

Hunting with Podengos

The dog excitedly works a zigzag pattern through the patch of sorghum, her snout low and snuffling. Two shotgun-toting hunters and a guide track the dogs progress. What sporting breed is this you might ask.

Well it's a Portuguese Podengo, a hunting hound.



This particular dog Xana was found on the streets of Portugal by Jonathan Savage an attorney from the US. John and his wife grew fond of her and brought her home and had her trained at the Hunters Creek Club – north of Detroit. The club's dog trainer, Steve Hardenburgh, wasn't sure how Xana would do but he quickly found out she was 'birdy as heck'.

Using both sight and scent to find its prey, in Portugal you would typically find them hunting rabbits, and the Grande hunting boar. In this Hunt Club in Michigan however, you find the podengo hunting pheasant.

In a recent article in the [Maticar](#), a newsletter of the PPPCA long time podengo owner, hunter and breeder John Fernandes of MA visited fellow rabbit hunter Tony Carvalho at his dairy farm in California's Central Valley. He had this to say about Tony and his dogs. "Tony is a semi retired dairy farmer. He came to the U.S. from St. Michael in the Azores with his parents when he was 9, and grew up in Fall River, MA. He left home at 18 to seek his fortune in California."

Tony and his wife Theresa are keeping the Portuguese traditions; his grandchildren speak both Portuguese and English. Honoring another Portuguese tradition, Tony breeds and hunts with Podengos. Mostly he hunts with Pequenos

This is a picture of me and Tony. Tony is holding Garrotto, which means "boy". I am holding Garratto's daughter Esplitta, which means "fuse" or "primer". I brought Esplitta home with me and she will be my foundation bitch for a hunting pack of Podengo Pequenos. Tony got his first Pequenos from the famous Portuguese hunter and breeder Vasco Matias. Vasco is related to a bullfighter in California who Tony knows because Tony used to have a active bullring on his dairy farm.



We went on four hunts while I was there, some with mixed packs of Medios and Pequenos, and some with just the Pequenos. This is the string of rabbits we got on our hunts. We could have taken more, but we follow the rabbit hunters axiom:

"Take some, leave some, and always have some."



The Pequenos are terrific at finding and flushing the rabbits, and the Medios are faster, so can give chase to the rabbits that range further away. Both are triple threat hunters...hunting by scent, sight and sound. Tony lent me his Winchester 101, which is reputed to be such a fine gun that it corrects for bad aim, but in my case it didn't. I missed quite a few rabbits. Tony is a phenomenal shot, as is my friend Rowland, who was with me on the trip.

Thanks to Kellie Theis editor of the Maticar and John Fernandes for sharing this information.



John Fernandes hunting in Nantucket and training the next generation of hunting Medio's.



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Nuno Fero in Portugal – keeping the hunt alive.



The Portuguese Podengo is the most popular hunting dog in Portugal, and the rabbit is the predominant game species in Portugal, so it is understandable that the Portuguese believe that nature and history have produced in the Portuguese Podengo the finest rabbit hunter in the world, or at the very least, the finest rabbit hunter for dense woods and a mix of wet and arid climates. Virtually every element of the conformation of the Portuguese Podengo comes from its rabbit hunting function (or boar hunting in the case of the Grande), and it is essential that it continue to be used to hunt if it is to stay healthy and true to type.

The Portuguese Podengo is a natural hunter, requiring no special training other than a gradual exposure to the sound of the gun. It hunts with a great deal of autonomy, often finding, flushing, catching, killing and retrieving the game without any involvement of the hunter.

The Portuguese Podengo hunting style relies as much on cleverness as on pure speed, and in a pack situation, there will be a lead dog or bitch (the "quitador") that directs the team work of the others, and which reserves to itself the honor of retrieving the kill. The Portuguese Podengo's hunting style engages its sharp vision, keen hearing and acute sense of smell. In hunting in dense woods, the senses of smell and hearing will dominate over the sense of sight. The typical hunt is not made up of short bursts of speed across open ground, but rather a long, zigzagging hunt through the brush that requires a combination of speed, endurance, agility, persistence and great tracking ability.

Speed, endurance, agility, persistence, the traits that are important in a hunter are beginning to be seen in performance events in the US like lure coursing, agility, fly ball. Because they have been bred for many years to fill this function as a hunter of small and large game, they are formidable in strength and character in performance venues.