

DAN MICK AND TIKKA

Reprinted from SoCal NAVHDA
On Point Newsletter



A few years ago, my (now) wife, Chiani, and I were walking through Bass Pro Shops. Upstairs, near the guns section, my wife saw someone with their dog. It was a beautiful black and white dog with medium hair and really nice feathering on its tail. She walked up to the man and asked to greet the dog. When she asked the man what type of dog it was, she was told it was a Large Munsterlander. She had never heard of such a breed and was told that they are a relatively uncommon German hunting dog. I didn't say hi

to the dog as I was too busy at the gun counter, but I did see it and, he was stunning! We left BPS and on the way home, Chiani and I were talking about the dog and how, one day, it would be nice to get a dog like that, that I could train and spend time with in the field and with any kids we may have in the future.

We lost our lab-mix, Sadie, back in May of this year. She was an amazing companion and just the sweetest pup anyone could ever want. Cancer took its toll on her very suddenly, and after we had to put her down, we both felt as though we were cheated out of being able to enjoy 3-5 more years with her. There was such an emptiness in the house after her passing, despite 3 other dogs in the house. Chiani knew that, as Sadie was my dog, I would need to get another dog when the time was right, but she expected that to be several months down the road.

About a week later, the void that existed in the house was just too much and I began to look around for another dog. Remembering the Munsterlander that Chiani met at BPS, I began earnestly looking for breeders of Small Munsterlanders. (We thought that the size of the SM was better suited for us as compared to the LMs). I contacted several breeders, but none had any puppies available or any planned litters. I spoke with Sande Mustain (Mustain Kennels) and Pam Robinson (Robingun Kennels). They were so pleasant and helpful. It quickly became apparent how much they love and care for this breed. Pam told me about an other kennel, Hunting Hills Kennel, that may have one or two unclaimed pups from a recent litter.

I quickly got on the phone with Kris Hill who confirmed that there was 1 male and 1 female that were available. Apparently, the family that initially claimed them had to back out as it wasn't the right time for them to get a couple of puppies. Kris and I spoke at length about the possibility of me getting the female. She asked me a ton of questions, and I did the same of her. It just felt more and more like this was about to happen! My wife and I expected to have to wait weeks or months for a SM, but it turned out, we only had to wait for a few days!..

Kris spoke so highly of the female, Yoshe, and about her breeding. Kris told me how strong Yoshe's nose was and how

much drive she had. I couldn't wait to let my wife know that we would have a puppy in a few days (pending my wife's approval of course!). My wife gave me the go ahead and the money was sent. We were so excited! A few days later, we went down to LAX to pick up Yoshe. She was so beautiful and so nervous! We loaded her into the car and headed for home! She and I bonded immediately. She was instantly daddy's girl!

We didn't love the name Yoshe. We couldn't decide on a name we liked until Chiani suggested Tikka. It was an instant fit! When I was researching SMs and speaking to the breeder, I kept hearing about NAVHDA, a group I had never heard of. The breeder asked that I test Tikka in the Natural Ability Test at the very least. Training a hunting dog sounded fun and I wanted to do right by the breeder (and Tikka), so I showed up at my first SoCal NAVHDA training day back in June.



Tikka had so much fun chasing birds and playing in the field. Everyone I met that day, and every day since, was so welcoming and helpful. It was clear that everyone has a common goal of improving and promoting the best versatile hunting dogs possible. Tikka and I went through some exercises with other NA pups that day. I thought we did pretty well, but I felt as though I was in over my head. I had no clue as to what I was doing and was sure that I was going to screw Tikka up! I set my sights on the NA test in October. I figured that, even if she doesn't pass, we would both gain valuable experience in how the tests are run, and we can always retest in the spring!

Since she joined our family, we have attended every training day and I have tried to work with her with the limited time, resources, and knowledge that I had. Initially, I was freaked out because she wouldn't swim. I kept thinking that I had already ruined her as SMs are supposed to love water! Everyone kept reassuring me that there is no reason to worry, she



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will swim when she is ready.

They were correct! She took to the water when we visited the San Diego chapter's training day. She loves it! The amount of knowledge and expertise that I have found in the membership is simply incredible, as is everyone's willingness to share it with me! It seems as though, whatever problem I am encountering in training her, 50 others have been through



the exact same thing and they all talk me off of the ledge!

Tikka ran in the NA test on October 12. We were so nervous (actually, I was probably the only one nervous). We ran second that day. I was really worried about the tracking, the pointing, and the gunshot (she had a bad experience the week before). We had only done 1 track with a live pheasant, and Tikka stopped pointing several weeks before. In her search phase, she did an amazing job. She covered the field like an old pro and with a ton of excitement. When the first gunshot sounded, Tikka took off towards the street. I immediately thought I was doomed. It turns out that she just saw my wife at the edge of the field and wanted to say hi. She did so and immediately went back to her search. On the second shot, she showed no reaction. As she was searching, she found a few birds and immediately locked up in a hard point. It was almost like she knew she was being tested and wanted to show off her abilities! I was so proud!

On the tracking phase, we had a small slip up. When it was her turn to run, we went to the starting point. I tried to steady her and focus her on the feathers. When I released her, she just ended up running around like an idiot having fun! She eventually found the bird, but it was obvious that she was hunting, not tracking. The judges allowed me to re-run that phase. Prior to her next at-bat, I took her to a side field and threw the bumper for her several times, hoping to burn some excess energy off of her. It worked like a charm. When her turn came up again, she walked out to the starting point very calmly and seemed focused. I steadied her and got her into the scent. When I released her, her nose was glued to the ground. She was obviously using her nose and was deliberately tracking whatever scent she found. She didn't find the

bird, but the judges did say that she ended up tracking a bird released for a previous dog and that was good enough! Her swim test was a piece of cake! 2 throws and 2 methodical and deliberate retrieves. At that point I knew that we had a real shot at earning a prize. I was on cloud 9! When we all met at the campsite for the scores, I could barely contain myself as the judge kept giving 4s for Tikka. She did get a 3 in tracking, but that was the max score she could receive as we had to retest that portion. If I would have burned the energy off of her prior to her first attempt, I am confident that she would have gotten a 4 in tracking as well. She ended up with a Prize 1 score of 110. I'll admit that I did get a little misty when the judge announced the final score! I was just so proud of her!

It's been a couple of weeks since the test and I eagerly look forward to the next training day and the opportunity to work towards the UT. The people and dogs involved with So-Cal NAVHDA are top notch. I really do cherish the time that I get to spend with everyone that I meet. I hope I am able to stay active and involved with the chapter for a very long time. I am also looking forward to being able to bring my soon-to-be-born son to the training sessions when he is old enough! *Looking back over the past few months, here are a few things that all new trainers and handlers should know:*

1. Owning/training versatile hunting dogs is an expensive and time-consuming endeavor, but one that is infinitely rewarding!
2. Don't buy books and DVDs about dog training. If you do, read/watch them, then throw everything you learned out the window.
3. Spend the time talking to fellow NAVHDA members and solicit advice from them. They will get to know your dog over time and they want to see him succeed.
4. When in doubt, trust the dog!
5. *Guido isn't yelling at you, he is just speaking passionately!*

Thank you to all those that have helped me and Tikka! We'll see you in the fields sometime soon! Happy hunting!
Dan Mick and Tikka

