

WORKING-DOG.CO.UK

Reprinted with kind permission of Sporting Shooter magazine

Author: Jackie Drakeford

I love to see a fast dog working. Contrary to received wisdom, fast dogs do not automatically lack stamina and will not necessarily sustain more injuries than slow dogs. Fast heavy dogs are more likely to get hurt, though, because the combination of weight and speed in a collision or a dramatic turn puts more shock through the dog, and weight and speed together puts more stress on joints, muscles and ligaments.

Lightweight dogs like salukis and whippets can have greater bone density in much the same way as Thoroughbred and Arab horses have far stronger bones than carthorses.

If your dog thunders along at the gallop, it is likely to do more damage to its feet and joints than a dog which skims over the ground.

What about catching quarry? Some think that fast dogs are left sliding along in a heap of arms and legs when whatever they are chasing takes evasive action. That happens with any dog which lacks experience, or is without the ability to learn from it. That is why coursing greyhounds don't usually run for many seasons because once they have sussed out how to use their magnificent speed to catch rather than just pursue, they 'run cunning' which is a priceless asset in a lurcher and loses competitions for greyhounds. Once a fast dog learns to use itself, it will put more game in the bag. It can close the distance between itself and its objective with plenty left in the tank for matching the tricks that the quarry pulls when under pressure. Fast dogs learn to slow up as they reach quarry so as not be caught out by its evasive actions, and fast dogs then get back on terms with it without wasting time and effort, because they have so much more speed. A slower dog has to run as fast as it can to achieve the same, and then has no more acceleration in it. Once quarry starts to spin, the fast dog takes less out of itself and more out of its prey, and when the job is done, the fast dog still has plenty of steam left for catching again.

WORKING-DOG.CO.UK

Reprinted with kind permission of Sporting Shooter magazine

Author: Jackie Drakeford

Speed allied to technique is breathtaking to watch, but there is more than one way to display it. The languid stride of the saluki looks totally different from the jack-knifing gait of the whippet, but neither wastes time. The amount of ground a deerhound can cover when it hits its stride is phenomenal, and far from being clumsy in the turn, it does not even need to turn in the way a smaller dog must because once it reaches quarry, that massive stride takes the hound all over it, and prey struggles to turn out of the dog's reach.

I never saw quarry lost because the dog was too fast, but I have seen plenty of slow dogs completely outclassed at any stage of pursuit. That does not mean the slow dog is inferior, but that it is an animal for a different set of circumstances, and plenty of people are much more at home with their solid half-crosses than they would ever be with my canine Ferraris. However, there is no job a slow dog can do that a fast dog can't manage just as well. Fast can slow down, but slow can only go so fast.

.....

Dogs run with a double-suspension gallop. This refers to the intervals in a single gallop stride where the animal has all four feet off the ground: twice for dogs, once for horses. When the dog is stretched full length and again when its hindlegs have attained their full reach forwards before touching down, the dog is airbourne. This is achieved through the exceptional suppleness of the dog's back, and the long reach and long back of a running dog all contribute to the speed with which the dog covers the ground.