

The Phudd

by Dean Wickwire

Most of you have owned that one special dog. The one that seemed to be the right dog for you. Always did the right thing and seemed to know exactly what you wanted. I did; his name was Fred and he became an AKC Grand Field Champion with a CDX in obedience, and a masters degree as house pet/friend.

This story is not about Fred, but rather his grandson, Elmer Phudd, AKA The Phudd. Elmer could never replace Fred and never tried. Born in June of 1988, Elmer was a typical red and white basset with absolutely no outstanding features. He soon proved to be too fast for AKC field trials. He did take a second on a day when it was too hot for most dogs to run.

At about 2 1/2, Elmer went blind from severe glaucoma. Any contact with his head resulted in a scream of pain. We had his eyes operated on to relieve the pressure. The ducts to the eyes were blocked and silicone rubber was injected into the eye to replace the normal fluid. His eyes turned completely gray. He would have made a great zombie dog for a horror movie. Later, he ripped one eye and it was removed, making him a one eyed zombie.

Now a house pet, Elmer soon resumed a fairly normal life. He adapted to being blind and quickly learned to navigate the house and back yard. I started taking him for walks in the state park and it didn't take long for him to start leading the way. One day I took his leash off and away he went. His system was to follow the edge of a path and if he brushed against something, he would make a minor correction. He developed a road map of the entire park and if not watched, he would take off on a tour. He always came back to the car when he was ready to leave, but he might be gone for an hour.

It took some time for him to realize that his eyes could not cause him any pain. He started running game and slowly learned that he could push his way through heavy brush. I started running him in AKC Field Trials just to see what he could do. He was an accurate tracking dog and won 3 field trials to become a field champion.

Elmer first appeared in the ARHA at the first Basset World Hunt. Jacob James offered to put my dogs up at his house. We tied Elvis and Jason on overhead runs and left Elmer loose figuring he would stay with his bud-

dies. Jacob and I went into town and on the way back, Elmer was about 1/2 mile from the house headed for town along the edge of the dirt road.

Elmer entered hunts at most of the ARHA clubs, but he never did well in the final standings. His problem was trying to get to the cast when a rabbit was jumped. At one hunt, he struck and jumped the first rabbit and took the first check.

If you put Elmer in a pick up truck, you better be ready to catch him when the tailgate dropped. He knew exactly how far down to the ground and would take a flying leap off the truck. At many hunts he disappeared, only to show up as we were loading the dogs to leave. At a hunt in NJ, he disappeared and was finally located 1/2 mile away, chasing ducks along the creek.

When he wasn't running in the field, Elmer usually prowled the clubhouse area and frequently mooched food from the kitchen or motor homes.

Many things he did were not surprising to me, since I saw him every day. Running deer in the state park and finding his way back, walking up to and then around people and cars without ever touching them, maintaining Alpha dog status for about seven years after going blind, stories from handlers about how well he did, these all became routine, even his watching airplanes fly past.

There was one thing he did that amazed me, particularly the first time. One hot day in the state park, we went to the boat ramp for the dogs to get a drink. Instead of wading around armpit deep, Elmer kept going straight out. Now I'm watching a totally blind basset swimming toward the far shore, over 1/2 mile away. Just when I was ready to ask the boater nearby to get my dog, he turned left and swam about 50 feet up the lake, turned left again and swam the 75 feet back to the ramp. He did this on several occasions, only when it was very hot and we had been out for over 1/2 hour.

I never told Elmer he was handicapped and I am not sure he realized it either.

I'm glad I was able to give him a chance to do his thing and even I have to admit that he was pretty amazing.

Elmer was too independent and too busy with his schedule to be a real buddy, but the Phudd was a fun dog to own and one tough act to follow. ☺