
HISTORY

The province of Poitou (capital Poitiers) on the western coast of France derives its name from the old Gallic people, the Pictones. Until 418, Poitou was part of the Roman Empire; during the reign of Charlemagne, this region became a county, and in the following centuries alternated in possession between French and English kings. So to be

Français Tricolore and an Anglo-Français Blanc et Orange is very difficult to determine.

Aside from a dog breed, a Poitevin is also a well-known, heavily-built French horse breed; it's also the name of the language of the people living in the Haute-Poitou.

POITEVIN

“-CHIEN DU HAUT-POITOU”

A worker in the ‘Grande Vénerie’

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

specific, the name of this breed has derived from a Gallic tribe, living in France at the beginning of our era.

“*Hurleur*”

The breed used to be called Chien du Haut-Poitou, but the name Poitevin has been generally accepted since 1957. The Poitevin is a pack hound used for hunting, one of the 29 breeds in the French hound family. Members of this group have several things in common: their rather long ears are low set, coats are short or rough, they have excellent noses and are at their best living in a pack. Some of them are somewhat reserved and there is a certain similarity in the way they bark, a kind of crying in different pitches known as hurleur. Usually the coat is tricolour with a black saddle or with large black patches, but there are also orange and white ones. The difference between, for example, a Poitevin, an Anglo-

Strong, athletic tricolour dogs

During the 17th century, the French crown prince, the ‘dauphin’, owned six pair of hounds. The Marquis François de Larye bred offspring of these royal dogs to English hounds - not the Foxhounds we know today, but a heavier type, the Staghound. The results of this crossbreeding were strong, athletic tricolour dogs, suitable for hunting wolves.

Aside from the Larye line, there were the Montemboeuf and Cérís lines. Like Marquis François de Larye, de Montemboeuf was a member of the aristocracy, living in a castle in the Poitou and serving King Louis XIV as a lieutenant in the French army. At that time, keeping dogs, breeding dogs and hunting with dogs was an exclusive privilege of the upper class.

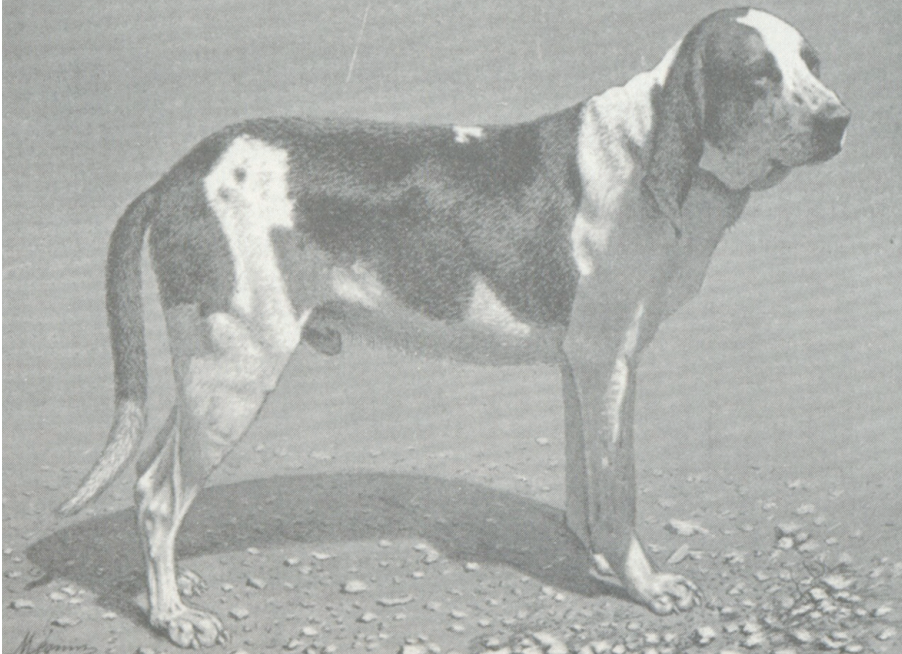
The hounds bred by de Montemboeuf and Cérís had two colours, orange and white, and their working abilities were less than the Lar-



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A Chien de Montemboeuf, called 'Vainquer'.
This engraving was published in the French magazine *L'Eleveur*.

rye's. To emphasize these dogs were the results of cross-breeding between French and English hounds, the prefix 'bâtard' (bastard) was used. Early breeders in France preferred the French characteristics to be dominant – of course.

“Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”

The French Revolution (1789–1799) was a period of



Wolf and French Tricolour Hounds,
by Jules Bertrand Gélibert (1834-1916), painted in 1898.
The wolf is surrounded and can only wait for the hunter's *coupe de grâce*.

radical social and political upheaval in French and European history. The absolute monarchy that had ruled France for centuries collapsed in three years. French society underwent an epic transformation as feudal, aristocratic, and religious privileges evaporated under a sustained assault from liberal political groups and the masses on the streets.

During this Revolution many members of the French aristocracy lost their head - literally. In 1793, the Marquis François de Larye died on the guillotine and after his death his pack of hounds almost disappeared. The motto of the revolutionaries, “Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité” (Liberty, Equality and Fraternity), does not go with nobility, castles, hunting and packs of hounds. Purebred dogs were status symbols, and hunting seen as a decadent way to pass time.



Old picture of a Poitevin

After the Revolution, at the beginning of the 19th century, some members of the de la Besge de Montmorillon family, the brothers Emile and Arthur, also living in the Poitou, carried on with the few Chiens du Haut-Poitou that survived the Revolution. It is

said that two brothers disposed of only two dogs from the Larye bloodline. When their pack was nearly destroyed by rabies in 1842, Foxhounds were imported from England to restore the breed.

In 1877, a letter of the Vicomte de la Besge was published in the French dog magazine '*L'Eleveur*'. In this letter the Vicomte stated that he has been familiar with the breed since 1830. One of the most famous stud dogs was 'Traveller'; he was imported from England by monsieur Lecouteulx who paid 500 Francs for him. Later, 'Traveller' was owned by de la Besge and mated a lot of French bitches. 'Traveller' was described as... a beautiful sight hound (!) with a magnificent head of a hound. This male is regarded the ancestor of nearly all Poitevins.

The First and Second World War were disastrous for these dogs and again new packs could be established only thanks to the arrival of English Foxhounds.

In his book '*La Vénérerie*' (1966) the Vicomte de Brissac

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The breed used to be called Chien du Haut-Poitou, but the name Poitevin has been generally accepted since 1957. (Photo: Johan Adlercreutz)

writes about the extraordinary qualities of the Poitevin... “he is able to chase the quarry more than 7 hours. Because of his speed, the Poitevin’s nickname is ‘Greyhound among the French hounds’. It is said that the Greyhound is one of its early ancestors.

Grande Vénérie

The Poitevin is used for working in the Grande Vénérie - the hunting of large game with a pack of hounds. The method is called Chasse à Courre; the hounds hunt by scent and pursue their quarry to the death. Hounds used in this type of hunting are called Chiens de Grande Vénérie or Chiens d’Ordre. While hunting, the Poitevin uses his excellent nose, great stamina, speed and fierceness extremely well.

The breed standard defines his action as very easy, galloping freely, bounding lightly and passing well through the



The Poitevin is a pack hound that needs to be in a group to feel at ease.

undergrowth. Ideal for hunting red deer, roe deer and wild boar, the Poitevin is able to pursue his quarry for hours at an average of five miles an hour.

The Poitevin is not suitable as a city dog and leaving him alone is often a problem. This is a pack hound that needs to be in a group to feel at ease.

The original valid standard was published in 1978; the present FCI standard dates from 1997. The Poitevin was recognized by the United Kennel Club in 1996. There is no breed club in the U.S.A.

Information:

French Kennel Club - www.scc.asso.fr

Vénérie - www.venerie.org (official website of the Vénérie, in French)

Grande Vénérie - <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A9nerie> (in French)

Grande Vénérie - <http://www.chassepassion.net/poitevin.php> (in French)

United Kennel Club - <http://www.ukcdogs.com/WebSite.nsf/Breeds/Poitevin>
FCI Breed Standard - www.fci.be

Origin: 17th-century France

Original purpose: Pack hound used for hunting

Description: A very distinguished hound, presenting, to a high degree of perfection, strength, elegance and lightness, with a range of the most fascinating colours. The head is long, but not exaggerated and has little stop; a correct scissor bite is preferred. The skull is rather flat, sloping very gently to the foreface. Ears are set on a little low and turn slightly inward. The Poitevin has large, round eyes with a lovely expression. The neck is long, slim and without a dewlap. The brisket is very deep and the breed is a typical working dog with long ribs, strong well-boned legs, muscular loins and very muscular thighs. The forequarters are straight, very muscular, flat and broad. Forefeet and hind feet are rather long and very resistant. The coat is short and glossy, tricolour with a black saddle or tricolour with large black patches, sometimes white and orange (bicolour); wolf-coloured hair is quite frequent.

The Poitevin is a free mover and gallops easily. Eliminating faults are: black and white hounds, dewlap, an incorrect bite and aggressive or overly shy.

Height/Weight: Dogs 24.5 to 28.5 inches; bitches 23.5 to 27.5 inches.

