literature.

In general, the need for small Swiss Hounds came about because they don’t have the speed and range of the large Swiss Hounds, enabling huntsmen to follow the dogs on foot and shoot the game. Working with small Swiss Hounds avoided the problem of dogs racing from one hunting ground to another, one of the reasons hunting with large Hounds had been forbidden.

Breed standards

The breed standards of the Swiss Hounds and the Small Swiss Hounds are almost identical, with the exception of skin, color and height. The height at the withers of male Swiss Hounds is 19 to 23 inches (49 to 59 centimeters); bitches are 18-1/2 to 22-1/2 inches (47 to 57 centimeters). Small Swiss Hounds are 14 to 17 inches (35 to 43 centimeters), and 13 to 16 inches (33 to 40 centimeters) respectively.

Apart from the Small Bernese Hound, which comes in smooth and rough-coated varieties, Swiss Hounds are smooth. In the breed standard, the temperament of the Swiss Hound is described as “Lively and passionately keen on hunting, sensitive, docile, and very attached to his master.” The Small Swiss Hound is “Deft, untriring and keen... with excellent nose. Steady on the trail and hunting with melodious cry. Friendly character, not nervous and never aggressive. Temperament calm to lively.”

A table is useful for understanding the differences and characteristics of the large and small Swiss Hounds. The FCI standards date from 2001 and can be found on the FCI site: fci.be

Large Swiss Hounds – Four Varieties

The skin of all varieties is “Fine, supple, well fitting to the body.” Faults for all varieties include weak general structure. Skull too broad, too rounded or too flat. Stop too distinct. Muzzle too short or too long, too square or too snippy. Eyes light; piercing expression. Neck too short. Saddle back or roach back.

Small Swiss Hounds – Four Varieties

The skin of all varieties is “Well fitting and taut, no folds.” The faults for all varieties include: coarse head lacking in refinement. Nose partially flesh-colored. Leathers set on high, too short, thick, flat. Swayback or roach back. Chest lacking in depth; ribs too flat or barrel-shaped; ribcage not smooth (e.g., flange ribs). Tail carried too high, distinctively bent. Shoulder blade steep, upper arm too short, angulation too wide. Weak carpal joints, down on pastern. Spread toes, hare feet. Insufficient angulations of hindquarters; cow-hocked or bow-legged.

Ria Hörter is a dog writer from The Netherlands. She is the contributing editor of various Dutch dog magazines. She was a finalist twice in the annual Dog Writers Association of America writing competition for her articles in Dogs in Canada. On April 12, 2014, she was awarded the Dutch Cynology Gold Emblem of Honour presented by the Dutch Kennel Club. For more information visit: riahorter.com

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of variety in English</th>
<th>In German and French</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Skin</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bernese Hound</strong></td>
<td>Berner Laufhund</td>
<td>White with black patches or black saddle; with light to dark tan markings over the eyes, on the cheeks, inside of the leathers and around the vent; the white sometimes with very slight black ticking.</td>
<td>Black skin under black coat, slightly white and black marbled under the white coat.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chien Courant Bernois</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jura Hound</strong></td>
<td>Jura Laufhund</td>
<td>Tan with black blanket, sometimes with black over-lay; or black with tan markings over the eyes, on the cheeks, around the vent and on the legs; sometimes with a small white patch on the chest which may be slightly speckled (black or grey ticking).</td>
<td>Black skin under black coat but lighter under tan coat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chien Courant du Jura (Bruno de Jura)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lucerne Hound</strong></td>
<td>Luzerner Laufhund</td>
<td>“Blue” resulting from a combination of black hairs and white hairs, very heavily speckled; with black patches or black saddle; with light to dark tan markings above the eyes, on the cheeks, on the chest, around the vent and on the legs; a black blanket is admitted.</td>
<td>Black skin under black coat and lighter under blue speckling.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chien Courant Lucernois</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Schwyz Hound</strong></td>
<td>Schweizer Laufhund</td>
<td>White with orange patches or orange saddle; the white sometimes with very slight orange ticking; an orange blanket is admitted.</td>
<td>Dark grey skin under orange coat and white and black marbled under the white coat.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chien Courant Suisse</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Small Bernese Hound</strong></td>
<td>Berner Niederlaufhund Petit Courant Bernois</td>
<td>This variety is bred with a smooth and a rough coat. Always tricolor: white, black and tan. Basic color white with large black patches. A few black mottles permitted. Tan markings (“Brand”) above eyes, on cheeks, on inside and upper part of leathers and around the vent. Black mantle permitted.</td>
<td>Black under black coat, slightly black-and-white marbled under white coat.</td>
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<td>Petit Courant Bernois</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Small Jura Hound</strong></td>
<td>Jura Laufhund</td>
<td>This variety is usually smooth haired, seldom shows a “double coat” (Stockhaar). Preferably deep black with tan markings (“Brand”) above eyes, on cheeks, on chest and/or on legs. Or alternatively tan with black mantle or saddle. White patch on chest, not too large, tolerated.</td>
<td>Black under black coat, lighter under tan markings.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Petit Chien Courant Bernois</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Small Lucerne Hound</strong></td>
<td>Luzerner Laufhund</td>
<td>This variety is smooth-haired. Basic color white densely grey-white or black-white speckled (giving a “blue” expression), with large dark or black patches. Tan markings (“Brand”) above eyes, on cheeks, on the inside and upper part of leathers and around the vent. Black mantle permitted.</td>
<td>Black under black coat, lighter under blue speckling.</td>
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<td>Petit Chien Courant Lucernois</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Small Schwyz Hound</strong></td>
<td>Schweizer Laufhund</td>
<td>This variety is smooth-haired. Basic color white with larger or smaller yellowish-red to orange-red patches. A few orange mottles permitted; orange mantle permitted.</td>
<td>Dark grey under orange coat, white-black marbled under white coat.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Petit Chien Courant de Schwyz</td>
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