

They're on the bloodhound trail

It was like watching a cops and robbers movie. Except that we were sitting in bright sunshine on the side of a rural road next door to our country place near Markham.

Gathered was an international group of dog lovers who now were observing, with mounting excitement, the successful pursuit of a "criminal" hiding, after an early start through field and wooded hillside, somewhere far beyond our vision.

The long arm of the law, in this case, was represented by a 2½-year-old, 125-pound purebred bloodhound.

Nero, a member of the canine world's most celebrated stalkers by scent, was working, as he has done since he was a pup, with trainer-owner Dave Kenney of Espanola, in northern Ontario.

The "partners," as Dave describes them, were giving a demonstration at the initial meeting of a newly organized dog club, the Bloodhound Fanciers of Ontario.

The match was described as officially sanctioned by the Canadian Kennel Club, with confirmation and obedience judges assessing the 20 bloodhounds brought from around Ontario, and as far as New York and Michigan.

The match is a prelude to the Bloodhound Fanciers receiving sanction to mount a specialty show at the dog show being put on by the Barrie Club (when points will be given) the weekend of Aug. 1.

What the new club lacks in mem-



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bership at the moment, it more than makes up for in enthusiasm.

I am convinced bloodhound owners and trainers are as special and dedicated a breed as their pets and, as in the case of Dave Kenney, co-workers in the serious pursuit of justice or the tracking down of lost persons in the northern Ontario bush.

President of the new club is James Jay of Midhurst, near Barrie; his wife Dawn is vice-president, with Linda Winters as secretary and June Pitter, treasurer.

Police work

Kenney is a conservation officer for the ministry of natural resources in the provincial government, stationed in Espanola. Since acquiring and training Nero, he has been on call many times by the OPP and other police (apart from his regular job) in tracking down persons wanted for one reason or another, and those who are lost, as happens to many in that wide-open country with its sparse population.

A tall, lean Windsor-born Canadian, he became interested in conservation when working with the Hudson's Bay Co. in James Bay.

After graduating from the Ontario Forest Ranger School, he's work-

ed in several districts, and for 5 years has been in Espanola.

Dave had Labrador retrievers, but became more and more interested in the idea of a bloodhound, and bought the first one he saw advertised. That was Nero, and it seems to have been mutual love and shared professional expertise at first sight.

Dave has attended National Police Bloodhounds Association seminars in Pennsylvania, and the use of these unerring sniffers in the U.S. is much wider, and much more legally recognized than in Canada.

"The bloodhound is the only tracking dog I know which can trace the scent of one human being from a scuff mark, footprint or article right into a crowd in a city area without being detracted from that one individual scent," says Dave.

The animal has no special way of distinguishing the tracking down of a criminal from tracing a lost child, although it can be trained, as Nero is, to grab a hand or anchor a paw on a person when found, without injury.

Dave and Nero have had many adventures, including one of tracking a suspect for miles, across a bridge heavy with traffic, and into a crowd of people on a city street. Another time, Nero led his master into a restaurant and up to the table, where the astonished object of Nero's search was having dinner.

Lost children are difficult, because the bloodhound will sniff every item the child has touched in a house or yard before moving out to the field.

Back to the demonstration we witnessed. Nero was shut away from the roadside while the supposed criminal wandered across a very large field through shoulder-high grass. He made intricate patterns, criss-crossing his own trail several times, and at length disappeared behind an embankment of distant trees.

Nero, with the special harness Dave has designed and a long lead for his trainer, entered the field, smelled a sweater his prey had dropped, and wound his way unerringly through the same maze of patterns we had seen taken earlier by the object of his search. He pinned the man in an amazingly short period of time.

Olefactory powers

Dave has some fascinating information on the intricacies of human scent and the incredible olefactory powers of the bloodhound, and the importance of the trainer being able to "read" what the dog is believing by his actions on the trail, which may go for miles.

Scents can be picked up days after they have been left behind, and the bloodhound isn't fooled by the vagaries of the wind.

What has all this got to do with senior citizens? Just that if you keep your eyes open, you might pick up the scent of a bloodhound in your neighborhood.

□ *Age of Reason is a column for and about those over 50, appearing Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Write Age of Reason, Toronto Star, One Yonge St., Toronto M5E 1E6, or phone 367-2326.*

Nose for scent: Dave Kenney puts Nero through his paces at the first match of the Bloodhound Fanciers of Ontario. Kenney and Nero have worked a number of times for the police.

JOHN MAHLER/TORONTO STAR