



A to Z of breeds: Azawakh

History of the Azawakh

Please, ask not what the breed can do for you; more importantly, ask yourself what you can do for the breed

THE AZAWAKH (named after the Azawakh Valley which runs through Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) is a West African sight hound of ancient origin; raised in the South Sahara (Sahel) by the Touareg.

Peulh, Hausa, Fulani and Bella peoples – originally nomadic, some now live settled lives. It is the only indigenous canine due to isolation by desert, the tribes' culture and the harshness of the environment.

The functions of the Azawakh are companion, hunter, herder and guard; they accompany their family as a pack – humans, livestock and hounds all belong to it. In the

by **Mary Snowden**

desert, they keep people and livestock together when travelling or in settlement. Hounds will subtly – and if necessary, vocally – alert to

the approach of strangers and to unusual situations; they often hunt back to their respected one.

They prefer to sleep next to each other and will make dens to keep away from temperature extremes and sandstorms. Rarely leashed, they show great intelligence; can make their own decisions, but prefer to help those they respect with the tasks of the day. To be respected, one needs to be consistently kind, fair and patient.

The first Az's brought to Europe were gifts of esteem from their African breeders; Dr Pecar, a

diplomat and some of his colleagues were thus honoured in the early 1970s. Two lines developed in Yugoslavia and in France – the country of patronage under FCI rules. The FCI first recognised the Azawakh as a separate breed in 1980 but had registered them as "Sloughi - Azawakhs" much earlier.

Owing to the marked differences between the two breeds, both sets of devotees campaigned for separate recognition from the outset. The support of each club for the other thankfully continues.



♦ Early Yugoslavian female



♦ Ejeker



♦ Gao and Lara



♦ Toboro in the desert. Old and still loved



Q&A with Andrey Klishas of the Gran-Vencedor Azawakhs in Moscow

Helen Davenport-Willis: Mr Klishas, when and where did you first encounter the Azawakh?

Andrey Klishas: The first time when I felt really stricken by the Azawakh, was a couple of years ago, at one of the shows in Italy where I judged. As the Sighthound group judge, I was already acquainted with this breed, but all the dogs that I had happened to see by that moment seemed to be quite rugged in outline and too heavy, so they never impressed me as much. The male whom I had the pleasure to evaluate in Lecce was the embodiment of true grace and dignity. He was standing in the ring like an artwork, and was absolutely irresistible and self-sufficient.

HDW: What attracted you to the breed and makes you want to own them?

AK: First of all, I was attracted by the fact that this dog was completely different from the other breeds which we're used to keep as "home pets". It was the wild animal on alert, and in the way how he was looking at people around there was no confidence at all, even if there was no hostility or aggression either. I felt it would be amazing to get such a friend, and to earn his love and his trust. For me, it was the kind of challenge that I accepted.

HDW: Where and which kennels did you purchase your foundation stock from?

AK: The only kennel which we contacted for the Azawakh puppy was "Azamour" by Francesca Zampini. I've never been thinking about whatever else, just because the dog who totally fascinated me in Italy was born in this kennel, and I've got the highest recommendations to "Azamour" breeding from my friends judges. Later I was lucky to meet Francesca Zampini in person. Thanks to her and to her wonderful dogs, I've discovered this breed for myself in a new way.

HDW: Have you started to establish your own lines at Gran Vencedor?

AK: At the moment, we have two Azawaks, male and female, so it's too early to talk about our own lines. Breeding is the responsibility first of all, especially if we're working with such unusual dogs as Azawaks, whose temperament is absolutely not easy. Not everyone could be able to cope with this breed, and you should measure up your chances very seriously before starting. So breeding Azawaks in Russia is not a trivial task, even if it's more than tempting.

HDW: How difficult it is to keep an Azawakh in condition for the show ring?

AK: I'd say it really can be a problem to keep an Azawakh in a proper condition for shows, particularly in Russia where the climate is rather cold, and winter time is almost half a year long. Azawaks need a lot of free-range walking activities, and such a load must be given regularly, because movement is what that these dogs are actually born for. When watching Azawaks, many people think them to look too thin, or even skinny, but their normal constitution is like this, they have to be lean, and to leave an impression of elegance and fineness. In the same time, a good dog should have sufficiently strong bones and well developed musculature, so it's important to provide them with superior quality food rich in protein and fat.



♦ Andrey and Kemo



♦ Andrey and Amira

HDW: Do they make good companions?

AK: Yes, surely, an Azawakh can be an excellent companion, but most probable that all his affection will be given only to one of the family members. The dog will choose the owner himself, and will be tenderly attached to him, however in this certain case unconditional affection absolutely doesn't mean unconditional obedience. An Azawakh remains a bit wild and a bit reserved animal, even if he luxuriates in your bed every day, and he will not always ready to follow your commands. In fact, inimitable charm of the breed is created by this air of "wildness".

We also have to take into account that an Azawakh can be unapproachable or even aggressive with the strangers, especially with those who try to impose their company on him.

HDW: What are the essential breed points that make the Azawakh breed type?

AK: In addition to what that I've already said about the distinctive character of this breed, I'd like to underline that an Azawakh can be not only a companion and friend, – it's important to remember that he is also a hunter and bodyguard. An Azawakh has highly developed intellect, and this is why it looks like he is considering and estimating all the commands given by the owner, and then making his decision himself. There is no way to put any pressure on Azawaks, or to use tough methods of training. You should be able to come to the agreement with these dogs, if you want to keep their unique originality and incredibly fascinating "wildness". Those who are looking for a dog with the complete readiness to obey, have to understand that an Azawakh is not for them. If you own this breed, you must learn how to become a friend and a good company for your dog, and you always have to look for the agreement.

HDW: For the future, what are your hopes and ambitions for the breed both in your own country and worldwide?

AK: I don't think that Azawaks, with all their peculiarities, will be too much popular, so I hope they will avoid problems which are typical for "fashionable", or "commercial" breeds. Nevertheless, these unbelievably beautiful and clever dogs will have more and more lovers all over the world, and the most important point will be to save not only the correct breed type, but also the specific behavior, thanks to which we can consider the Azawakh as an unique representative of wild nature who just allowed us to live near him and to enjoy his incomparable grace and his beauty.



♦ Azamour puppy



♦ Azamour Wahid on the move