

## THE CARRIER GENE *(Originally Published in Dogs in Canada)*

I've been carrying around a secret, one which reflects on my breeding of German Shorthaired Pointers. I know that as a responsible breeder, I should be completely open about genetic traits in my line. I have to admit however that I have concealed a trait from everyone, including my unsuspecting puppy buyers.

Well, I'll just come out and say it. All my Shorthairs have the "carrier gene".

For those of you who have not encountered this before, let me explain. The carrier gene manifests itself by compelling the Shorthair to pick up an item, any item, at any time or place, and carry it around, until interest is lost and the item is unceremoniously dropped and left. In most affected Shorthairs, the gene is non-specific, that is, any object in the mouth will do. This is not to say however that the Shorthair cannot have favourite articles. Rudy will always first seek a stuffed toy or a shoe. Ben likes carrying sticks and socks, while young Riki shows an early preference for panty hose and small logs.

I can count on the carrier gene motivating Rudy to greet all visitors with something in her mouth. On a good day, this something might be an innocuous fuzzy, or a shoe carelessly left on the rack in the closet. On a bad day, it is likely to be something from the waste basket in the bathroom or from the floor in the laundry room, or even the remote from the coffee table, which I will later discover with no battery cover and only one battery. This prompts 24 hours of anxiety, following Rudy around with a trowel as she does her business, until the missing battery is found under the couch, behind the cabinet or in the woodbox.

It wouldn't be so bad if the Shorthairs kept the pilfered articles in the house or used some discretion as to which objects to bring onto public display. But alas in a world with doggy doors, this is not often the case. As I stand at the kitchen sink, it has become second nature to look out the window and idly scan the property for telltale signs of shoes on the grass, underwear draped around the base of fenceposts, or a bra nestled at the edge of the woods. It is particularly frustrating on a rainy day to find only one boot, and know that the other is "out there" where one needs two boots to venture.

I accept that there is no cure for the carrier condition. My rantings and scoldings generally elicit no more than a mildly curious glance in my direction and Shorthair whispers about my time of life. I therefore devised a way to counter the effects of the carrier gene. My plan was to teach Rudy, on my command, to search the property and bring to me any article that was not of nature made. Given that she's a Shorthair, I didn't expect this to be particularly difficult.

One recent Saturday morning therefore I carefully seeded the acreage with a variety of objects – a shoe, some underwear, socks, hand pruners, a garden glove and the like. As I ran from article to article giving the fetch command, Rudy bounded along beside me, really getting into the spirit of this new game. She was happily picking up some panty hose when I sensed that we were not alone. Sure enough, a local farmer from whom I had ordered some hay was standing at the fence, studying my performance. As I opened the gate to allow his truck through, he commented laconically, "Strange, but in my day we trained our bird dogs on birds". Caught off guard and stung with embarrassment, I snarled softly, "You train your way and I'll train mine".

So there we have it. I concede defeat – this gene is stronger than me and it's here to stay. It is therefore time to stand tall and announce in the finest help-group tradition, "Hi, my name is Janet, and my Shorthairs have the carrier gene".