

# **THE RISE OF THE JAPANESE** **AT THE** **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS**

By **Bobby Behan - 2000**

I remember well the first WUSV world championships I went to. It was in the French speaking part of Belgium in the city of Waremmes. I was really excited at the prospect of witnessing such an important event and seeing dogs from all over the world working at the highest standard and also “dogs like our own”, as they were described. This was just how it turned out to be, the superstars were there as expected and there were the “also ran.”

## **From Humble Beginning's**

One of these “also ran” teams were the Japanese. I remember watching as dog after dog had problems in the protection work, there were some nice obedience performances but nothing spectacular and as far as I can recollect they did not achieve a passing team score. What a tragedy, to come all that distance for so little, what made them do it I wondered. This was not their first appearance in the championships; they had been represented at every event since the inception of the competition and with similar problems and results. The year was 1990.

1998 in Boston was a different story, following on from the individual success in Finland of Haruo Masuda with Orry von Haus Antwerpen double world champion, (WUSV and FCI), in 1996, Japan achieved third place team position and further improved this to second position this year with two handlers in the top five spot both achieving V rated totals. The total score of 865 made up of Haruo Masuda with 291, Makiko Nango with 289 and Katsumasa Murase with 276.

## **Why and How**

So why and how the turn around? How did an “also ran” become a top contender in such a short space of time? Against every imaginable difficulty the Japanese have become a force to be reckoned with. This is a difficult question to answer but I suggest it is a combination of a number of factors including the following,

The obvious natural talent for dog training

Nothing is a problem that cannot be overcome

The help, energy and training talents of Belgium's Roger Snollaerts

The leadership skills and drive of Haruo Masuda

The contribution of Orry to the Japanese breeding programme

## **A Privilege**

At this years competition I had the privilege of spending three weeks training with the Japanese team and I think it is worth recording the experience.

Makiko Nango, who is superb dog handler and trainer, told the stories relating to the training back in Japan to me. Nango finished in fifth position with a V score of 289, (95/98/96) the 98 being the joint highest obedience score, the other from Germany's Harald Murdel and Quasy v.d bosen Nachbarschaft

On the first night of training when I arrived at the club grounds Nango was on the field doing an obedience routine with her competition dog Tomba (Troll v.h.Berghuis) an Orry son she bought from Roger at eighth months of age. It was incredible the level of control and attention she got from the dog. It was as if he was part of her. Every now and then Roger Snollaerts would pass some advise and she would leave the dog and come a discuss the comments. Her command of English was minimal and she found it necessary to do this. She would casually command the dog to wait and without looking back walk away. The dog as if frozen would remain exactly where he was until she returned and then the training would proceed as if the interruption had never happened, it had to be seen to be believed. This was repeated time and time again. The obedience was followed by an equally impressive protection training session.

## **Post Training Discussions**

As is the norm, following the training we got talking and this conversation was the start of many fascinating discussions about the training difficulties experienced by the Japanese handlers.

This trip was only the second time Nango had competed outside Japan. The first time was to participate in the first WUSV world championship in Munster, Germany in 1988. At that time she was a student, studying her chosen profession of dog trainer. It is normal in Japan for dog owners to give over the duty of exercising, training, grooming and general care of their dog to professional schools. In the big cities like Tokyo and Yokohama where Nango comes from there is very little option; there is hardly room for the people let alone the dogs. Dog care and training is considered a serious business and in order to work in the profession you have to go the school for a number of years and graduate with a diploma. It was while doing this training that Nango first travelled. She had no European language what so ever, little idea of where she was going and while she understood the obedience routine had only a vague notion of what was required in the tracking and protection phases. Despite this and the fact that the dog belonged to her teacher she managed to make a qualification score.

## **Problems in Context**

But these problems paled to insignificance when she explained the other difficulties. It is easy to learn what is required in the trial routines and English can be learned but trying find a training field in Tokyo or Yokohama is next to impossible.

Nango's daily routine consists of driving to various clients' apartments in her van with eight air crates on board. She spends her time collecting dogs, training in obedience, grooming them and bringing them back. She will also handle the dogs if required in shows and obedience competitions. All of the dogs are brought together to a green area about the size of four football pitches, Nango's and every body else's.

In addition to the dogs, the field is occupied by people walking, children playing football and baseball, flying kites and teenagers lounging about playing music and doing the things that teenagers do. Are you getting the picture??

Here the dogs are walked and trained, not just the family pets but also the world championship contenders like Tomba. This is where it happens, obedience, protection and as unbelievable as it may sound, tracking.

## **Fresh Tracks**

Leaving a track to age is not considered. Nango would come back to the training area in the evening in the hope that every one had gone to track her dog. Every track is run immediately it is put in and it was certainly not unusual to be kicking someone else's dog off while your dog was working (and we complain if the birds eat our tracking food!!). Nango would laugh telling us this, she reckoned Tomba would track very well in the dark.

To make matters even more unbelievable her dog, (by the way I forgot to mention that Tomba is Nango's first dog to actually own) never saw ploughed land until he arrived in Europe, four weeks before the championship started. This was also the case with two others of the team, the other two arrived two weeks and one week before the competition start.

No big problems with obedience. Once you came to terms with the mass of activity all around you, the kites and balls flying in all directions, other peoples dogs trying to steal your dumbbell and children picking up the ball that you left for the send-away it is straight forward enough, no wonder the control is so good and taken for granted. It is probably a good time to mention that all Nango's training with Tomba is done on a fur-saver flat link chain.

## **Where's the Hide?**

Then comes the protection work. To be honest I just can't picture it, but yes it happens in the same park. You will probably think I am making it up when I tell you that apart from the team qualification competition Tomba had only one other opportunity this year (before coming to Belgium) to train with six hides, she calls them tents.

This is normal for Japanese trainers; the space just does not exist. The dogs are taught using small hides to circle around and around on command. The handler uses a ball and stands over the hide circling the ball to motivate the dog. It is a very difficult procedure to explain, but it works and works very well. Nango demonstrated the method for us, the dog would continue to circle one hide until called or commanded to lie down, "no problem" she would say smiling. All the Japanese dogs did excellent, tight fast searches.

Add to this the fact that for three months of the year it is just too hot and humid to do anything with the dogs and yet they still manage to succeed.

## **Borrowed Dog**

I hope by now you share some of my admiration for these Japanese handlers. Two of the other 1999-team members were outside Japan for the first time and had no European language. They also had the same difficult training experiences.

One of them Youkiko Ishikawa with a very good female, (Dornroschen v.d Verstandeheim a daughter of Qerry v Haus Antwerpa,) that she had borrowed from her teacher, had the incredible misfortune to get on the wrong bus to the tracking fields, easily done considering her communication difficulties. This resulted in her having to run 3Km from the bus to make her draw. Can you even imagine how she must have felt, all that distance and expense to make such a mistake? This was one of the dogs that had never seen ploughed ground before but was settling nicely in the training. A very confused Youkiko finished with a score of 85 points and her bitter and her understandable disappointment flowed over into the stadium performances where her scores of 90 and 92 did not reflect the actual ability of this team.

## **Roger, Orry & Haruo**

If the foregoing are reasons as to why the Japanese may have made such progress the next factors must be the contribution of Roger Snollaerts, Orry V Haus Antwerpa and Japanese trainer Harou Masuda.

Roger was the trainer and handler of Orry when he was world champion in Linz, Austria, 1992 (95/98/98.)

Orry was and is an extraordinary sports dog and became champion at the young age of two and a half years. But like all good dogs he is only as good as his handler and when Haruo Masuda got the

opportunity to buy Orry he had the good sense to know this. Many times we have seen dogs that made good points being sold only to see the performance plummet. This is not because the dog is no longer good or that the new handler is necessarily a poor handler it is simply that dogs are individuals and it is the understanding of this individuality that makes successful training. Obviously the trainer who has reared and had success with a dog knows him best.

Haruo was wise enough to know this and so both Orry and Roger went to Japan. This was the beginning of the success story in earnest.

## **Helpers**

Haruo Masuda is a superb trainer and handler and also a very astute planner. He knew that if long-term success was to follow it was not enough to utilise the talents of Roger in the continuation of Orry's training but that it was also necessary to develop a system of training and a pool of competent helpers.

Haruo is a very generous trainer, he gives so much of his time to every one, and it was a pleasure to be on the field as him. How often in sport we see self-centred attitudes prevail. This was never the case, in spite of the fact that in our small group there were three very serious contenders to win the championship the level of co-operation, and help within this group was beyond belief.

This same quality of co-operation was the driving force behind the helper-training programme and again the Japanese ability to learn quickly was demonstrated. Roger told me that two years after he began the programme he was invited back by Haruo. He presumed it was for further training and advise but it transpired the he was required to carry out a helper assessment. Seventeen very competent helpers presented themselves and Roger tells he was amazed at their ability. This ability is apparent in the protection work of the current Japanese team.

The quality of Roger Snolaerts as a trainer of dogs is enhanced greatly by his amazing ability to convey his message. Language barriers do not seem to affect him. While there are legions of excellent dog trainers those who can demonstrate their ability through others are few.

Roger is a calm communicator, he is consistent from session to session and it is not difficult to follow what it is he requires from dog and handler. The Japanese have been lucky to have such a mentor.

## **Orry**

As with so many great producers over the years, the ability sometimes does not manifest itself, until it is too late.

This was certainly the case for Belgian handlers when considering the breeding contribution of Orry. For whatever reason he was not utilised fully and it was not until sold to Japan that his ability as a producer

became apparent. A son of Verwin v Blitsaerd out of Steffi v Tiekerhook, Orry has produced the goods time and time again and you don't have to be a physiologist to detect the frustration in Roger when he talks of the numerous excellent dogs in Japan (Roger does not use the term "excellent" lightly) who are lying in the kennels of collectors and will never be trained formally or grace the sports field.

That aside you only have to look at the make up of the Japanese team to appreciate the contribution. Three direct sons, one being Quinto, (Haruo's dog,) a daughter of Quinto and another granddaughter of Orry via Qerry. These were quality working dogs with improvement in construction on Orry particularly in Quinto and Nango's Troll.

I have not examined the lines of the other teams but I am sure the contribution does not end there in spite of the limited use of Orry outside Japan. Mike Worrall's superb dog Max has lines to Orry also.

### **Watch This Space**

While Japan does not have the depth of numbers competing that Germany can boast (who has?) they have showed steady improvement to their current position and they have done it correctly. They did not buy short-term success. They have invested time, (an invaluable commodity,) in their programme. They have bred well using what will almost certainly be a pillar bloodline for the future and they have taken expert advice well. They have put in place a training programme for dogs, handlers and helpers and have a very astute leader at the helm.

Japan will be force to be reckoned with for the foreseeable future. I wish them success.

*Bobby Behan*