

### LAUFHUNDE – SWISS HOUNDS

Some words for “scenthounds” in Europe are *Chiens courant* (France), *Bracke* (Germany, Austria), *Laufhunde* (Switzerland), Hounds (Great Britain) and *Brak* (Netherlands).

Hounds from European countries and Great Britain share their old history but, in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries they developed into separate breeds. Some hounds vanished, others merged into today’s breeds.

# Swiss Hounds

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

courtesy of KENNEL BOHEMIA HILL, DR. RADANA MENSIKOVA,  
MARTINA TRAVNICKOVA AND ILKA BECKER

The Hound Group can be confusing. The FCI, for example, classifies sighthounds and scenthounds separately – sight hounds in Group 10 and scent hounds in Group 6. In North America and Great Britain, the Italian Greyhound is classified in the Toy Group; the FCI classifies this breed as a sighthound (Group 10). When discussing hounds in Europe, I refer to the FCI standards and groups.

We must remember that neutral Switzerland did not suffer from two World Wars, so that Swiss breeds developed in relative peace and quiet, unlike German and French breeds.

It is said that Hounds from Switzerland (*Laufhunde*) are among the oldest members of the Hound Group. According to a 15th-century letter to Ernst, Elector of Saxony (1441-86), Swiss working dogs were among the best. Images from the 17th century show packs of hounds “with the same color and the same size, big heads and very long ears.”

Three centuries later, German dog writer Richard



Bernese Hound from the famous kennel Bohemia Hill in the Czech Republic.

This breed always has a tri-color coat: white, black and tan.

(Photo: Martina Travnickova)

Strebel wrote in *Die Deutschen Hunde* (German Dog Breeds, 1903-05) that Hounds living separately in a restricted area in Switzerland therefore developed separately.

### Inheritance

The Swiss Kennel Club (*Schweizerische Kynologische Gesellschaft*; SKG) was founded in 1883; at that time, the Hounds did not look very promising. After the French Revolution (1789-99), Liberty, Equality, Fraternity applied in Switzerland as well and the nobility had to share their hunting rights with civilians. In the 18th and 19th centuries, this noble pastime became the so-called *Fleischjägerei* – “meat hunt.”

In *Enzyklopädie der Rassehunde* (Encyclopedia of Pedigree Dogs, 2005), Dr. Hans Räber stated: “In the 1890s, there were hardly any purebred hounds available.” Most huntsmen didn’t care if their dogs were purebred or not, and in some parts of Switzerland, working with

*Laufhunde* became forbidden because their hunting behavior damaged the fields and crops.

*Development of the Swiss Hounds began in the 1930s, but took time and effort.*

## HISTORY

*continued from page 200*

Obviously, France managed its inheritance better. Dozens of packs of *Chiens courant* existed in the 1880s, each pack consisting of 10 to 100 dogs.

### Undisciplined Dogs

In the 1890s, it seemed that purebred Hounds were marked for death in Switzerland, despite the breeding of Schwyzer, Berner and Luzerner Hounds. Some Hounds were exported to Scandinavia and, thanks to cross-breeding with native Hounds, the *Stövares* (Scandinavian Hounds) were blossoming. But at the same time, the Thurgauer Laufhund quietly disappeared in Switzerland, and the Aargauer Laufhund gave way to the Jura Laufhund (Bruno de Jura).

In 1903, J. Staub of the Swiss Kennel Club founded the *Schweizerische Laufhunde-Club* (Swiss Hound Club) and in 1907, an appeal was made to save the Swiss Hounds from extinction. Then something remarkable happened: the breed club bought good-quality Swiss Hounds and gave them to prudent breeders and huntsmen. Working test rules and regulations were put together, and a series of obligations established: a) only one dog at a time when hunting; b) the dog had to be under control when searching for game; c) a dog that disappeared while hunting must return to its master within half an hour; and d) the dog must return as soon as the horn blast was sounded, regardless of whether the dog was searching. Using these rules, the breed club tried to exclude disobedient dogs and forced owners



*Bernese Hound (male), Ch. Bandière Syrinx  
Bohemia from Bohemia Hill Kennel  
in the Czech Republic.  
(Photo: Martina Travnickova)*



*A Swiss Hound Mother and Her Pups  
(Photo: Waliboo)*



*Small Bernese Hound (on the right) and two Basset Hounds.*

to properly raise and train their hounds.

### Four Varieties

Development of the Swiss Hounds began in the 1930s, but took time and effort. In 1937, only five Hounds were entered in the Swiss stud book. Dr. O. Vollenweider succeeded in gathering 11 Hound fanciers in the city of Solothurn, in northwest Switzerland. Dogs suitable for breeding were selected and, in 1933, a breed standard was published. In the standard, the varieties were distinguished by color and coat pattern.

In 1944, 150 Swiss Hounds were entered at a hound exhibition. (As a neutral country, Switzerland was not involved in the World War II) It was no longer forbidden to work with dogs that gave tongue, and Hounds more than 20 inches (50 centimeters)

at the withers were no longer ruled out.

Attempts to save or restore the Aargauer Laufhund were unsuccessful; in 1933, the breed's standard was cancelled. Four varieties remained: the Bernese Hound, Jura Hound, Lucerne Hound and Schwyz Hound. Their names connect them to Swiss cities and areas (Bern, Lucerne, Jura), or to Switzerland.

### Excellent Nose and Strong Passion for Game

In 2008, I visited Animalia, a two-day dog show in Lausanne, Switzerland. About 3,500 dogs were entered, so it seemed a perfect opportunity to watch the Swiss Hounds. Unfortunately, only one variety was present, the Jura Hound (Bruno de Jura). In the Netherlands, dog shows without national breeds would be unthinkable. But it was indicative of the status of Swiss Hounds: they are working dogs, not show dogs. They hunt fox, roe, hare, rabbit and sometimes wild boar.

Game laws differ among the Swiss cantons and, in most, it's now forbidden to hunt with large Hounds. Swiss Hounds possess an excellent nose and a strong passion for game. Great stamina means the dog can follow a track over long distances. Large Hounds don't bother about borders and hunting grounds of any kind. There is a saying that pointing dogs hunt for their master, hounds hunt for themselves.

### Exports

It is said that between 1902 and 1922, about 1,200 Swiss





## HISTORY

*continued from page 202*

Hounds – mainly white-yellow Schwyzers – were bred in Norway. Some years, there were more Swiss Hounds outside Switzerland than in their country of origin. In 1993, around 1,000 Lucerne Hounds lived in Sweden.

France is another importer. Seventy-five Jura Hounds were entered at a show in Lyon in 1976. Not surprisingly, the Jura is found predominantly in France and Switzerland, and extending into Germany. From the 15th century, Swiss hounds were also exported to Italy. According to Räber, they were frequently crossbred with their Italian cousin, the Segugio Italiano.

### Schweizerischer Niederlaufhund – Small Swiss Hound

#### Large Swiss Hounds (Laufhund)

- Berner Hound
- Jura Hound
- Lucerne Hound
- Schwyz Hound

#### Small Swiss Hounds (Schweizerischer Niederlaufhund)

- Small Bernese Hound (smooth coat and rough coat)
- Small Jura Hound
- Small Lucerne Hound
- Small Schwyz Hound

The Small Swiss Hounds are like smaller versions of the large Swiss Hounds. They are lower on leg, an inheritance of the French Bassets. A characteristic of low-legged dogs is that the forefeet may point straight ahead or turn slightly outwards.

Now and then a Small Swiss Hound will have a Dachshund-type head instead of a typical hound head. Like the large Swiss Hounds, the small ones must be of true hound type.

In 1895, the Swiss canton St. Anton banned hunting with large Hounds. The canton of Graubünden followed suit, and ruled that the maximum height for Hounds should be 16 inches (40 centimeters). In 1898, a group of hunters came together with a view to forbidding hounds over 15 inches (38 centimeters) at the shoulder. Voices were heard that the Alpine Dachsbracke could be used to keep down the height at the withers. Opponents protested against the plan, saying, "... a purebred Hound is as far away from a Dachsbracke as a sighthound is from a spaniel."

#### Nice Colors and Typical Heads

Dr. Frank B. Laska, an authority on Hounds who was opposed to the idea of using the Dachsbracke, fanned the flames when he advised the Swiss dog world to breed "a small edition of the old, beautiful Swiss Hound." Otherwise, the beautiful colors and typical heads would disappear. Laska's idea was well-received by a large

#### *Hounds in Europe*

Balkan countries: Gonic  
Germany and Austria: Brack(e)  
Great Britain: Hound  
France: Chien courant  
Greece: Ignilatis  
Hungary: Kopó  
Poland: Ogar  
Slovenia: Kopov  
Sweden: Stövare  
Switzerland: Laufhund



*Head of a Small Bernese Hound Bitch*

*(Photo: Ilka Becker)*

number of breeders and hunters, but the quarrelling about the Dachsbracke went on for several years.

However, in 1906, the Dachsbracke breed club was renamed *Schweizer Niederlaufhund-Club* (Swiss Small Hound Club). Once again the breed standard was re-written; the maximum height became 15 inches (38 centimeters). The club agreed on the color: *Laufhund* color.

However, a breed standard and breed club were no guarantee of purebred dogs. Dachsbrackes from Switzerland, French Bassets, Fox Terriers and many mixed breeds contributed to the development of the modern Small Swiss Hound. At first, exhibitions showed a mixed lot. Dogs of the right height had crooked front legs or a wrong color. Dogs with straight front legs had wrong colors or were too high on leg. It was quite difficult for judges, and one of them stated that, "If breeding dogs with crooked legs becomes forbidden, the Small Swiss Hounds will become extinct."

Nevertheless, development progressed quickly because in 1903, at a dog show in Lucerne, it was possible to divide the Small Swiss Hounds on the basis of their color. It is estimated that there were 150 Hounds entered at this show.

Rules and regulations for working tests were drawn up, and the first test for scent hounds was organized in 1916. The Swiss Hounds, large and small, were not out of danger, however; annually, only a few dozen were entered in the Swiss stud book.

#### A Keen Nose and Melodious Bark

Swiss Hounds share three Hound characteristics: a keen nose, a desire to track down quarry, and a melodious bark when working. These traits are thoroughly described



*Puppies from  
Kennel Clairjoie, France.*

*(Photographer unknown)*

# HISTORY

continued from page 204



Lucerne Hound by Piero Cozzaglio, circa 1973

in hunting literature.

In general, the need for small Swiss Hounds came about because they don't have the speed and range of the large Swiss Hounds, enabling huntsmen to follow the dogs on foot and shoot the game. Working with small Swiss Hounds avoided the problem of dogs racing from one hunting ground to another, one of the reasons hunting with large Hounds had been forbidden.



Small Lucerne Hound  
(Photographer unknown)

## Breed standards

The breed standards of the Swiss Hounds and the Small Swiss Hounds are almost identical, with the exception of skin, color and height. The height at the withers of male Swiss Hounds is 19 to 23 inches (49 to 59 centimeters); bitches are 18-1/2 to 22-1/2 inches (47 to 57 centimeters). Small Swiss Hounds are 14 to 17 inches (35 to 43 centimeters), and 13 to 16 inches (33 to 40 centimeters) respectively.

Apart from the Small Bernese Hound, which comes in smooth and rough-coated varieties, Swiss Hounds are smooth. In the breed standard, the temperament of the Swiss Hound is described as "Lively and passionately keen on hunting, sensitive, docile, and very attached to his master." The Small Swiss Hound is "Deft, untiring and keen... with excellent nose. Steady on the trail and hunting with melodious cry. Friendly character, not nervous and never aggressive. Temperament calm to lively."

A table is useful for understanding the differences and characteristics of the large and small Swiss Hounds. The FCI standards date from 2001 and can be found on the FCI site: [fci.be](http://fci.be)

## Large Swiss Hounds – Four Varieties

The skin of all varieties is "Fine, supple, well fitting to the body." Faults for all varieties include weak general structure. Skull too broad, too rounded or too flat. Stop too distinct. Muzzle too short or too long, too square or too snippy. Eyes light; piercing expression. Neck too short. Saddle back or roach back.

## Small Swiss Hounds – Four Varieties

The skin of all varieties is "Well fitting and taut, no folds." The faults for all varieties include: coarse head lacking in refinement. Nose partially flesh-colored. Leathers set on high, too short, thick, flat. Swayback or roach back. Chest lacking in depth; ribs too flat or barrel-shaped; ribcage not smooth (e.g., flange ribs). Tail carried too high, distinctly bent. Shoulder blade steep, upper arm too short, angulation too wide. Weak carpal joints, down on pastern. Spread toes, hare feet. Insufficient angulations of hindquarters; cow-hocked or bow-legged.

*Ria Hörter is a dog writer from The Netherlands. She is the contributing editor of various Dutch dog magazines. She was a finalist twice in the annual Dog Writers Association of America writing competition for her articles in Dogs in Canada. On April 12, 2014, she was awarded the Dutch Cynology Gold Emblem of Honour presented by the Dutch Kennel Club. For more information visit: [riahorter.com](http://riahorter.com)*

*We have tried to find the names of all photographers, etc. Unfortunately, we did not always succeed. Please send a message to the author ([riahorter.com](http://riahorter.com)) if you think you are the owner of a copyright.*



The breed standards of the Swiss Hound and the Small Swiss Hound are almost the same, with the exception of the skin, color and height.

## HISTORY

*continued from page 206*

<i>Name of variety in English</i>	<i>In German and French</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Skin</i>
<b>Bernese Hound</b>	Berner Laufhund Chien Courant Bernois	White with black patches or black saddle; with light to dark tan markings over the eyes, on the cheeks, the inside of the leathers and around the vent; the white sometimes with very slight black ticking.	Black skin under black coat, slightly white and black marbled under the white coat.
<b>Jura Hound</b>	Jura Laufhund Chien Courant du Jura (Bruno de Jura)	Tan with black blanket, sometimes with black over-lay; or black with tan markings over the eyes, on the cheeks, around the vent and on the legs; sometimes with a small white patch on the chest which may be slightly speckled (black or grey ticking).	Black skin under black coat but lighter under tan coat.
<b>Lucerne Hound</b>	Luzerner Laufhund Chien Courant Lucernois	“Blue” resulting from a combination of black hairs and white hairs, very heavily speckled; with black patches or black saddle; with light to dark tan markings above the eyes, on the cheeks, on the chest, around the vent and on the legs; a black blanket is admitted.	Black skin under black coat and lighter under blue speckling.
<b>Schwyz Hound</b>	Schweizer Laufhund Chien Courant Suisse	White with orange patches or orange saddle; the white sometimes with very slight orange ticking; an orange blanket is admitted.	Dark grey skin under orange coat and white and black marbled under the white coat.

<i>Name of variety in English</i>	<i>In German and French</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Skin</i>
<b>Small Bernese Hound</b>	Berner Niederlaufhund Petit Courant Bernois	This variety is bred with a smooth and a rough coat. Always tricolor: white, black and tan. Basic color white with large black patches. A few black mottles permitted. Tan markings (“Brand”) above eyes, on cheeks, on inside and upper part of leathers and around the vent. Black mantle permitted.	Black under black coat, slightly black-and-white marbled under white coat.
<b>Small Jura Hound</b>	Jura Laufhund Petit Chien Courant Bernois	This variety is usually smooth haired, seldom shows a “double coat” (Stockhaar). Preferably deep black with tan markings (“Brand”) above eyes, on cheeks, on chest and/or on legs. Or alternatively tan with black mantle or saddle. White patch on chest, not too large, tolerated.	Black under black coat, lighter under tan markings.
<b>Small Lucerne Hound</b>	Luzerner Laufhund Petit Chien Courant Lucernois	This variety is smooth-haired. Basic color white densely grey-white or black-white speckled (giving a “blue” expression), with large dark or black patches. Tan markings (“Brand”) above eyes, on cheeks, on the inside and upper part of leathers and around the vent. Black mantle permitted.	Black under black coat, lighter under blue speckling.
<b>Small Schwyz Hound</b>	Schwyzer Laufhund Petit Chien Courant de Schwyz	This variety is smooth-haired. Basic color white with larger or smaller yellowish-red to orange-red patches. A few orange mottles permitted; orange mantle permitted.	Dark grey under orange coat, white-black marbled under white coat.