



5,000 YEARS -- FOR A SINGLE PURPOSE

By Stuart McLean

Imagine a dog, a regular dog, in fact: imagine this mutt is a very happy go lucky, average sized male who possesses instincts and traits handed down to him by ten different breeds of his family tree. He has a good temperament, our imaginary mutt: he is friend to both animal and man. His behaviour is generally good: he comes when he's called.

When out for a walk with this mutt, or a game of chase-the-ball, his behaviour is predictable and safe. If you're out at the park with the mutt and you lose sight of him, there is no need for worry. One shrill whistle will bring him running back to you from behind whatever tree or bush he was investigating.

The point is this: he's safe. He's safe because we know what makes him tick, we know what he will do, and when he will do it. He shares the common behaviours and physical limitations of almost every dog you have ever seen throughout your whole life; you know exactly what to expect from him.

Now, just for fun, let's do some genetic engineering to this imaginary mutt. The first thing we'll change is his personality; alter his patterns of thought and reactions with instinctive behaviours that most dogs do not have. From now on, imagine our mutt has the uncanny ability to perform hunting tasks. Then again, almost all dogs have hunting ability, don't they? Well, let's enhance our mutt's abilities beyond those of most dogs. Let's imagine our mutt enjoys the benefit of, oh, let's say five thousand years of single purpose breeding; the purpose being pursuit and capture. Hunting.

Let's change him even further. Let's give this mutt the physical enhancements he would need to fully exploit his new instincts. First, we'll change his vision, giving him larger eyes so that he can spot his prey even if it's a kilometre away. We'll make his vision sharp and clear so that he can tirelessly scan the horizon, looking for targets.

Now, in order for our mutt to be able to catch what he spots so far away, we'll give him great speed. Imagine that we can recreate his heart and lungs to be larger and stronger, and alter his skeletal frame and musculature to be more efficient, powerful, aerodynamic. With this new body design, our newly enhanced mutt can go from a standstill to sixty kilometre-per-hour in about three seconds. We will also add to his great speed the power of agility, giving him the ability to corner and change directions at high speed, so he can easily capture what he chases.

Let's summarize our changes. Our mutt has single mindedness now, and determination to hunt; he possesses instinct centuries old. Our mutt also has the physical ability to back up this powerful instinct; he can hold his own with the fastest land animals in the world, and he can spot prey with the proficiency of an eagle.

What else does he need? What other changes should we make to this mutt to complement intelligence for the chase? Imagine that this mutt has the instinctive intelligence to go around fences, bushes, walls and buildings to catch what he sees. He no longer just stops and barks like a fool when something comes between him and his target.

Finally, there is one last change we should give our imaginary canine creation. He should have the power of camouflage. He will possess a calm demeanour and a tranquil, loving attitude. It will not be obvious that he has such great powers.

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Wow! We've imagined quite a super dog! All he needs is a name. Maybe "Feline Terminator"? Or "Squirrel's Nightmarous"? Then again, in keeping with his personality, something low key would be more appropriate; let's just call him "Greyhound".

Now -- when you take this recreated animal out to run and play, will you forget his new abilities? Will you allow his powers of calm tranquillity to lull you into believing he's just a dog? Will you let him off the lead in an area that's unfamiliar to both of you or unsafe? An area where the sight of another dog, car, bird, squirrel or white piece of floating trash could send him streaking at sixty kilometres an hour across a traffic-filled road?

He would appear out of nowhere, instantly; a driver would have no chance to even attempt to hit the brake.

Will you expect this "Greyhound" to stop, or come to you, when he can't hear you calling out over the thunder of his own legs striking the ground in full sprint? Would you expect him to respond to your panicky shouts when the only thing he can hear is his huge heart pounding, the panting of his own breath, and the relentless howl of centuries of instinct?

Your answer should be "no". A Greyhound is a specialized animal possessing physical ability and instincts beyond normal dogs. A responsible owner must never forget that product, the Greyhound, is real. You own one, and I own one.

My adopted Greyhound is Voodoo. Voodoo is without doubt the best friend I have ever had. I love him, and I know him very well.

I know that he doesn't understand that a car (his second greatest love in the world) can kill him. I know that if I let him off the lead to run (his first love) in an unsafe or unfamiliar park or meadow, he could be a kilometre away and totally lost in less than a minute, and never hear me calling. I know that even though he hasn't shown aggression toward, or a desire to chase a "Whizmo" look-alike for over 8 months -- he could at any time. After all, he's from the track, his programming is to pursue and capture.

I love this breed and I love Voodoo. It's because of this love that when I am out with Voodoo, I never let him run free unless I have carefully scouted the park in advance and know everything in it and around it; I also learn the safest, best time to go there.

As adopters, we all know these rules, and have been warned by our adoption representatives. Did you pay close attention? Do you understand fully what this wonderful breed is physically capable of?

To all the new adopters, I would like to say: listen to the advice! Bond with your dog -- know your dog. Don't be in a rush to watch him run for the first time. I know it's tempting to just unhook them and watch them fly. Please don't throw caution to the wind.

To all the long-term adopters, I would like to ask: Has your friend's power of tranquillity ever lulled you?

Love them, enjoy them; don't risk them. Please.

Greyhound Adoption Center seconds Stuart McLean's advice.

This article appeared in the Greyhound Club of Canada newsletter and is reprinted with the author's permission. It has Canadian/English spelling and its original punctuation.