

Spanish Saga

R F Truman relates the story of Fuego, the Gordon Setter who was last year diagnosed as having osteosarcoma.

One day, way back in May 1987, the telephone bell rang and a voice from Bilbao, with a strong Spanish accent spoke excitedly.

"Elo, eet is I, Xavier. I 'av to to tell you, today we 'av the pups from zuh beech you sent us and you know what? One of 'er dog pups 'as much white, like your old dog; the Papa iss a dog from France and por favor, we would much like you to 'av this pup. We give you for nossings."

I hastened to break in to the tirade of words.

"Yes, great, that is good news, and I thank you for your generous offer;" adding wryly, "but it is much, much too expensive for me to even think about the quarantine."

The bitch of which they spoke is a Gordon Setter, Assarts Avante, a black and tan bitch of sound working blood that I had sent in response to a request for a good shooting dog.

Her sire was the somewhat controversial tricoloured Gordon FT Ch Freeburch Vincent, a great trial and shooting dog and winner of a dozen Open Stakes including the Champion Stake. There is no doubt that he had passed on this colouration to his grandson.

The phone rang again two days later. They would not take no for an answer and would pay the quarantine charges themselves.

OSTEOMYELITIS

He arrived in November of that year, a beautiful dog, with striking colouration which was, his impressive pedigree stated, Blanco, Negro, Fuego; so Fuego became his name. Fire. Well-reared and now well-named, he was so full of guts and go.

When we began training him, a 100-acre field would not hold him. He was a most headstrong dog, and it took us nearly a year to establish any real control. He ran in several trials in 1989, but I still hadn't achieved complete authority and it was not until the summer of 1990

that I really felt ready.

Then, whilst training during June, he suddenly went quite lame in his near rear leg. A visit to the vet suggested a knock, and rest was prescribed; there was no significant improvement and an X-ray was called for. The reason for the lameness was then readily apparent to the radiographer, the plate revealing a small dark shadow just above the hock. Osteomyelitis.

Notwithstanding the fact that we were three days from going North for the grouse trials, an immediate operation was ordered, expertly carried out by Harry Scott, a veterinarian in Coveunty who specialises in this type of operation.

TREATMENT

Back Fuego came, leg swathed in plaster and bandage, just in time to accompany us to the moor when at each and every opportunity, he would be off on three legs to find a grouse if he could. Complete rest was the vet's instruction: some chance!

We took out the stitches five days later, lying in the heather; it looked a first class repair. We subsequently arrived home ten days later to find a letter on the mat, a letter from our vet, the gist of which was that they had sent off a sample for biopsy which had returned from Cambridge as positive. It was osteosarcoma, the big C.

I recalled an article by a Mr McGlenon of the Animal Health Trust in which he discussed this disease only months previously in the *Kenel Gazette*. He spoke of swift and extensive destruction of bone tissue, with a high potential for rapid spreading throughout the body. Only 10 per cent of patients were still alive a year later after amputation of the offending limb, which improved to 40 per cent using adjunctive chemotherapy.

We were completely devastated. The Gordon is a far ranging, hard running Setter of the high moor, not a breed of dog suited to running about on three legs, even for so short a while. We decided not to operate, but to leave him

on four legs until the first sign of pain, when he would be put down.

In August 1990, again browsing through the *Kenel Gazette*, we came across a paragraph under the Trading Post section that related the case of Tommy, an elderly Labrador with cancer, returned to almost full health after treatment by medical herbalist Mr Michael Brookman.

We phoned Mr Brookman at once, who first requested detailed information regarding the dog, his medical history, weight, breed, general health, attitude and conduct, etc. He then made up a specific prescription based on that information, together with a special herbal tonic which worked in conjunction with the treatment. This therapy is ongoing, now over a year long.

When deciding just how efficacious this type of medication might be, scepticism dictates that there are at least two other factors to be taken into consideration in making a balanced judgement.

Firstly, the veterinary surgeon who carried out the operation to repair the ravages of the osteomyelitis may possibly (though he admits most unlikely, bearing mind the almost certain contamination of surrounding tissues which is the norm) have been fortunate enough to completely remove all traces of fibro sarcoma at the time and secondly, the outcome of the biopsy from Cambridge could have resulted from a mix up with the slides. (Again doubtful since we sent for a second confirmation and they are very, very careful.)

No claim was ever made that this treatment would specifically cure a cancer condition, and at best may only contain it, anything more being a distinct bonus. Suffice to say that the dog won two Novice Stakes within the week of the spring trials this year.

In this last week of June 1991, we plucked up sufficient courage to return to the surgery for further X-ray examination of the leg in question. Collecting the dog later, I was almost too terrified to ask about the result, reading nothing from the vet's face as she spoke.

MIRACULOUS RECOVERY

"Best read his record card," she said blandly, tossing his file papers onto the desk in front of me.

I picked them up. There was one word written on the latest entry line; it was strikingly short and stark. It simply said, 'Miracle!'. What do you think?

We believe that the positive result obtained in this specific instance is a testimonial to Mr Brookman's skill and knowledge of his subject and are forever grateful for his expertise, ever certain too that he can surely help others.