

## The Wirehaired Vizsla in America -- by Deb Wall

The Wirehaired Vizsla was first introduced in North America in the early 1970s by sportsman Wesley Basler of Manitoba, Canada. The breed began to attract the attention of hunters in the United States who were looking for an easy-handling gun dog that was “a bit off the beaten path.” The Canadian Kennel Club and Vizsla Canada recognized the breed in 1977.

Although the Wirehaired Vizsla was recognized as an independent, separate breed in Europe by FCI in 1966 and subsequently in Canada, the Wirehaired Vizsla remained unrecognized in America as the result of a sort of “identity crisis.” Charles Newman had discovered the breed in his visits to Hungary in the 1960s and imported his first Wirehaired Vizslas to his Hungry Mother kennels in Volney, Virginia in 1973. But instead of using their rightful name of Wirehaired Vizsla, he called them “Uplanders” from the breed’s origins in the upland region of northern Hungary. He and other early U.S. promoters believed the uplander name would help distinguish the breed from its smooth cousin, the Vizsla.

They formed a club in Virginia with the aim of gaining support for “uplanders” among American sportsmen and applied for recognition with the Field Dog Stud Book and the American Kennel Club. However, there were far too few Wirehaired Vizslas in the country for recognition and also, because the Wirehaired Vizsla was recognized by that name everywhere else, both AKC and the Field Dog Stud Book refused to recognize the breed by the arbitrarily chosen designation of “versatile uplander”.

Further complicating the issue were some individuals who sought to circumvent the entire registration process and felt they could perpetuate the breed by conducting their own crossbreeding programs and calling them uplanders, rather than utilizing imported, purebred registered Wirehaired Vizsla breeding stock. This subverted the efforts made by those who had imported purebred European WHV stock and dogs known as uplanders were summarily dismissed as unregistereable by both the AKC and the Field Dog Stud Book. There was still very little known about the breed here in the US and early efforts to promote the breed as “uplanders” died out and few records remain of them.

Some dedicated enthusiasts of the Wirehaired Vizsla in Canada and the U.S. persisted in their efforts to preserve the integrity of the purebred Wirehaired Vizsla through importing purebred registered European stock for their breeding programs and testing the dogs' versatile hunting ability. The North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) tested the first Wirehaired Vizsla in 1974 (Schmidt of Strongmenger, bred by Frank Enstrom and owned by Paul Strongmenger) but was awarded no prize. NAVHDA formally recognized the breed in 1986. The first Wirehaired Vizsla registered in NAVHDA was Palotasmenti Jutka, a bitch bred by Molnar Pal and owned by Sandor Arany of Ontario, Canada. Her sire was Szandavari Cimbori, the dam was Ikrenyibia.

Through NAVHDA recognition and registration, the Wirehaired Vizsla was entered into the Field Dog Stud Book and the breed continued to grow in popularity among American hunters and falconers. By 2003, a total of 181 Wirehaired Vizslas in North America had been registered in NAVHDA and five new litters were registered that year. Despite the breed's rarity in the US, the Wirehaired Vizsla Club of America (WHVCA) was formed that same year in response to the need for a breed rescue organization in the United States.

By January 2006, over 350 Wirehaired Vizslas in North America had been registered in NAVHDA. Some individuals in America applied to the United Kennel Club (UKC) for recognition of the breed on their own behalf. The breed was recognized in UKC as the Hungarian Wire-Haired Vizsla in 2006 and a few people began showing their dogs. The United Hungarian Wire-Haired Vizsla Association was formed later that year for the owners who wanted to have a UKC licensed club to hold UKC events.

But because only AKC is widespread from coast to coast in the United States, with many events available in all 50 US states and because AKC is the only American registry accepted by kennel clubs in countries outside the US, an overwhelming majority of WHVCA members voted to begin the process of obtaining AKC recognition. The WHVCA formally applied for acceptance of the Wirehaired Vizsla into AKC's Foundation Stock Service (FSS) program in autumn of 2007, the first step for eventual AKC recognition.

Before FSS would consider the application, the WHVCA had to get official word from the Vizsla Club of America (VCA) that the Wirehaired Vizsla is not merely a variety of Vizsla, but a completely separate breed with its own pedigrees. The Wirehaired Vizsla was then approved for acceptance into AKC-FSS in January, 2008 as an independent breed under the Hungarian standard. The WHVCA began collecting pedigrees for the club's initial packet of registrations to submit to FSS. Registrations, including pedigrees and photographs of each dog, were submitted to the club without restriction to WHVCA membership while others were sent directly to FSS. Nearly 100 registrations, including some from Canada, with three or more generation pedigrees have been submitted to be the foundation stock of the Wirehaired Vizsla in the AKC.

With dogs on record in FSS, the WHVCA petitioned for eligibility to compete in AKC Performance Events (Hunt Tests) and Companion Events (Tracking, Agility, Obedience and Rally). The petition was granted in August, effective January 1, 2009. Owners across the country are preparing for AKC Hunt Tests and Companion Events. In addition, dogs can be shown for conformation in AKC 'B' Matches. Also known as a Fun Match, no championship points are awarded at B Matches but ribbons are awarded and entries/results are recorded in AKC records.

Full recognition of the Wirehaired Vizsla by AKC is a process that will take several years. The Wirehaired Vizsla will stay in FSS while the studbook and WHVCA grow to be ready to advance to the AKC Miscellaneous Class in one to three years. After some time in Miscellaneous, usually another one or two years, the breed will finally be eligible to petition for full AKC recognition.