

Moa Persson

An occasional series in which Andrew Brace interviews leading international figures in the dog world. This week he talks to Moa Persson...



Moa on her daily walk to the woods with 'the gang'.

MOA PERSSON was born in Stockholm in 1951; her parents owned dogs, her father a keen hunter as was his father before him, his favoured breed being the German Wirehaired Pointer.

When Moa was growing up, Bertil Stedgren lived in the same apartment block and he was

a keen owner of Pugs and Poodles – he was later to become Ulla Segerstrom's husband – and it was Bertil who really took the young Moa under his wing and stimulated her interest in dogs. From the age of five Moa spent most of her time with Ulla and Bertil, and already Ulla was an established judge of dogs. Ulla Segerstrom had moved from her native Finland in 1954 to Sweden, and will be remembered by many older British exhibitors as she was a frequent visitor to British dog

shows, known for her plain-speaking and no-nonsense approach to the job in hand.

Moa became a regular visitor to Swedish dog shows, going along with Ulla and Bertil and she also frequently accompanied the Hammars, who owned the Trygggestad Bernese Mountain Dogs and whose daughter was the same age as Moa.

"There was a group of us – Peter Magnusson, C C Jungfeld and other kids who were about

ten years old I reckon – and we tended to stick together while there was a rather 'elite' group of Terrier Juniors like Lars Adeheimer, Carl Gunnar Stafberg, Birgitta Hasselgren and Siv Jernhake who tended to keep to their little gang, and they didn't want to bother with us interlopers!" laughs Moa.

The Scandinavians are great at encouraging young enthusiasts and Moa acted as kennelmaid to so many people at dog shows. In 1959 Moa actually made up her first champion, a Pug bitch called Mips Chilli Wip, when the judge was Major Dick Gibson of Elmsleigh fame. Bertil Stedgren was her registered owner, but it was Moa who took her through to her title.

Moa handled dogs for a variety of people, the breeds being mainly Pugs and French Bulldogs, and in her teens she began to show Labradors for Sigyn Littorin who was acknowledged as one of the greatest Swedish judges, and to whom Moa says she owes a huge debt of gratitude. She also pays respect to Ulla Magnusson who also took time out to explain the different breeds to her. Ulla owned the famous Airways Great Dane kennel, and was a great friend of Margaret Everton who imported the big winning Wrangler from her.

Incredibly over a period of time during the sixties and seventies Moa had handled some 300 champions to their titles across more than 60 breeds, a great record. Some of them came to live with Moa, by now in her own place which she shared with several other young people, while others lived with their owners and Moa just met up with them at shows.

Moa first ring stewarded at the age of 13, and frequently worked in the ring with Karl Erik Johansson. "I did the writing and he did the shouting, though you would have thought it should have been the other way around," Moa laughs.

In 1975 Moa came to England to spend a year, mainly with Mary Gidman of Tibetan Spaniel note, and during that time she spent as much time as she could spare going to as many dog shows as possible.

"That was a great year for learning, going to all those shows and seeing so many wonderful dogs," recalls Moa, "and I also spent a lot of time with Dennis and Margaret Izzard of Ryshot Flatcoat fame in Hampshire."

Before that year, Moa had frequently visited England, often on buying trips with Ulla Segerstrom. One trip she remembers vividly was to visit Bill Hindley Taylor of Kyratown Pekingese fame, at the time something of a legendary character.

"I remember being so impressed by being collected at Manchester station by a Bentley. Ulla shared Bill's love of music and when we were at the bungalow they spent so much time enjoying music – and Pekingese of course. I learnt so much from the likes of Hindley Taylor and so many of the other old breeders we spent time with because they were happy to share their knowledge, if you would listen! Today, if people were more appreciative of the amount of knowledge that the old timers have to offer and are prepared to pass on, the dog world would be a far better place and better set up to deal with the future."

Moa joined the Swedish judging programme in 1977, after persuasion by the two Ullas (Segerstrom and Magnusson) and Bertil Stedgren. In Moa's case she began studying six breeds – Pugs, French Bulldogs, Shih Tzus, Lhasa Apsos, Pekingese and Tibetan Spaniels. The Swedish system facilitates this studying of loosely related breeds in tandem, which is arguably why their judges can progress at a slightly greater speed than their British counterparts who have to qualify for one breed at a time.

Swedish judges begin as students. This involves three times being in a ring with a qualified judge of the breed, preferably a breed specialist, when the student is required to discuss the entire assignment with the judge, and also produce written critiques on each dog.

After having served as a student, the would-be judge then assumes the status of aspirant. Aspirant judges must work independently from the appointed judge, critiquing the dogs and afterwards suggesting their placings. At the end of judging there is discussion with the judge who is required to study the aspirant's critiques and placings, and make an appropriate evaluation. Their recommendations are obviously then forwarded to the Swedish Kennel Club and after two aspirant sessions approval is available.

Interestingly breed club involvement in Sweden is somewhat different from the UK. When any judge wishes to judge a new breed, the breed club (and remember there is only



A recent photo of Moa in action at a Swedish summer show.

one parent club per breed; they then have regional branches) must give its approval for them to join the judging scheme. Beyond that, there is no reference to the breed club in any shape or form. The judge's future progress is entirely down to the Kennel Club and its appropriate committees.

Moa then progressed into other bull breeds across the groups – Bulldogs, Boxers, Bull Terriers and the various mastiff breeds, adding further breeds in group nine (which is a mixture of our toy and utility groups). She also,



Winning BIS with Erna Jungfeldt's St Bernard, Int Ch Alphofs Benchy at Gothenburg 1975. photo Wilhelm Dufwa

Moa giving BIS to a Spanish-owned Parson Russell Terrier.



Moa with her group-winning Bulldog at Sydney Royal show.



Hands on!