

March 24, 1965

Gun Shy Dog Was Factor In Making Benson Trainer

By C. O. HARRIS
Freeman Feature

A GUN SHY springer spaniel, a lot of patience and a seemingly inbred understanding of dogs were factors in producing one of America's leading professional hunting dog trainers.

Orin Benson, 51, of Eagle, began his career in 1926 when a friend gave him the gun shy spaniel. He trained the dog in a few months and found the task interesting and satisfying. Word of his ability passed around and soon hunters were bringing their dogs to him for training.

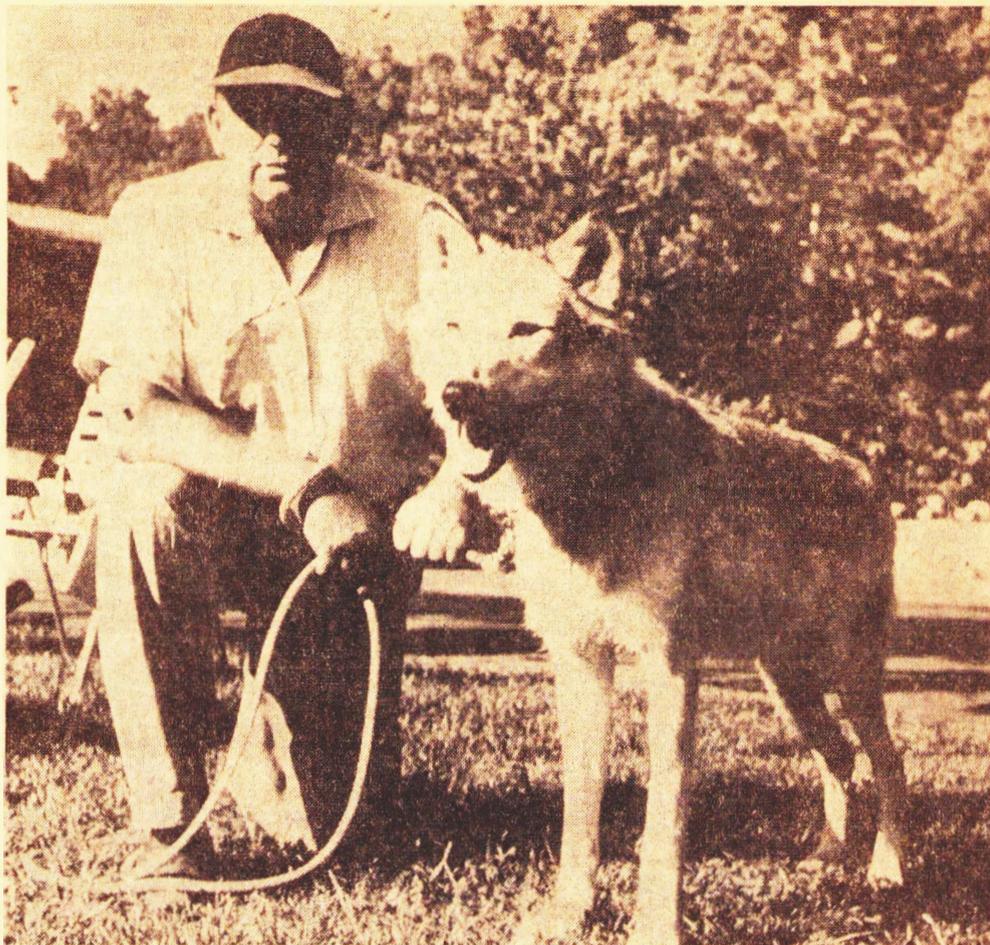
Benson was raised on a farm near White Bear, Minn. Leaving the farm in 1933 he worked as a kennel boy for Wally Larson at North Olmstead, Ohio. Later, while working for Hank Christians Goldwood Kennels at Dellwood, Minn., he handled "Toby of Willowlock" who was the first golden retriever to win best of show honors in an all-breed dog show.

Benson did not care for bench show work and in 1936 moved to Milwaukee and ran dogs in Wisconsin's first licensed retriever field trials. He was employed by Dogs Unlimited, a kennel started by enthusiasts Ben Boalt, Binks McGregor and Bob Pabst. He started to work the field trial circuit. Some of the outstanding labrador champions he handled were Black Panther, Black Roland of Koshkonong and Mully Gully Goo.

With his reputation as a dog trainer reaching national proportions Benson and his dog troupe were selected as director and actors by 20th Century-Fox for their movie short "Dog Sense."

Each spring Benson traveled extensively from coast to coast appearing at sports and vacation shows. During his early days of travel from city to city he designed a 30 foot trailer that provided living quarters for himself and 15 large dogs. The Bensons traveled in almost every state in this mobile kennel.

Benson has appeared with several dogs that will be remembered by audiences across the country. Dead Pan Moo, a Chesapeake Bay retriever, would jump



Orin Benson, noted trainer from Eagle, setting near his kennels and licensed shooting preserve.

as far as 22 feet into water to fetch a duck. Schatzie, a golden retriever, delighted spectators by retrieving a pigeon on stage at the age of 10 weeks. Fritzie I, a dachshund, performed his first show in Boston at the age of six weeks and his last in Milwaukee at 13 years. Benson has made several television appearances with his dog troupes.

This spring of 1965 marks the 25th annual Milwaukee sports show and Benson will again be a featured attraction.

While there are many good dog trainers throughout the country, Benson is probably the most publicized. This most likely is due to his flair for the unusual. He was the first to have a hunting dog point on stage. He injects honor into the act with a dachshund and a ring neck pheasant.

In the movie "Dog Sense" a ham Irish water spaniel named Shillelagh Spike furnished a real touch of comedy.

A highlight in Benson's career was the taming of Kepa and Pake, two magnificent timber wolves.

Benson had a life-long ambition to work with a "natural dog," one not yet oriented to man. The timber wolves fit the bill. Pat Wilsie, who operates animal exhibits in Vilas and Door counties, removed Kepa from an animal exhibit den at the age of 2 weeks. The wolf pup was presented to Benson. A year later Pake was born and Wilsie called Benson to come and take her.

Mrs. Benson recalled that "Kepa was a scrawny pup with about one hair to the square inch." He wanted to play with the dogs but none would associate with him.

But Kepa was destined to change. A balanced diet, expert care and affection, produced a proud, regal appearing animal. At the age of 4 years he weighs 125 pounds. He plays with Bobby, 11 and Lynn, 4, the two Benson children.

Benson had years of training experience when the wolves were acquired and felt his knowledge of canine psychology would tip the scales in his favor. Kepa has made public appearances with Benson. Appearing at the Milwaukee county stadium during a double header, Kepa was quite tolerant of the crowd. Once at a childrens benefit at Eau Claire, Kepa walked up and took an ice cream cone from a child's hand and consumed it with relish.

The most recent example of Benson's ability with canines occurred in the spring of 1964 when he trained four red fox pups that were to be characters in a U.S. forest service film. Under Benson's direction the red coated actors performed admirably.

This spring when the Kettle Moraine forest bursts into new life the red fox will perform for the final scenes.

Benson's kennels are located in the Kettle Moraine forest, north of the village of Eagle, in Waukesha county. His facilities house around 60 dogs, with about 20 in training. The balance are boarded for customers.

A husky 5 foot 11 inches, with a ruddy complexion, Benson has spent his life out-of-doors. The fall season finds him in Sheridan, Wyo., where he hunts the vicinity of the Big Horn mountains for deer, elk and sharp tail grouse. He has hunted ducks and geese in Canada and made a fly-fishing trip to Great Slave lake.