

Adventures With Ollie

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Although I literally grew up with Brittansys (back in that day they were called Brittany Spaniels) and I have owned Brittansys since 1983, my current situation is like none I've encountered before.

Let me fill in a few details. In the fall of 1976, I returned to Northern Virginia from Ohio to begin a new career. Renting a home in 1981 (and purchased in 1983) I rescued a six-month Brittany, Benjamin Franklin (part of his AKC name!), from the Fairfax County Animal Shelter. Ben was a great companion and a well manner Brittany. He enjoyed life in Falls Church, our trips to South Dakota to visit my wife's family and working in the fields in both eastern and western SD. Since I'm not a hunter, Ben's field work was limited. As Ben aged, I got a call in 1994 from the staff of Fairfax County Animal Shelter that another young Brittany needed a home. Jocab of Sterling (Jake) arrived at the Shelter after five previous stops. Our home would be his seventh and final destination. He was a wild boy that needed serious obedience training. He responded so positively to obedience work that we earned two obedience titles and, along the way, discovered NVBC. His desire and talents to work in the field were amazing, earning a JH title in his first four outings.

Upon my retirement from Fairfax County government, we moved to Santa Fe where Jake had literally hundreds of acres to hunt for rabbits and quail. Jake was in his element although he was clearly in his twilight years as he developed cancer. It was during this time I was contacted by a family in Virginia that needed to place their 2½ + year old Brittany, Sigbrit Ollie, in a home that could provide an environment more suited for him. As webmaster for NVBC, I receive inquiries every couple weeks or so related to Brittansys. This was one of the few requests to help place a Brittany in a new home. Alas, my efforts to find a home for Ollie in the metro area were unsuccessful. Ollie was both neutered and oversized. Not exactly what most NVBC members would be looking for in a Brittany. Given Jake's age and health, we decided to offer Ollie a new home. We only saw a couple of pictures of Ollie and didn't realize exactly what we were getting until he landed at the Albuquerque Sunport. And he arrived in dramatic fashion! I grabbed his collar as we prepared to take him out of his travel crate. The collar came off in my hand and Ollie took off running paying no attention to our calls. He ran by a guard stand where a guard stopped and held him for me. Thank you Homeland Security!

Ollie arrived ready for road trips	
	<p>From that auspicious beginning, Ollie and I have been working on not only obedience training but he has afforded me my first experience teaching a Brittany to hunt. With our set up visit to the veterinary, Ollie tipped in at 63.3#. Measuring 23 inches at the shoulder, he was one HUGE Brittany! Literally a Brittany and a half and it became clear that he was built for comfort and not speed. It took several trips to the dog park to find his third gear. On our trips around our neighborhood Ollie stayed on the driveway and gravel and dirt road. He rarely ventured more than a couple steps off into the desert green lands. Cholla, with their nasty stickers, and prickly pair cactus may have factored into Ollie's self imposed limits.</p>

Growing up I heard the old adage that females dogs were smarter than males and the bigger the male the less intelligent the dog. If that was true, I faced a major challenge with Ollie. Ollie's first owners told me they believed Ollie would be a good and willing learner. How right they were. Ollie quickly grasped the basic obedience commands of sit, down, stay, front, come to heel position, and the stand. He also gained confidence and trust in me. We went from needing three people to cut his nails to him allowing me to trim his nails with a Dremel tool and without a fuss. I can even clean his teeth with a dental scraping tool! In our pre-novice obedience class, Ollie was at the head of his class. My previous obedience classes with Jake helped me be a good teacher for Ollie. But it's Ollie's willingness and quick uptake that, frankly, has amazed me. Having never been off lead prior to arriving in Santa Fe in mid-April, Ollie has quickly adapted to my commands which enables us to go outside multiple times daily with Ollie under my vocal commands.

It was clear from the outset that Ollie is built for comfort!



In reviewing Ollie's AKC pedigree, it is clear that he comes from a long list of FC with a few DCs sprinkled about. The April issue of The American Brittany magazine brought his lineage to life as his littermate, Sigbrit's Catch Me Now, was listed as the ABC 2006 Central Region Futurity Gun Dog.

Meanwhile back at our (former cattle) ranch, how would I go about teaching or perhaps enabling Ollie to become a complete Brittany? Being a non-hunter and never having trained a dog to hunt, I turned to my basic obedience training instincts . . . and trusted Ollie's instincts and breeding would kick in. Combining an out-of-sight long sit stay with scenting, search and find, I worked on encouraging Ollie to use his nose to find Milk Bones. He mastered both the sit stay and being able to quickly scent out his treats no matter where they are hidden. Spending time in our courtyard and fenced-in side yard, Ollie discovered critters that interested him and awoke his hunting instincts. Mice and lizards may not be part of a typical training regiment for upland game bird dogs but they worked for Ollie engaging his hunting instincts. These instincts easily carried over beyond our fenced and walled-in areas to the great outdoors. Stickers aside, Ollie is eagerly but cautiously venturing further out into the surrounding desert. His obedience training has blended nicely with his desire to hunt as he comes a running to work any area I point out. And he works it until he picks up a scent.

To my surprise and disappointment, this is the first year without Scaled Quail in our yard. Typically, we have dozens of quail on and adjacent to our property. That would be perfect for Ollie's development. With fall only a few weeks away, I plan to take Ollie to practice fields owned by and used by members of the Central New Mexico Brittany Club. This area, free of cactus and stocked with birds, should help Ollie

advance his hunting skills. I know he is steady to shot, can hold a point, and is trainable. He only needs to work with birds to round out his basic skill set required of a Junior Hunter.

Ollie gaining his hunting feet, err paws (late July)



Jake was the smartest Brittany I've ever owned or been around but Ollie is continually surprising me. We had a full-length mirror installed in our bedroom this week. Ollie was immediately drawn to the Brittany in the mirror. After a brief few seconds of observation, he walked around the bathroom door looking to see what was "behind the mirror!" Preceding Sue Drazek's confirmation, my guess this behavior is further proof of Ollie's intelligence.

Since Ollie is now a very suitable 55.1#, our goals have become earning both Novice Obedience and Junior Hunter titles next year. I'm certain Ollie is up to both challenges. We just need to work a bit more on heeling on and off lead and working birds. I'm looking forward to these adventures with Ollie.