

by *Deb Kidwell and Rhonda Mann*

History and Development

The Azawakh is an African sighthound of Afro-Asiatic type. The original homeland of the Azawakh is the endless arid region of the south Sahara and Sahel, which encompasses the countries of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Azawakh means "land of the north," and the breed is named for the Azawakh Valley. They are the guardians, hunters and companions of the Tuareg and other ethnic tribes of the region.

The Azawakhs are called, "idii 'n illeli," which means "sighthound of the free people." Other sighthound-type dogs, called Afazo or Abaikor, are common to the region, but the differentiation is important. These dogs do not attain the nobility and type of the "idii," whose prototype sets the standard.

The breed was first imported to Yugoslavia in the early 1970s by Dr. Pecar, a Yugoslavian diplomat stationed in Burkina Faso. However, the dogs could not be bought. Dr. Pecar received his male as a gift from the nomads. In exchange for a female Azawakh, he later bartered his services as a hunter by killing a bull elephant that had been terrorizing the tribe. The French military and civil servants also played a significant role in exporting the Azawakhs to Europe. France is the patron country of the Azawakh.

The Azawakh has a show history in Europe that begins very soon after its original importation. They were first shown in the early 1970s under FCI rules as a variety of Sloughi. On January 1, 1981, they were accepted as a bonafide breed and were referred to as "Sloughi-Azawakhs." In 1986, the

Azawakh was finally recognized as a distinct and different breed when the "Sloughi" prefix was dropped.

The Azawakh made its debut in America in the mid-1980s. The first litter was whelped on October 31, 1987. These first American Azawakhs were all red or fawn with white markings. The first brindles came to America in 1989, with the first brindle litter whelped November 27, 1990. In the mid- 90's, a parti-color male was imported from Burkina Faso. In 1997, a mixed parti-color and sand litter, which had been bred in Mali, was whelped in Alaska. It is hoped that an even larger selection of colors will find their way to the US from Africa in the near future.

In America, the Azawakh is recognized by the AKC Foundation Stock Service, the United Kennel Club (UKC), the International All Breed Kennel Club of America IABKCA the American Rare Breed Association, and many other smaller registries. The American Azawakh Association is the parent club for the breed in the U.S. Their history as show dogs is in its infancy, but their natural regal presence demands recognition.

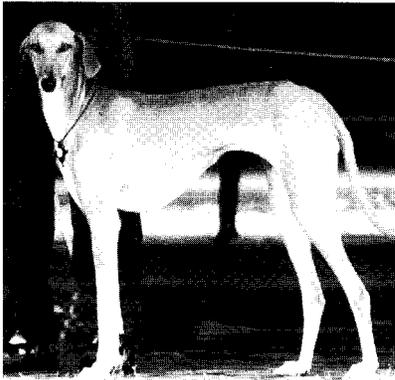
Lure coursing in the U.S.

As with most sighthound breeds, many Azawakhs love to lure course or open field hunt. The American Sighthound Field Association (ASFA) has given Provisional recognition to the Azawakh beginning January 2000. Full recognition of the breed should occur in 2001.

Prior to 1996, Azawakhs were frequently seen at field trials running as test dog and at practices. In 1996, they were finally recognized to run in the newly created Miscellaneous stake. The first

Azawakhs to be certified to run at an official trial were Dayyat 'n shat-ehad, CGC, TT, Therapy Dog and Tezma Kel Soulleret.

At the '96 International Invitational in South Carolina, the Azawakh was named the official breed to run as test dog for the first time in ASFA history. Dogs that ran at that trial were: Dayyat 'n shat-ehad, Amastan Kel Air, Kel Simoons Cinnamon, Celie, Djenabá, and Diallo.



BISS UCI Int'l, Natl. Ch. Kel Simoon Essari, FCC

In that same year, Deb Kidwell and Rhonda Mann gave a very well received breed presentation to the Annual Convention of Delegates in Houston, TX. Azawakhs present at the ACOD were Kel Simoon Afella (Kesia) and Amastan Kel Air, both owned by Deb Kidwell.

In 1999, after running in the Miscellaneous stake for three years, three Azawakhs were awarded the newly created Foundation Coursing Champion certificate. Those three were: Multi. BISS UCI Int. Natl. Ch. Kel Simoon Cinnamon; SBIS ARBA Grand Ch. Kel Simoon Celie; and BISS UCI Int. Natl. Ch. Kel Simoon Essari, who is Cinnamon's daughter. Essari was also the first Azawakh to run officially with recognized AKC breeds for the

Presidents Cup in Virginia (a non-regular Best in Event).

Of the three dogs that were awarded the FCC certificate, only Kel Simoon Essari is still actively competing. Kel Simoon Celie sustained a serious back injury during the 1997 I.I. in Kentucky, when she fell and hit her back on a pulley in the first course. She can no longer run competitively, but still enjoys outings to coursing practices. She had earned her FCC prior to her injury. Kel Simoon Cinnamon was killed in a tragic accident in early 2000.

During the Provisional year of 2000, several Azawakhs from different breeders finally appeared on the scene and are listed in the Top Ten standings. Those are: Tagalas, Kel Simoon Essari, WNS Ketoto Mateeka, Al Hara's Lafia Lo, Talempt Al-Ifriqiya, WNS Magic Mirth, Fada Faranda Bohemia and P' Akasha de Garde Epee.

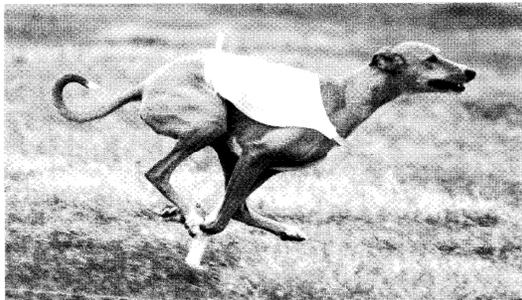
The Azawakh is also recognized by the National Open Field Coursing Association (NOFCA) as a rare breed. There have also been supportive offers for recognition with the National Oval Track Racing Association (NOTRA); however, at this time, no Azawakhs are participating in this sport.

General breed characteristics

The Azawakh is an active breed with incredible endurance. They should have a large yard or open area where they can stretch their legs on a regular basis. More importantly, however, they need interaction with the owner or another dog to encourage them to exercise. Finding a securely fenced ball field is perfect for play excursions. This breed will become fat and lethargic or hyper and destructive without proper energy outlets.

When discussing the temperament of an Azawakh, consideration should be given to individual personalities and contributing backgrounds, both genetic and environmental. However, there are several general characteristics common to the breed. Azawakhs are gentle and affectionate with those they are willing to accept. They constantly solicit physical affection. However, they may be distant and reserved with strangers, and could even be savage or aggressive. Generally, they distribute their affection and seek to be recognized as a member of the family; therefore, they are not kennel dogs. Interestingly, in their countries of origin (COO), the Azawakh prefers not to be touched by strangers, however, is not aggressive. Unprovoked aggression toward a family member or guest would never be tolerated.

Described in Dog World as a “warrior class dog,” they have the intelligence and heart to protect. When approached on their own turf, they will usually bark ferociously. In situations where their duty as guardian is not necessary, their reactions may range



*Multi SBIS UCI Int. Natl. Ch. Kel
Simoon Cinnamon, FCC*

from friendly and exuberant, to mildly curious, to arrogantly indifferent.

Although generally not outgoing, several of the breed in the U.S. and Europe are making social contributions as therapy

dogs in nursing homes and rehabilitation centers.

They seem to possess an uncanny combination of total loyalty and independence. Each new situation presents the potential for the struggle between the dog’s natural desire to please his owner and his prideful desire to do things his own way. A firm, fair hand is called for.

The Azawakh with children and other dogs

Much discussion has been given to the guardian nature of the Azawakh, but we must remember that this is a sighthound. As a rule, they seem to accept other dogs, though sometimes grudgingly, as protected members of their own pack.

The Azawakh is a very dominant breed. Within a household pack, they will almost always aspire to the alpha dog position. If there is an existing dominant dog in the pack, this can sometimes cause conflict within the pack.

No one can predict the individual personalities of all dogs in any breed. There are some situations that should be avoided with guardian and sighthound dogs of any breed. Children playing together sometimes squabble, and it is natural for a guard dog to protect “his” child from their playmates.

Chase or prey behavior is another situation that can be a problem. Children or other pets running away from the hound can activate the prey drive. The hound may try to “take down” the child or other pet from behind, as they would prey while hunting.

Because comparatively few generations have been removed from the need to hunt daily for personal and family

survival, the hunting instinct is very strong in this breed.

A good rule of thumb is never to leave the Azawakh with children while unsupervised by an attentive adult. There are individual dogs of all breeds that do not like children.

The Azawakh, as a breed, with care given to the situations mentioned, should fit well into any family structure.

Obedience training

The Azawakh is easily trained, using positive training methods. They respond very well to gentle, yet FIRM corrections and are usually food-motivated. Extreme dominance-type training, such as alpha rollovers, is NOT the training method of choice for this breed. The Azawakh has an amazing amount of dignity and must be treated with mutual respect and honor. Rough treatment and training can result in a hound that is either broken in spirit or very aggressive and impossible to handle. An Azawakh broken in spirit is a sad sight in deed!

Many Azawakhs can be reliable off lead. This characteristic makes the breed an enjoyable companion for people who like to run, hike, and camp or just hang out!

Health and nutrition

The Azawakh is generally a healthy breed. In medical treatment of the hound, natural, holistic methods work very well. They heal amazingly well from cuts and scrapes. However, the Azawakh is a natural, primitive breed whose immune system could be compromised by the injudicious use of chemicals and over-vaccination.

The Azawakh, as a breed, does have several health issues. The most common

of these health concerns are hypothyroidism, spondylosis (a degenerative spinal disease), seizures, and several autoimmune-mediated diseases, such as eosinophilic myositis, and autoimmune thyroiditis.

Cardiac problems, though not common, can be found in the breed. Bloat and gastric torsion, though rare, have been known to occur. Hip dysplasia is virtually unknown in the Azawakh because of its upright, open-angled structure and high hip profile. There are no known eye diseases in Azawakhs at this time.

Weight maintenance of Azawakhs is an important area to consider. They should be slim. In proper weight, some ribs and vertebrae, and the hipbones should be visible. It's not to say they should be skeletal, but Azawakhs are structured to be on the thin side. Overfeeding will adversely affect the joint structure of the hound, especially in puppies. Azawakh puppies should never be fat and roly-poly. Keeping them slim as they are growing permits the joints and other body parts to grow properly, without additional stress, wear and tear. Slim pups are less prone to growth plate problems.

General impressions and key points of the breed standard

Azawakhs are elegant, tall dogs of proud bearing. The appearance of the dog is marked by its slender, rectangular form, with dry muscles and moderate limb angulation. This sighthound presents itself as a rangy dog whose body fits into a rectangle with its longer sides in a vertical position. The length of the body is 90% the height of the hound. This ratio may be slightly higher in bitches. This "format" may seem extreme when compared with other sighthound breeds.

The height for males ranges from 25-1/2" to 29", females from 23-1/2" to 27". Weight ranges from 33-55 pounds. Life expectancy ranges from 12-15 years.

The narrow head, with its pendant ears, is carried loftily atop a slender, gracefully arched neck. The big, dark and almond-shaped eyes appear quite expressive through darkly pigmented rims. Its tail is proudly carried above the line of the back. The skin should fit tightly over the whole body. The coat is short and fine.

The height of chest is 40% the height at withers. Well developed and deep, the chest should not reach the elbow in a mature specimen. The brisket maybe rounded or angular, but should rise abruptly to an extremely tucked up and muscular belly.

The back is short, with a flat topline or it may have a slight rise over the loin. The hips must always be at the same level or higher than the level of the withers. *It is a fault to have hips lower than the withers.*

The forequarters and hindquarters should exhibit very open angles. The shoulders should be at about 130 degrees, the hindquarters at about 145 degrees.

Their movement is spectacular to watch, always very supple and elastic. At the trot, they are light, feathery and floating; the gallop is leaping, and they cover ground in great strides. At the trot, the forelegs should not extend beyond the level of the hound's nose.



SBIS ARBA Jr. Grand Ch. Amastan Kel Air
The movement is an essential point of the breed.

The FCI standard admits only sand to dark red and black brindled. In the U.S., the American Azawakh Association recognizes all colors that naturally occur in the Azawakh's countries of origin. These other colors include: white, black, gray, blue, dilute brindles, grizzle, parti-color and all shades of brown, to include chocolate. The hound should have the requisite white markings to include a white bib and white brush at the tail tip. Each of the four limbs must have compulsorily a white "stocking," at least in the shape of tracing on the foot.

FCI standard eliminating faults

Lack of type (in particular translating as a recent crossing with another breed).

Size deviating from more than three centimeters (a little more than an inch) from the norms of the standard.

Prominent non-accidental anatomical deformation.

Non-acquired disabling anomaly. All spotted crippling defects.

Ribs curving in reverse at the bottom of the chest which gives the aspect of a “violin case”.

Overshot or undershot bite.

Harsh or semi-long coat.

Coat not identical to the standard.

Absence of any white marking at the extremity of one or more limbs.

Light eyes; i.e. bird of prey eyes.

Timid character, panicky or aggressive to the point of attack.

Sources and resources

The American Azawakh Association, Inc. (AAA) is the parent club for the Azawakh in the U.S. The AAA was founded on February 7, 1988. The club’s goals are to promote the pure Azawakh and guarantee the breed a permanent future in the U.S. Further information may be obtained by writing to the: American Azawakh Association, 30083 Rows Mill Road, Rhoadesville, VA 22542 or e-mail dayyat@aol.com. The club publishes a quarterly newsletter, The Azawakh Aegis, which is available by subscription to interested persons.

There are also several books that have small sections about Azawakhs, or deal with the nomads who breed them in the countries of origin.

Dog’s Best Friend: Journey to the Roots of an Ancient Partnership Ursula Birr, Gerald Krakauer, Daniela Osterlander

The Pastoral Tuareg: Ecology, Culture and Society Johannes & Ida Nicolaisen

Der Azawakh: Windhund der Nomades in Mali (in German) H.J. Strassner, E. Eiles

Wind, Sand and Silence: Travels with Africa’s Last Nomads. Victor Englebert



*BISS ARBA Grand Ch. Kel Simoon
Celie, FCC*