

EALC & NALC Louisiana Catahoula Show 2015 – Catahoula feast

EALC/NALC Show 2015 was the event designated exclusively for Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dogs. It was held during the last week of September at the Mitrov farm (Vysočina, Czech Republic). Catahoula owners and breeders arrived from Germany, The Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Czech Republic in order to show their dogs' working abilities in several disciplines and in the show judged by a judge from Louisiana (USA), a homeland of this marvelous breed. There were competitions in obedience, bikejoring (scooter), mantrailing, search and rescue, and herding abilities, which are all activities suitable and time-tested for this breed. The event was held by European Association of Louisiana Catahoulas (EALC) together with the original breed registry, National Association of Louisiana Catahoulas (NALC).

It has been the first event of this kind being supported by NALC outside of America. I think that none of us has got a reason to regret it. There were about 60 Catahoulas participating in this event. Traditional disciplines were organized according to NALC rules (obedience, show), the rules for herding were adapted to our conditions, and some rules had to be set up for Catahoulas (bikejoring, mantrailing, SAR). Experienced judges evaluated performance of our dogs: Susan Gerschel (obedience, SAR), Christian Kufner (bikejoring and scooter), Stephanie Lang von Langen and Dana and Vít Paula (I. and II. Level of mantrailing), Jim Eaves (herding and show), and Karel Kalný (as the second judge for herding).

EALC - European Association of Louisiana Catahoula – was established in the middle of the year 2012 in Munich, Germany. It joins together Catahoula owners from the whole Europe. EALC focuses preferentially on breed working abilities while breeding is not the main task.



NALC - National Association of Louisiana Catahoula – was established in 1977 in Denham Springs, Louisiana, USA, by Mrs. Betty-Ann Eaves, who has been the president since then. NALC works as a worldwide registry exclusively for Louisiana Catahoula breed. It is a quite conservative organization, but it is a guarantee for a preservation of the breed. NALC holds several events every year where shows and breed-typical and time-proven competitions take place.



Thursday, 24 September 2015

Obedience is a traditional discipline for NALC events in USA with their own rules, which differ slightly from those of FCI. A competition includes several basic and useful exercises that could be done by every „educated“ Catahoula. Obedience was the first discipline held in Mitrov with 8 teams competing. Obedience is not a beloved discipline for Catahoulas, but we could see that some were quite well prepared for it, while others could still improve. Michal Hanko (Slovakia) was the winner of this discipline and both his dogs took the first and second place. However, a higher level of obedience (without leash) was not reachable for anybody at this time.

Bikejoring and scooter competition were taken by some participants as a sport, some approached it as a relaxation; their final times showed it. The forest track was about 4 km long. The participants could choose either bike (3 teams) or scooter (3 teams). Contrary to only a symbolic number of competitors, I am sure that there will be more participants next time, because it was a big fun for all. Spectators could admire enthusiasm of Catahoulas, their strength and their speed. This was apparent already at the start. Alex Spießlechner (Austria) with his female Afrodite Fasanhof was the fastest in Bikejoring. Janine Kretschmann (Germany) with Brodick Ayra Aranel won the scooter competition.

Friday, 25 September 2015

Search and rescue disciplines become one of possibilities how to use Catahoulas for reasonable work in Europe. NALC is also interested in such a work. Both founders of EALC, Anke Boysen and Stephanie Lang von Langen, have been working for many years in a SAR brigade in Munchen; therefore, they are experienced in training and also in preparing competitions and exams for SAR dogs.

Both SAR disciplines have the same subject for a dog to search for, *i.e.* human scent, and they use their nose for it. Nevertheless, training of searching and mantrailing cannot be, at least at the beginning (and for some even later), combined together, because both disciplines differ on principle what a dog is basically searching for. During free SAR in wilderness, a dog must mark every person present in an area of searching. This could be a big problem for mantrailing, where, contrary to SAR, a dog must follow a trail and mark only a particular person and distinguish it from others present in the area. It takes some time before a dog knows for sure what is the point. Until dogs understand it perfectly, it is better to avoid another discipline. No wonder that there was no team here competing in both disciplines.

SAR in wilderness took place in woods around Podmitrov on Friday afternoon. There were 9 teams in the competition. The well experienced lady judge, Susan Gerschel, often evaluates dogs during their regular exams, which must be done every 18 months for dogs in order to keep their valid SAR certificate in Germany. She could easily compare a level of our competing teams. This discipline started in front of „Lesní penzion“ in Podmitrov. All dogs had to show first how they mark a found person. Then, they could start one by one searching in a marked area. The main task was to find two persons „lost“ in the forest area of ca 45,000 m² within 15 min.

There were three teams, active members of SAR brigades, other teams practise SAR rather as a sport discipline. As expected, professional teams were the best ones, although all others showed quite good work, too. Marking of a found person by barking proved to be a weak point of many teams. Some teams lost their time and precious points due to a bit worse orientation within the area of searching.

There was no surprise that Anke Boysen (Germany) with Indigo Louis Šumící křídla won finally this discipline. They have been together a very experienced team for many years in service. Indigo in his 8 years is showing his desire to find and his loud barking means that he has found again. The second place was not surprising, too, because the second team was comprised of Anke again and her second male, Country Strong's Aquim. The third place was taken by Michal Hanko (Slovakia) with his female Blue Numa II for their very good performance. The competition was very successful even if it has shown various weak points in work of some teams. However, it has shown shortcomings that can be improved by further training.

In **Mantrailing** competition, 11 teams participated in two separated categories according to their training level (beginners – 7 teams, advanced – 4 teams). The beginners worked in woods, while advanced teams had to deal with an urban environment, in a nearby village Strážek. The young female, Ataensic z Vadínských strání, with Pavel Drábek (Czech Republic) won conclusively the level I of mantrailing, the beginners. The winner of the level II (advanced) was no surprise - Country Strong's Alma Rose with Stephanie Lang von Langen (Germany). They have been preparing already for their professional mantrailing career for some time.

There were apparent differences between the beginners, namely in their advanced state of training. We could see that some dogs focused well on their work and they were willing to find a person at the end. Some dogs were very fast, but it could be dangerous, because then they can miss crossings and turnings. We could see also dogs that were not really searching; they have not been basically prepared for this activity and their owners wanted only to try their luck.

The group of advanced mantrailers showed namely differences in the way how they managed barking dogs behind fences, chickens, cats, and/or people passing by. Those dogs, who did not sustain such distracting moments, have been training too much in nature rather than in urban areas. However, in order to prepare a reliable mantrailer, dogs must be trained to withstand such an environment by step by step increasing load. Nevertheless, a handler's stability plays very important role in mantrailing, because contrary to free searching, the handler is connected to the dog by a leash and every uneasiness of the handler can be passed on to the dog. Catahoulas possess very good noses and they are able to make trails very fast. However, it could be risky, because they can go on too fast in training with no time to absorb and understand all. Therefore, a good training plan is needed to go step by step.

Saturday, 26 September 2015

The herding competition was held in the arena of Mitrov farm on Saturday. This time, many spectators visited the place. They are already used to visit events held by the Team Penning Association here. They could also enjoy western riding during our event, because cowboys and cowgirls showed their mastery in short exhibitions taking their turn among runs of the Catahoula herding competition. Kids could also participate in their favorite competition at the end of the program.

Herding competitions belong to traditional disciplines of NALC events in USA. Herding is work where Catahoulas could be used in practice, therefore it is necessary to keep this tradition alive. However, herding is taken rather as a „sport“ in the Czech Republic and also in Europe, because Catahoulas are very rarely used for this work here. There is a big difference between our competition and those held in North America, namely because our dog handlers do not work from horse back. It is more difficult for a dog; human is not an efficient partner for a dog in such a work, he/she is too slow and cannot help „pressing“ cattle as riders with horses can.

Therefore, our competition had to be held in an arena (30 x 60 m). Nevertheless, it is not optimal as it provokes different response of both cattle and dogs from that at larger areas of pasture. Even if we had held several training sessions during the year, most of participants chose a class of beginners (17 participants), where dogs should show only their abilities for „bay up“, a typical behaviour of Catahoula around a herd. There were only 5 participants in the class of advanced dogs and all of them passed through the first run, which was also „bay up“. In contrast to it, several dogs were disqualified after the first run in the beginner's class – they did not show satisfactory performance. Anyway, both judges were satisfied because many dogs performed well. Interestingly, both judges agreed on placings of the first three dogs, although they did not have time to coordinate their work prior to the competition and they made their evaluation separately and from different views, Jim Eaves (USA) from top view of a grandstand, while Karel Kalný from his horse back. Apocalyptic Espero Koro with Dáša Adámková (Czech Republic) won the class of beginners.

A task for the participants competing in the class of advanced dogs was to move a small herd of cattle to a small fenced area inside the arena. Jim Eaves alone judged this part. There were three successful trials. Victory of the home favourite, Camano Island's Elmo with Karel Kalný, was no surprise. However, Enya Enna Roztocká hvězda with Jan Procházka (Czech Republic) and Arget Ayra Aranel with Jan English (Slovakia) also performed well and succeeded to fulfil their task. At the beginning, they were struggling to get cattle moving, but then after „pulling the trigger“ both females grasped the situation, started working and both teams could finish their task.

We awarded winners of all working disciplines on Saturday afternoon and spent the whole evening in a steakhouse in Mitrov at Catahoula Party.

Sunday, 27 September 2015

The show was held on Sunday, the last day of this event. There were 37 dogs registered for the exhibition, but only 35 entered this competition. Jim Eaves, the USA judge, played his role with a serious responsibility and he chose as winners those dogs that were really worthy of it at that moment. The NALC standard for the breed has not changed since 1979 and we cannot expect it soon. However, the standard is valid for our breeding and judging of the FCI-unrecognized breed. Nevertheless, this standard is quite wide concerning a size of dogs (50,8 – 60.9 cm for females, 55.8 – 66.0 cm for males), but it does not specify any faults except a cut tail and ears. Therefore it is confusing for many owners and nobody knows how a typical Catahoula should look like (unfortunately, including many judges at our shows).

This, Catahoula owners could find out at our show, because the judge excluded uncompromisingly all males and females that showed long ears, heavy and deep muzzle, long nose, faults in bites, or those that were not apparently Catahoulas for the first view. The size and color was not the most important, while characteristic proportions and gait had a decisive influence. Not all owners were satisfied, but the judge has chosen in two the most crowded classes, i.e., females (in total 12) and males (in total 10) older than one year, the most typical representatives. I think that nobody should call his choice into question, because Jim Eaves surely knows how Catahoula should look like. It has been his family that established NALC and registers this breed in Louisiana. Later, we could also hear Jim's explanation why they do not comment their choices during the show. The main reason is that decisions are always a subjective matter. Some owners were a bit disappointed as only first four placings is announced at NALC show.

Although a busy program was scheduled for the event, the international organizers of EALC and the staff of the Mitrov farm managed very well and were able to keep a planned schedule. The only trouble occurred on Friday when Jim Eaves with his wife Vicky should have reached Prague at 8 a.m. by airplane from Amsterdam. They had planned to hire a car and drive to Mitrov by themselves and watch mantrailing and SAR competitions on Friday afternoon. However, this did not happen and we had not known where they were at Friday midnight. The last notification from USA announced some delay already in Atlanta. On Saturday early morning we met them in front of the Mitrov farm. They looked fresh even if they had reached this point at three o'clock in the morning and spent the rest of the night at a parking place. They had arrived twelve hours later, a booked car with GPS navigation was gone, their phone was not working, and they finally lost their way when they left somewhere a highway. They were driving through countryside with names of villages, which they could not pronounce. Nevertheless, they were in a good humour and Jim was able to judge the herding competition starting on Saturday morning.

Finally, we must point out that Jim behaved differently from our judges and authorities. It has been namely his attitude to judging which has been really refreshing. He reminded us to approach a competition in high spirits because we should enjoy our work and show with our dogs. Jim did not forget to thank repeatedly to European breeders and owners for their work with Catahoulas.

With contributions from Karel Kalný, Anke Boysen, and Stephanie Lang von Langen, written by RNDr. Helena Synková, CSc.

Pictures of Jan English