



The Whippet Fling jumping off the dock. Photo Chris Davis.

Dock diving — a Sport that's not just for Labradors and Golden Retrievers ...

By Caroline Coile, Ph.D.

“**M**y dog can do that,” I said to myself as I watched dock-diving on TV — “... and they can do it better!” This was years ago, when the sport was dominated by Labradors and Golden Retrievers, and the phrase “When pigs fly ...” kept echoing through my mind, as I watched them belly-flop in the water a few feet from take-off. It was like watching Sumo wrestlers compete in high-diving. What if, instead of focusing on good swimming breeds, trainers focused on good jumping breeds? Like Sighthounds! Images of world domination danced in my mind. My dog could probably jump over the pool!

I woke up my Saluki, marched outside with his beloved soccer ball and threw it to the far end of the pool. He eased down the steps, careful not to make a wave, and smartly retrieved it. Okay, a bit more speed was obviously needed. I got him chasing the ball full speed, then kicked it into the pool. He raced after it, skidded on brakes and slowly lowered himself down the stairs, like an old man getting in a hot tub. All right, maybe we should avoid the steps and try it from the side of the pool... I kicked

the ball in, he raced after it, skidded on brakes, ran around to the steps and eased himself in old-man style ...

I was beginning to see a pattern. A minor setback. I attached a leash, ran with him beside me, and we jumped into the pool! Well, one of us. He stayed on the deck, pulling back on the leash like a mule (or Saluki) being led to water. Was he smirking? Okay, bad equipment choice. I removed the leash, held him by the collar, ran with him to the side of the pool, jumped in ... and resurfaced, holding an empty collar. He eyed me curiously (and perhaps a bit triumphantly) from the deck. I put on dry clothes and let him go back to sleep while I resumed watching pigs fly on TV. This was obviously harder than it looked.

Apparently not everyone gives up so easily. One team in particular vindicated my views that if only a Sighthound could get into the mental game, it could show the world true canine flight. That dog came in the form of a race-bred Whippet named Farseer Cochiti, FCh, ORC.

A DOCK-DIVING PRIMER

But first, a dock-diving primer. Dock diving first appeared in 1997 as part of Purina’s “Incredible Dog Challenge.” In 2000 Dock-Dogs emerged as the first dock-diving organization in America, followed by Splash Dogs, Ultimate Air Dogs and, in 2014, by North American Diving Dogs. The United Kennel Club partnered with Ultimate Air Dogs to offer dock diving as a UKC sport, and the American Kennel Club has recently partnered with North American Diving Dogs to offer it as an AKC recognized sport.

The different organizations have slightly different rules, events and titles. Generally, two types of events are offered: Big Air, which measures how far the dog jumps, usually from the dock to the point where the base of the dog’s tail breaks the water; and Extreme Vertical Jumping, in which the dog knocks down a bumper (that’s retriever lingo for a retrieving object) suspended over the water eight feet out from the end of the dock. A third type, Speed Retrieve, measures how fast a dog gets his bumper to the far end of the pool, starting from

20 feet back on the dock.

WHIPPETS MAKING WAVES

Back to Cochiti. Owner Diane Salts says he was a natural. “A friend invited me to try with my dogs, so I showed up with ten Whippets. Three or four jumped into the water. I started Cochiti on the ramp, threw the toy 10 feet, and he jumped. So I put him on the dock — he ran 15 feet and jumped! My friend said I should enter him at an event — that weekend! His first jump was 13 feet and 2 inches, then he jumped 15 feet, then 19 feet and 2 inches at the end of the day!”

Cochiti eventually jumped his way into the *Guinness Book of World Records* with a jump of 31 feet, a record he still holds. He recently broke the Iron Dog record — that’s for distance, height and speed — but held it only for about 10 minutes.

After his record 31-foot jump, Cochiti’s momentum carried him into the far wall of the pool, unnerving him. “He wouldn’t jump anywhere near that distance for a while after that!” Salts says. Pool lengths have had to increase as the dogs have jumped farther, and she expects they may increase even more.

Handlers use one of two methods in competition to get their dogs to jump. The first, which Salts uses with Cochiti, is Place and Send, in which the handler walks the dog to the end of the dock, throws the toy (for Cochiti, it’s a toy alligator head wrapped in a white plastic trash bag) in the water, walk the dog back to the starting point and release him to go after the toy. The second, Chase, is where the handler leaves the dog on a stay, then releases the dog and throws the toy in the water just in front of the dog. This method can increase height as the dog jumps up after the flying toy.

As for challenges, Salts says she’s careful about water temperature. “Labs and other breeds like them have a layer of fat for insulation, plus a water-repellent coat. But Whippets have neither and they get cold easily.” She won’t jump Cochiti if the air temperature is below 70 degrees, or if the water temperature is too cold. “I don’t jump on the first day until the water has had a chance to warm up, and if it’s still too cold I cancel.”

At 9 1/2, Cochiti’s still going strong, recently jumping 28 feet 7 inches. He’s one of just seven or eight dogs of any breed to jump over 8 feet in the vertical competition, and one of only four or five to be under four seconds in the speed competition. “It’s a low-impact sport, so it’s one he can do until he decides he doesn’t want to.” So far, Cochiti shows no signs of slowing down.



Skor is “a Longhaired Whippet, who loves to swim and retrieve,” says owner Pamela Bennett. He has not yet competed in dock diving.

Cochiti is one of several Whippets catching air. Tommy (BIS GCh. Shojin’s Turn Me Loose, SC RN ChDM CGC) is not only a top-ranked show dog, but he’s titled in obedience, rally and lure coursing. “His absolute passion is his Frisbee,” owner Lisa Fontaine says. “That’s what started him down the dock-diving path.

We have a pond, and to get him into the water I would toss his Frisbee in the water and each time throw it in a bit further ... Getting him off the ‘official’ dock was a little more work. It took us three different events of practicing with him to get him to jump from the dock. He did not like the clear water or the fact that the dock was two feet up from the water. With a little persistence, he realized that pool water was the same as his pond water. Dock diving is one of his all-time favorite things that we do. His longest distance is 24 feet 2 inches — we’ve been invited to

“Cochiti jumped his way into the Guinness Book of World Records with a jump of 31 feet ...”

jump at the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship this year.”

It seems to run (or jump, or swim) in the family. Tommy has several offspring that love the water — not necessarily a Whippet characteristic. And Tommy’s brother, Howard, owned by Charlotte Pond, has been jumping for four years, since he was a year old, and has earned both his UKC Grand Master Jumper Champion title and his AKC Dock Master Title.

Debra Borton has three Whippets with dock-diving titles. One is a retired eight-year-old, the other two are Fling (UKC Ch. Debmar First Fling of Lanruvi, CGC ARX TFE-III AX MXJ DS) and her daughter Remy (UKC Ch. Wylie’s An Affair To Remember at Cogshall, DS). Both competed at this year’s NADD championship. Borton reports that at one point Fling quit wanting to jump: “I finally realized she didn’t like strangers holding her; she wanted me to hold her and someone else to throw the toy. Once I did that she started jumping well again, earned her Dock Senior title and picked up a couple of legs toward her Dock Master title, setting a new personal best of 21 feet 9 inches.”

That’s Fling whose jumping picture is shown on the lead page of this article.

Daughter Remy started young, in a baby pool. Her first try in a real pool she wanted nothing to do with swimming until Borton put a life vest on her, and with some coaxing she was swimming and finally jumping off the ramp. Two more lessons and she was jumping off the dock without Burton in the water. She entered her first dock-diving trial at age 7 1/2 months. “She surprised me by jumping 12 feet in her first jump and in each jump after that she did better,” Borton recalls. Remy earned her Dock Junior title that weekend and also



Chroma, another Whippet, loves dock diving so much she “screams and spins” as if she were waiting to run in the field, says owner Julie Poee, who took this photo.

qualified for finals in the junior division, which she won with a 17-foot jump. At her next trial she earned her Dock Senior title and once again qualified for finals in the senior division, where she placed second with a 19-foot jump. On Labor Day weekend she jumped into the Master division with a 20-foot jump. She now has three legs towards her Dock Master title and a new personal best of 20 feet 6 inches.

Julie Poole discovered her Whippet, Chroma (DC Aperture High Chroma SC), loved water when she was swimming for rehab after a lure-coursing injury. "Since she is no longer running, this is our fun thing to do with her. She screams and spins like she did waiting for her turn to run, now it's just waiting for her turn to jump," says Poole.

OTHER SIGHTHOUND SPLASHERS

Several more Whippets have earned titles and prestigious invitations. But we all know Whippets are the overachievers of the Sighthound world. What about the more laid-back members of the family? Greyhounds are the obvious breed to excel. They

win all sorts of jumping competitions and their extra size is an advantage in dock diving. But where are they? MACH2 Never Expected, CDX, call name "Travis," owned by Jennifer Bach-

elor, earned the Junior Jumper Dock Dog title. He is thought to be the only purebred Greyhound to earn any titles, possibly even to compete — and he was one of the first Sighthounds of any breed to do so. Then there's "Country," said to be a Greyhound x Coonhound mix. He once held the world "Big Air" (distance) record of 28 feet 10 inches and Extreme Vertical of 7 feet 10 inches.

I know of several Salukis that have tried, but none has gotten to the competition stage. Janice Aquino's "Rosie" (registered name Ru'Yah Tamanny Al Asmaanii) doesn't hesitate to dive off after her ball, and has participated in a dock-diving fun event at a pet expo. I heard rumors of an Afghan Hound or two, but never



Salukis are not known as enthusiastic dock-diving dogs, but Rosie doesn't hesitate to dive ...



An underwater shot of Skor.

found hard evidence. But there's a Magyar Agar, and there's a Pharaoh Hound.

A Magyar Agar? Yes, one named Pi, registered name UKC Ch Stouthearted Chocolate Soldier CC CM JD. His owner, Audrey Hsia, said she was always looking for new sports where she could showcase her rare breed, a Hungarian Sighthound, somewhat heavier than a Greyhound,

recognized for decades by FCI but not so far by AKC. Audrey taught Pi to swim, then went to a practice, slightly worried he wouldn't jump. "Turns out I needn't have worried," she reports, "because he took right to it once I figured out what his 'on' switch was. The dock is about two and half feet off the top of the water, which is a bit intimidating for most dogs at first. However, I found that if I threw the toy out first, and then pulled him back away from the edge, giving him a running start, he was much more confident about jumping in."

Pi's personal best is 19 feet. He was ranked the top dog in the Splash Dogs Junior division

(for dogs that average 10 to 15 feet) for 2014 and was invited to the National Championship. Pi isn't fond of cold weather or cold water and has a habit of hesitating before takeoff when the temperature is below balmy. He's even skidded on brakes a couple of times at the end of the dock, but not in time to avoid falling in! After all, he is a true Sighthound!

The Pharaoh Hound Reason (Bronze GCh. Galadrial's Its In The Stars du Ciel, SC RN DJ GCG), owned by Shawna Swanson, has her Dock Junior title from NADD and one qualifying jump toward her Dock Senior title. Her personal best is 17 feet 3 inches.

"Shortly after that wonderful 17-plus-foot jump at the trial, she ran to the edge and stopped. She looked at me like she had no idea what I was asking of her and that there was no possible way she would ever consider jumping into that pool. Aaarrggghh! With a lot of coaxing (and a very patient judge!) I managed to convince her to 'jump' in and she earned that Dock Novice leg with a measly 4 feet 6 inches jump. I went home frustrated. Reason was just shy of 8 months old, but she had been introduced to lure coursing at a fun run and loved it, so I got creative. I took a part of a pool noodle (a long flexible styrofoam tube, about four feet long, that kids play with in the pool), shoved an ankle weight into it, covered it with a white plastic bag, attached a long rope and combined lure coursing with dock-diving practice at my pool. It worked! She went nuts for the 'red-neck bumper,' as I called it, and I was able to



The Pharaoh Hound Reason has her Dock Junior title and one qualifying jump toward her Dock Senior title.



On competition days, Reason didn't always see the point of jumping in a strange pool at 7:00 a.m. while she was still sleepy and the water may be cold... Owner Shawna Swanson sometimes wasted the entry fees — but on good days Reason could perform as beautifully as in this picture. Photo Mary McSparen.

get her jumping again. I took that toy with me the next day for practice, in addition to a toned-down version of her regular bumper with just a plastic bag on it, and was able to complete that Dock Junior title that day!”

But Reason kept Shawna guessing. Reason entered dock diving at AKC Eukanuba last year, entering in four “splashes” as the jumps are called. “Yet again, I was reminded that I was working with an extremely intelligent Sighthound who really didn't see the value in my \$25 per splash entry fees: she found it extremely annoying that I expected her to jump into a strange pool at 7:00 a.m. Despite my



Reason retrieving the plastic bumper. Photo Mary McSparen.

pleading, toy purchasing, and extremely patient pool stewards (if that's what they're called), we left \$100 poorer and with no qualifying jumps — although she did enjoy some leisurely leaps off of the ramp!”

Since then Reason has been busy in conformation and hasn't had a chance to focus on dock diving ... but maybe soon!

BIG AIR BORZOI

I couldn't find evidence of any dock-diving Ibizan Hounds, nor of Scottish Deerhounds or Irish Wolfhounds — and really, would there be any water left in the pool once the latter got through with a few dives? But I did find some Borzoi making a splash.

Knight (officially named Ch. Greyhaven Fall of Night @Russian, JC DN UAD DN DJ NADD DN) is the only dock-diving titled Borzoi at this time. He has four dock-diving titles and is one third of the way to finishing his fifth. He lives with Lois and Mark Hough, and Mark has been his main handler. They train under the guidance of Barb Lentz, who owns two dock-diving Whippets.

Knight started training at 4 1/2 months of age. He already loved kiddie pools and retriev-

ing toys (unlike most Borzoi, who will gladly give chase to toys but are not known for bringing them back). A friend suggested they should try dock diving. Knight was the odd duck out of (and in) water at his training classes, which are dominated by more traditional performance breeds. “These Malinois, Retrievers and Border Collies are of such a different mindset,” Lois

Hough says. “They go to one class and they're ready to compete the next!” Knight took seven months before he was ready to compete.

Knight's personal best is 14 feet 7 inches, but Hough says that at age two he's only just

begun. “Now he has to learn to jump up instead of just out,” she explains, “which will give him added distance.”

Knight's cousin, Russian Bayou Bandit, just turned 9 months old, is known as “B,” and like Knight began training at 4 1/2 months. He's just getting to the point where he takes a leap in the water — although he's not yet jumping off anything. While training a retriever may take only a few steps, training Sighthounds — or at least Borzoi — takes a few more.

First they need to learn how to use a ramp to get in and out of the pool. That's for safety

“Knight was the odd duck out of (and in) water at his training classes, which are dominated by traditional performance breeds.”



Bandit, or "B," is only a little more than nine months old, but began training for dock diving at 4 1/2 months. He is still at the point where he leaps in the water — not yet jumping off anything. Photo by Kim Langevin.

as much as anything else. And of course they have to learn to swim. Most Sighthound novice swimmers beat the water with their front feet because they're oriented too vertically. Hold their tails up to pull the rear toward the surface,



Knight, the only dock-diving titled Borzoi. Photo Carol Judson.

and they'll not only quit flailing but start to use their hind legs to swim. Most trainers have the dogs wear life jackets, which, according to Hough, serves two purposes: "One, as a security blanket and two, because they have so little body fat it helps keep them afloat and they don't have to work as hard to stay afloat."

Once the dogs master swimming and going up and down the ramp, they then learn to jump into the water from the ramp. A big part is finding just the right toy to motivate the dog to jump. The dog then learns to retrieve the toy from the ramp. The bottom of the ramp is submerged, so the dog needs to jump off it at the bottom, or sometimes when his feet are already underwater. Only when he masters jumping from the ramp is he moved to the dock, and then he wears two leashes: one is held by a person on the dock and the other by a person in front, which is gently tugged to encourage

the dog to jump. A person in the pool is waving the dog's toy, and everyone is encouraging him to jump. Once in the water, the dog gets praise and his toy, and is then guided to the ramp.

"When the dog jumps, everyone in class claps and praises the dog. The dog must learn that this is exactly what is expected and learn the trigger word. In our case it's JUMP!" Hough says. "Knight was attached to leashes for four months before he would jump on his own without them. And he is a smart dog. It's a security issue for them."

Remyu Dock diving is still dominated by Labrador Retrievers and Belgian Malinois, but there's no denying that when it comes to running and jumping, Sighthounds rule! I may even give it another try with my Salukis now that I see I was going about it all wrong.

Either that, or get a Whippet.



Remy wanted nothing to do with swimming at first but soon caught on and entered her first dock-diving trial at 7 1/2 months. She now has her Dock Senior title and three legs towards the Dock Master title. Photo Chris Davis.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: D. Caroline Coile, Ph.D., has earned the Canine Health Foundation Award (twice), Eukanuba Canine Health Award (twice) and Morris Animal Foundation Award, plus induction into the Dog Writers

Association of America Hall of Fame. She has lived with Sighthounds since she was six years old, starting with a Whippet, then Afghan Hound, Borzoi and finally her first love, Salukis. Caroline's Baha Salukis have won BIS, SBIS, BIF and National Specialty BOB, HIT (agility and obedience) and triathlon wins. She has written hundreds of articles and 32 books about dogs. Caroline lives in Live Oaks, Florida.



Knight has four dock-diving titles and is well on the way to a fifth. Photo Carol Judson.