Interview with Espen Engh, Famous Greyhound Breeder

In January 2005, I had the honor of interviewing Espen Eng, a world-renowned Greyhound breeder from the Jet Kennel. Under his breeding program, dogs from this kennel have won over 400 championship titles in more than 40 countries worldwide. Espen lives in Norway and is an internationally recognized breeder, expert, and authoritative specialist in the breeding of hound breeds.

His philosophy and breeding methods are well-thought-out and highly successful. The experience and knowledge he shared with us will be very useful for breeders. An abbreviated version of this article was first presented in the issue of the magazine "Dog Review" dedicated to hounds, July 2005.

When did you first become interested in Greyhounds?
My mother, Kari, began working with Greyhounds in 1955. This year she celebrates her fiftieth anniversary as a Greyhound breeder. In the 1950s, the Greyhound breed was a novelty in Norway. The first dogs appeared here after World War II. Kari got her first Greyhound from a local breeder. It was half a show dog, half a racing dog.

Kari, a true enthusiast, was absorbed in raising that Greyhound. It wasn't that he was very good or consistently won at shows, but that dog served as a purpose that motivated Kari to seriously engage with this breed. She soon began attending all shows, became an assistant in kennel clubs and rings, and then, in the late 1960s, started judging.

When were you born?
I was born in 1962. When I was just a few weeks old, my mother was already taking me to shows. She has an interesting ability to enthuse others with what she loves. It was a big family. So when people ask me when I got my first dog, I say it wasn't that I got a dog, but that I appeared with a dog.

When I was in Norway, Kari told me that as a child, you would sometimes sit in the front rows during her judging and loudly shout about the mistakes you thought she was making.
Yes, that was true. At the age of six, I was forbidden to sit in the front rows near the ring when my mother was judging because I was too loud and too confident. But it was happiness. I didn't need mentors; I had my mother.

Where did the name of your kennel come from?
The prefix comes from the name of my first dog, Int Ch Jet Commander, a brindle dog. He was born in 1966 and was bred to standard. He belonged to one of the litters of the Carnlanga and Tritops kennels, being a descendant of these greatest lines. A typical example of the first generation of crossings between these lines can be called Eng Am Ch Seagift Parkankandy Royaltan, from a dog of the Tritops kennel and a bitch of the Carnlanga kennel.

We developed our own line, at the origins of which are numerous crossings between these kennels. In our pedigree, there are many crossings from these oldest English kennels. Jet Commander is a typical example of this. His paternal ancestors were Riverbank Playboy and Int Ch Tritops Rising Pheasant. They were littermates in the Tritops/Carnlanga combination.

Commander was our first serious show dog. Our living conditions did not allow us to breed dogs, so we only kept males. We got him to the International title. But he had many faults, and I doubt we would want to breed from him today.

When did you start breeding?
My mother was very passionate about this breed for 20 years before we got our first litter. When she began thinking about breeding, I was already old enough to be interested as well.

Who were your first dogs in the breeding program?
We spent a lot of time and effort looking for a bitch worthy of breeding. At that time, it was difficult to find a first-class adult bitch. It is still hard to do in Scandinavia because people do not sell adult animals. Almost all dogs in Scandinavia are pets, and actually, all Greyhounds are pets. They will not sell their dog to you, so adult animals are unavailable unless you go to England and buy them there.

Mrs. Gustavson, the owner of the GULDS kennel, once mated Int Ch Crosswalla Nova with her magnificent Int Ch Guld. We saw their grown offspring. Two of them went to America, Bir Bronco belongs to the Echohill and Aroi kennels, and Big Bombax to Kingsmark. Mrs. Gustavson planned to repeat the mating. The parents did not seem to be related, but according to the pedigree, both had several Tritops/Carnlanga combinations, so there was a chance that the repeat mating would give us what eventually happened.

We were very lucky, and as a result of this repeat mating, we got the best bitch from the litter. Thus, Int Ch Gulds Choice Simon became our first bitch in the breeding program. She was a star from childhood and showed herself very well at shows. She took second place in the BIS nomination at a show in Sweden in 1973 and in Norway in 1975. In those years, she was also the Best Bitch of the Show. At the same time, we got Int Ch Guyside Solomon Grundy from England, who also took second place in the BIS nomination at a show in Norway. He was a beautiful dog. And almost all breeders already used him for breeding, all except us.

It was a kind of Trojan horse. He was strong, well-muscled, and correctly proportioned, with a round chest and a sturdy build, but most of his puppies were "overly noble," like angel fish. He and Simon did not match each other. Solomon was better than Commander as a Greyhound, but Commander had the qualities necessary, as we thought, for a bitch. Although his faults were quite unpleasant, Simon won where he lost.

They were similar in type and complemented each other. By mating such dogs, you risk getting offspring that take the faults of both parents rather than the good qualities. But my experience is that when mating dogs of a similar type, the chances of getting the worst qualities from both are very small.

Did you do a lot of line breeding and close breeding over the years?
We have been engaged in line breeding and close breeding (inbreeding) from the very beginning. We have a strict preference for individual line breeding rather than in combinations. By engaging in line breeding in combinations, you get qualities equally from the dog and the bitch. I find it hard to believe that both are equally suited for mating. You either want to enhance the influence of the bitch or the dog. I believe that line breeding allows increasing the influence of the best individual at the expense of other individuals in the pedigree.

Since we were breeding on a small scale, it made sense to create as strong a female line as possible. Dogs, at least in Europe, are always available for mating. And if you come with your excellent bitch, no one will refuse you. Therefore, it is the bitches that are worth their weight in gold. The male line is not responsible for the difference between good and expected pedigrees. The responsibility lies on the female line. Therefore, it makes sense to create it through careful selection and mating only the best individuals of both sexes. Through relatively few generations, I think we have succeeded in creating an excellent female line.

It seems to me that the ideal option is to start working with dogs from an early age. If you are striving to create a "branded" pedigree for your kennel, which will enjoy long-lasting success, I think it makes sense to start at an early age. There are many obstacles on this path, and it takes time to overcome them. The more information you have about the dogs you are breeding, the less chance of a "lottery." The more dogs of your pedigree you have bred yourself, the more predictable the results will be. It doesn't matter what solid people think about their dogs; they will never tell everything. Most people prefer not to show their "skeletons in the closet."

What offspring did you get from Simon?
From our first litter in 1975, we got Int Ch Jets Elegant Nigress, her brother - Jets Evening Nocturne, and several other very good puppies. As we were still new to breeding dogs, we repeated this combination to later get Int Ch Jets Stardust and Int Ch Jets White Christmas and many other champions.

The second time we should have mated Simon with another dog; we usually avoid repeat matings. She had already given us Nigress, who was the key to the future since she was simply the perfect daughter. We considered Nigress, like her mother, to be the best bitch of her generation. She won many times in the BIS nomination in Norway, 1976. In this first litter, we managed to get the perfect bitch to continue the female line.

As we lived in an apartment on the 3rd floor, Nigress had to be given to our best friends. Unfortunately, we could mate her only once. We wanted to make such a line combination to consolidate the best qualities, and we needed to find a dog that would complement her. The famous stud dog in Scandinavia at that time was Int Ch Psychotic. He was very serious, well-balanced, and without faults, but he did not move the heart. Nigress was extremely exciting. She could not be made more elegant without ruining her. At that time, many breeders in Scandinavia wanted to mate their bitches with Psychotic. For those bitches, he was perfect. They would leave a mark of quality on their offspring, and he would ensure that the puppies would not be

In result of mating with Psychotic, Int Ch Jets Pink Panther was born. Pink Panther was an exceptional dog from the moment she was born. It was hard to keep such a puppy because she made it impossible to sell the others, although they also became champions. We had

to hide her when people came to choose puppies. She was clearly an outstanding specimen of the next generation, a link between the past and the future. Pink Panther was extraordinary in both appearance and character. She was better than her parents, better than her siblings, better than anyone in her generation.

It is very difficult to compare dogs from different eras since few have a photographic memory, but Panther is probably the best of all the specimens we have bred. It is quite sad to realize this because a breeder always wants constant progress. So, we had this magnificent bitch, and we earned a headache deciding whom to mate her with. We didn't want to take a step back, but at the same time, we didn't have the "tools" to produce offspring better than her. Certainly, there were characteristics she should improve, but there were no dogs suitable for this job.

What made Panther so special?
She was as purebred an animal as one could imagine, and she looked so flawless, so refined, as if all the sun's rays were directed only at her, and other dogs in the ring became uninteresting.

The bigger the show, the harder it was to get around her, as she was of the highest quality. She had an amazing character, which I find particularly appealing. The dog knew she was a beauty. Looking around, she seemed to say, "Ha! Who cares who takes second place?"

Panther had a wonderful appearance. This is my weakness. When judging dogs, I always pay attention to this. She had the type of Greyhound appearance that is very hard to beat in competitions. I just don't know how many times we could have sold her. But bitches are worth their weight in gold, and if we had sold her then, it would have meant the end of our breeding career. Panther represented the third generation of multiple BIS-winning bitches. We passionately wanted to see her offspring but couldn't find a male for her who would match perfectly. She was better than any of those with whom she could be mated. And we came to the conclusion that if you are a true breeder and are going to continue this, you have to accept that you will have to take a step or two back.

What do you mean?
Breeding is the art of patience. As a breeder, you are not always ready to move forward. If it were so, we would all have excellent dogs now. You have to be patient and take a step back to take two steps forward in the next generation. If each generation takes 4 or even 5 years, you need to have immense patience and prospects for the future.

If a bitch is much better than her parents, her generation, and her littermates, do you expect her to produce a specimen better than herself?
Most likely, in this sense, a step back will be taken. Expecting her to produce a better specimen than herself, especially in the first generation, is too much to ask. The only way to improve the qualities of a dog is through line breeding. Thanks to this, her weak points are corrected by the strong points of the male with whom the mating is carried out. You have to look for those who would complement this prominent bitch, as her faults can still manifest.

There will always be points that need improvement. Even when you mate a perfect bitch with a male who can improve the parameters in which she loses, it is unlikely that she will produce a daughter better than herself in the first generation. We practiced "closed" breeding through all generations to get what we have now. But you come to a situation where it is impossible to improve qualities within the line. You need to resort to "outcrossing" (mating individuals from different lines) because within the line, all qualities are fixed, but so are the faults.

Outcrossing is very difficult to accomplish. It's good when someone else is doing it because it's like opening "Pandora's box." As a result, you want to get just a few specific qualities and that's it. But often, you get everything except what you need. One hopes that through several generations, you will create the most important traits you have been breeding for all this time. You may not achieve much progress regarding non-priority qualities, as you can select a limited number of qualities at any one time.

So, if you have 4 main qualities that your dogs must have, you will likely create them with most pets over several generations of selection work. One of the reasons I fear mating individuals from different lines is that it is very difficult to conduct selection in these combinations. You look at the long-awaited litter and realize that these are Greyhound puppies because you witnessed the mating, but you cannot use the usual method of selecting puppies because they are all very different. This is especially true if you mated with another strong line, just what you wanted. You want the puppy to be like all those in its line and select the qualities you need. Of course, if he comes from a strong line, he will also give many unnecessary characteristics.

The main thing in your selection of puppies from these outcrossings is to choose not the one you liked the most but the one who, as a result of this mating, has the qualities you need. I meet breeders who make mistakes in choosing puppies. They conduct outcrossing and then select a puppy most like the mother. They not only do not get what they expected from the mating; worse, they weaken their line due to a non-linear mating that does not preserve the needed qualities.

How do you choose puppies from such outcrossings?
You have to keep them with you longer and continue selection. We keep at least two specimens from each litter. For the development, both mental and physical, puppies benefit from playing together. We do not let them play with adult dogs. You can wait with selection until you are confident that the chosen puppy is the right one.

Keeping several individuals from each litter is more typical for America. In Scandinavia, this is rare. Most breeders select a puppy at 8 weeks of age, sell the rest, and keep the chosen one. If this is the third-best bitch in the litter, the subsequent offspring will be from her. The first and second will be given away. The best bitches are a kind of culling, and the breeder stops breeding from a not-very-good individual. Through 1-2 generations, all qualities will be lost. In breeding, selection is key. You can engage in breeding using any method: outcrossing, inbreeding, line breeding; if you select the right puppy, the breeding will be successful.

I like to make the first selection among puppies at about 8 weeks of age. But if the puppies are not closely related to our dogs, I cannot make a selection at this age because I choose them according to the criteria inherent in our dogs, which may be fundamentally different from what is in another line. In any case, I am not very good at selecting puppies, and this is another reason why we keep several specimens from each litter. Fortunately, my mother is very good at it, so we usually manage to avoid irreparable mistakes.

What did you decide then about Pink Panther?
We mated her with 4 different males. She had 4 large litters, many beautiful puppies, but none better than the mother. She was mated with two of her uncles. The combination with Ch Jets Evening Nocturne worked well, and as a result, Int Ch Jets Kers Pink appeared. The other uncle-niece combination did not succeed. We crossed two opposites, and the result was too much in the puppies.

The best litter Panther had was from a close mating with Int Ch White Elephant, whose qualities were doubled by the line of Psychotic, Jet Commander, and Guld. White Elephant is the younger brother of Am Ch My Adventure and Am Ch Hero Kingsmark from the USA.

Panther's last litter was from Int Ch Gallant Major Motion, whom we brought from America. This was another good litter that gave us several pieces for the future puzzle. Up to and including Pink Panther, it was clear who was the best bitch in each generation, and it was on them that our line was based. But who was the best among Panther's numerous champion-winning daughters was unclear. In the end, we settled on the BIS winner Int Ch Jets Coco Chanel, the first daughter from the combination with White Elephant. Thus, Coco perpetuated the female line.

To produce a dog as good as Panther, we worked on her with the line breeding system. We got offspring from the best second and third daughters of Panther and different males. These second and third bitches did not allow the female line to break. Their task was to produce males whom we could then mate with the alpha bitches. Outcrosses fit well into the breeding work with male-producing females, allowing for line breeding with the alpha female line. We have been using this system since.

As a result of the combination related to Panther, when Coco Chanel was mated with the son of Int Ch Jets Kers Pink, our next alpha bitch, the exceptional multi-BIS winner Int Ch Jets Headed Like a Snake, was born. In many ways, she was similar to Panther, better than the mother compared to the grandmother. Headed Like a Snake also had 4 litters. And we again feared that, like her grandmother, she would have difficulties continuing the line. However, Hildur (Headed Like a Snake) turned out to be a remarkable producer. Her main fault was that she was a mediocre mover.

You leave some of your dogs with people you know and trust. We have to do this as we cannot keep many dogs and, besides, we are now focused on the female line. If an alpha bitch is mated 4 times and from each litter we keep two puppies, that's already 8 bitches, although most of them are given away even when they are not material for the alpha line. We had to turn to the owners of the males. For a long time,

we achieved getting males through outcrossing. It was such a relief when people agreed to outcrosses with our dogs. Some of these breeders were proud of the results of those combinations. Several males significant for more than half of our matings were brought for temporary or permanent residence from the USA. Sometimes we used closely related dogs belonging to Scandinavian breeders.

How many dogs live with you?
My partner Aage and I have a total of 11 dogs, all living with us at home. This number includes Afghan Hounds and Whippets. Usually, we keep only bitches, but occasionally there are exceptions. My mother only has males, currently two.

But you also have a male now. Who is he?
We had to rely on other breeders for males until Int Ch Something In the Way You Smile, Gustav. This litter was created for a male, and he was undoubtedly the best puppy in it. Gustav lives with us. He is a multi-BIS winner, Best Dog of the Show in Norway in 2003, and second place in BIS at the World Show in Dortmund.

What is his character like?
He has an extraordinary, wonderful character. He is an interesting dog, and there is much good in him, for example, his side movement, which has been remarkable since childhood. But there are also faults. There has not yet been a bitch that matched him.

The question arises: "What is the best mating you are capable of?" Using the whole world as a playground, what is the chance that a dog accidentally in your garden will meet your requirements? Many Greyhounds come from our line, and we can conduct line breeding using dogs from all over the world. We did not mate with Solomon Grundy 30 years ago, but other breeders did. We decided not to do this as he did not meet the requirements of our bitches. Later, our line showed clear problems with the exterior. I cannot say this was inherited from the old line; we carefully tried to avoid it.

I think history will mention Gustav as a dog created for shows. He won in BIS in many countries, and he was admired. I doubt his capabilities as a producer, but he showed himself perfectly in hunting competitions. He is the first Scandinavian Greyhound to become an International Champion in this area. This happened the same year he became Best Dog of the Show at many shows. Many owners of show Greyhounds are afraid to let them race, but if the dogs are healthy and have the necessary flexibility of limbs, there can be no problems. Gustav had to participate in hunting competitions and the next day in a show, and there was never a conflict between these two events.

Do you train other Greyhounds besides Gustav for racing?
We train all our Greyhounds, and I am not at all surprised by the results. Most of them can turn on a dime and have great endurance. It is very important to have the necessary flexibility as opposed to insufficient pliability and inelasticity.

If you know what to look for, you can observe flexibility when moving at a trot. Gustav has such flexibility, as does his aunt Int Ch Once Upon a Dream, who possesses it in full measure. In one year, she won BIS at three capital shows: Sweden, Finland, and Norway; she is the only one in these three shows who left behind 17,000 dogs. She has very good maneuverability. It is wonderful to lead a dog with the desire and passion for running. She was Best Dog of the Show in Norway in 2001, and it is not surprising that she became another excellent runner.

Do you breed for "mobility" as a separate characteristic, or is it the result of proper conformation?
Mobility is one of the key points of our selection work. The English standard for Greyhounds requires "flexible limbs, which greatly characterize the type and quality of the breed." The standard implies a characteristic connection between limb flexibility and type. This is precisely what is a priority for us. But mobility is not automatically determined by good conformation. There cannot be a poorly built dog with excellent mobility; however, there can be excellent but inflexible conformation.

Why does this happen?
Speaking of conformation, we focus on the skeletal structure, the angle at which the shoulder blade, forearm, hock joints, etc., are located. But muscles, ligaments, tendons, joints, and, in addition, the nervous system and brain are much more important. Mobility is also related to character: does the dog want to move? Is there a "motor" in it? In any case, we breed dogs with this "motor"; they really love to move. We look for energetic dogs ready to work independently. If you bet on mobility, you need to conduct selection work for it as a separate characteristic.

How do you train your Greyhounds?
They walk with us for an hour daily, and they are allowed to run freely in the yard. Winter in Norway is dark, cold, and slippery. It takes great endurance to walk long in such weather. Aage has done most of these walks over the past 15 years. He and the dogs enjoy it. He walks up to 12 dogs at once, all on a leash.

You mentioned that it is very difficult to find good males from related lines. Why?
In the history of Greyhound breeding, standard Greyhounds, there have been too many dead-end branches. Modern breeders often start by crossing out everything done before them rather than taking note. For example, in the 1930s, the English kennel Southball bred many champions, BIS at Crufts, and the Group at Westminster. But you will not find them in English pedigrees, except perhaps in some American ones. This successful line died out as modern breeders did not take care of those best representatives that were available at that time.

They started with the worst and only after several generations came to the starting point from which they could have started then. Most breeders base their lines on random bitches. They want to breed Greyhounds, so they start getting offspring from a bitch they are lucky enough to acquire. Just a good bitch has nothing to do with a bitch from a magnificent line. So, if you start from scratch and expect to get something worthwhile in 2 generations, it won't work, right? Who will take the baton? A successful breeder must pass it on to the next one. Such a rule does not exist in Greyhound breeding.

What do you think the ideal Greyhound should be like?
The ideal Greyhound should have an optimal combination of substance and elegance. They should be tall but also have an elongated body. It is easy to get either one or the other, but the ideal option is a balance of the above. Also, there should be a pronounced quality, which is essential for a Greyhound. And of course, there should be smooth lines and good curves in the right places. All this is combined with flexibility, lightness, strength, and power of movement. These are not small details but what creates the dog's appearance. It seems to me that the English standard describes this well.

Do you prefer one Standard over another?
Yes. I prefer the English Standard. We use it in the countries of the International Canine Federation (FCI). I like it because it considers the dog as a whole. Of course, the Standard means nothing if you do not know what it describes. Therefore, you need to study it in the context of the breed's purpose and history. With such content, I believe the English Standard is the best. It gives a complete picture of the appearance. It also has size requirements, which the American Standard lacks. The English standard mentions mobility and says something about the correct bite, all of which are missing in the American Standard. I also like the description of the ears, but the description of the paws is much better presented in the American standard. If you study the English Standard carefully, you will notice that it focuses mainly on substance, as opposed to elegance. But in England, any passerby knows what a Greyhound looks like, and elegance is a given.

I noticed a connection between color and type within a litter.
Yes, in some lines, there seems to be a connection between characteristics and color, which is on the same axis as substance and elegance. We breed Greyhounds of any color, and it's great. Acceptance of any colors is written more carefully in the American Standard because the English standard has a set list of colors, but it does not say what to do with those not included. We adhere to the saying: "A good Greyhound cannot be of a bad color," the same in Europe and England, but this statement is challenged in the UK Standard.

What can you say about Standards insisting on dark eye color, especially in breeding and evaluating dilute animals?
Dilutes can have both dark and light eyes. It seems to me that it is more pleasant to deal with dark eyes. I cannot say it is very important, but it seems strange that when the Greyhound Standard requires dark eyes, this is somewhat ignored. Dark eyes are a matter of beauty, but it has almost nothing to do with the dog's purpose. But again, we want to get all 10 qualities (meaning external data) and therefore should strive for dark eyes. Recently, we have started working with dilutes. In the first 7 generations, there were no such puppies, but now we have several, and I really like them. There are also chocolate-colored Greyhounds. We haven't had chocolate puppies in a long time, although our foundation bitch came from a litter with chocolate Greyhounds.

Some Greyhounds from the Kingsmark kennel, owned by Judy Donaldson, were chocolate-colored. Judy had a chocolate gene in her line from Bir Bronco. He himself was also born from a combination that produced chocolate-colored dogs.

The American Greyhound Club has chosen the tactic of not redoing our Standard since the 1920s.
In principle, I agree. You don't want to wake up every morning

to see a new Standard. Standards should change only when necessary. People claim that the Standard has served us well in its way. I don't see a big difference in Greyhounds from different countries due to the presence of Standards. Greyhounds are beautiful everywhere. Afghan Hounds have good Standards in both countries, but interestingly, you notice that differences in Standards are reflected in the dogs. I do not find this in Greyhounds, except maybe for the feet. Many English and Scandinavian dogs have "cat" feet, which are not very good for galloping dogs. "Better a hare than a cat" is a worthy definition, and this is the principle we breed these dogs by.

How do you select puppies?
We constantly evaluate them. The initial selection for those we will not keep is made at 8 weeks. At this time, our puppies are already starting to resemble adult dogs. Despite still being puppies, we look for the same characteristics as in adults. Besides, it is quite difficult to "calculate" movement. Greyhound puppies at eight weeks old have large bones and are still very clumsy, like walking in boots.

Most breeders prefer to select puppies at 8 weeks of age. How accurate is this, in your opinion?
I'm afraid it is not very accurate. The more your expectations, the more careful the selection should be. In large breeds like Greyhounds, much can go wrong. The influence of the environment on a large breed puppy plays a huge role. By the time they reach an age when they can be realistically evaluated, somewhere between 11 and 18 months, you will understand what you have. Much can happen between 8 weeks and 18 months. This is very scary from a breeder's perspective. What you ultimately evaluate is often formed by environmental influences rather than at the genetic level. You can make mistakes because one of the brothers is actually better genetically, but the environment was not as favorable, and he did not fully develop his potential. For a breeder, this is a nightmare. You can lose gold and be content with bronze all your life. I think this happens very often.

This is more true for males than for females.
Yes. This may be one of the reasons why good males among Greyhounds are much fewer than females. They are more susceptible to the environment. It is unlikely that a male puppy given to an amateur will develop his potential. The best females often stay with the breeder and grow up in more favorable conditions. It takes a lot of work and experience to get the "maximum" out of a Greyhound puppy.

Do you co-own dogs with anyone?
Very rarely. But we invest a lot in developing relationships with the owners of our puppies. We mainly deal with those who buy show-oriented puppies, which is a problem because some of our dogs are not suitable for the ring. People focused on show participation are very energetic. We meet them at puppy competitions or training sessions and closely observe the puppies. The mother of Gustav Int Ch Jet's Some Like It Hot we raised together with our good friend Lize Olesen.

Many kennels base their breeding programs on Greyhounds from the Jet Kennel. Would you like to name some of them?
For us, it was good news because it opened the possibility of more line combinations without the need to mate dogs ourselves. Several kennels in Scandinavia base their work on our program; the most significant of them are: Eyckika in Denmark, Taikutasaan and Rantaaluokan in Finland, Moyens and Azravi in Norway. And if we go further, the kennels Attimo Fuggente in Italy and Jericho in Texas got several litters from line breedings related to our dogs. Our first exported puppy was Ch Jet's The Voyage Out, who went to the Abraksas Kennel in Utah. He was an ancestor of Ch Shazam's The Journey Begins in the male line, who in turn was a consistent champion producer in the USA.

Another exported puppy was Jets Oscar de la Renta, who produced champions for the English kennel Wenona. Quom Greyhounds in Australia was also founded on dogs from our family. Happy Hunters in Germany is another major kennel with the Jet line. Currently, there are many dogs related to our line worldwide, from Japan to South Africa, New Zealand, and Latvia. We enjoy communicating with all these people and being part of a large family. Now Jet champions are in 42 countries around the globe.

Have you ever thought about how many champions you have bred?
This weekend we reached 135 from a total of (420) championship titles, as many of our dogs have been exhibited in multiple countries. Since we export dogs worldwide, it brings a sense of additional responsibility. When we started our breeding program, our dogs could be affected only by circumstances, but now it can be much more serious. If something happens to us that shouldn't, like health problems, it can unexpectedly arise worldwide.

You have judged at shows worldwide. In how many countries have you been?
About fifty countries. Being a judge is an activity that perfectly combines with dog breeding. Someone arranges a trip for you to see all the dogs and continue the "treasure hunt," as I prefer to think of the judging process. For me, it is both interesting and a great help when I am breeding. I consider myself primarily a breeder, then a judge.

If you are lucky enough to judge special dogs worldwide, you can overlook what other breeders are doing and where the breed is leading. There are characteristics to be eliminated and those to be encouraged. Having the ability to influence is a great privilege. It is impossible to fix all problems, but you can support owners raising dogs in a way close to you by saying, "Yes, excellent, you are on the right track." For the winners, your decision MATTERS.

What do you see during these travels as a judge in the ring?
It is quite obvious that lines are dying out. We have to use such lines that could be easily recognizable due to high qualities and sometimes due to faults. Some breeders of that time had a certain positive influence. They were 100% dog people who immersed themselves in their work for a long time. They had the patience to understand that it would take a lot of time and effort to achieve success in breeding.

When my mother started breeding dogs, the kennels Tritops and Seagifts were exhibiting. Then Shaflit Greyhounds appeared. We admired the best of them, although they are not the most noticeable in our pedigrees. In all their appearance, they were what we always looked for. Also, the Aroi kennels from California and Kingsmark from the Midwest (USA, Canada), which we also liked. Their best dogs would still be competitive today. Fortunately, they are still here, so some will be able to preserve all this. I don't want to sound negative, but it is very rare to meet a Greyhound today that would leave me speechless. However, I cherish the memories of those who managed to do so.

Since you mentioned dogs that impressed you, could you mention Greyhounds from other lines that impressed you?
I liked some dogs from the Shaflit kennel in England. My favorite was Ch Shaflit Spode. This blue-colored bitch was closest to the ideal. Sir Lancelot, her brother, was also a beautiful dog, but I think the sister was better. She was more elegantly built. Ch Seanwelly Cavalier was another great contemporary of theirs. I believe America was lucky to have Ch Aroi Talk Of The Blues as its first winner. I saw her when she was already a bit aged, but even then, she was an absolute beauty. I can give as an example many dogs from the Kingsmark kennel, which I would include in the list of magnificent ones. It would be unfair to single out one or two since I can name no less than half a dozen.

According to my ideal of a Greyhound, the best dog over the last 4 months, I could name Ch Gerico's Chasing the Wind. He has most of the qualities we look for in Greyhounds. I have judged him several times and cannot recall a dog that could compare to him. I liked Ch Marqurell, the famous stud dog from Sweden, an ancestor of White Elephant on the male line. He immediately attracted attention and was so beautiful that it was easy on the eyes. These are the examples that come to mind immediately.

You call your show Greyhounds "standard Greyhounds." Is this term politically correct?
I don't know if it is politically correct, but I think the term "standard Greyhound" explains the essence most clearly. These dogs are bred to meet the Standard, which does not prohibit them from being just show dogs. Our dogs are hunting dogs, passing functionality tests, but at the same time, they are pets. The term "standard Greyhound" describes their origin as opposed to racing Greyhounds, which are bred not to the Standard but to run a 480-meter distance, turning only to the left. This is very far from the true purpose of this dog. They were bred for game hunting, which cannot be equated with racing.

I would like people to understand this because some believe that our Standard Greyhounds are non-functional because they cannot run fast on an oval track. But give them a chance to prove themselves in the field, where they will show their abilities for which they were bred. In Norway, there are no special game fields, and conducting real hunting races is prohibited. We arrange lure coursing for dogs, preferably over long distances, about a kilometer over rough terrain. Greyhounds love this. They have a very strong hunting instinct. But there is another instinct that is just as important. When the prey is caught or the lure has stopped, the dogs seem to ask, "Where is my owner?" And this is understandable. When they were used for hunting, what use was there for a dog that caught a rabbit and ran away with it into the woods

? This instinct to return to the owner works almost immediately. You can take Greyhounds hiking, circle the forest 12 times, and they will always return to the owner because that is what they were bred for. Those who don't return are culled.

Your favorite Greyhounds from the Jets kennel
I have favorites for different achievements. Some became favorites because of their closeness to our ideal of a Greyhound. There were favorites who were a milestone in our breeding program. There were favorites for being excellent producers, which is what breeders value most. If I had to choose only one favorite, I would choose between Pink Panther and Headed Like a Snake. Looking at Pink Panther every day for 12 years, I always thought, "Yes. She is the only one!" She carried her classy qualities throughout her life. Headed Like a Snake was another favorite because of her appearance, but even more so because of her reproductive ability. Only from her alone, we got 30 champions.

Do you consider this a record?
Perhaps among Greyhounds. Because we wanted them to be seen, we often took Pink Panther and Headed Like a Snake to shows. They were very successful in the ring. Both bitches produced 4 litters each. I think 4 litters for a key bitch is enough, but of course, this is not more than you need if you want to have the opportunity to line breed this bitch later without line breeding with the males you have already mated her with. By inbreeding Pink Panther, we put all the pieces together in the third litter of Headed Like a Snake, where all 4 grandparents were children or grandchildren of Panther. This litter produced 9 champions, including Int Ch Jet's Keep The Snake, who became a champion in 16 countries and the most titled Greyhound in the world. We are now working on the same thing several generations later. Our female line was doubled, tripled, and quadrupled. Now there are also dogs in whose pedigree our line is found up to 20 times. Most of those combinations were not made by us. We were lucky to sell Greyhounds to breeders who might be faster and braver than us to continue breeding our dogs.

What about the preparation of show Greyhounds in different countries?
Our dogs need to reach two years of age to become champions. This means that a dog cannot have a big career until it is 2 years old. Once Upon A Dream and Something In The Way You Smile reached the Best Dog of the Show title before they were 3 years old. Gustav is not yet 4, and he is a champion in 8 countries and a Group winner in 7 countries. It makes sense to approach the "end product" before the dog becomes a champion. On the other hand, this slows down reproduction, which is also good, as a young star will not have litters with serious faults.

It seems to me that in America, becoming a champion is ridiculously easy. Since there are so few Greyhounds, all you need to gain an advantage among them is to bring four puppies to the show, and one of them will definitely win and get a 3-point major. This can be done 3-4 days in a row. If the mother is not yet a champion, she can also participate, beat her six-month-old puppies, and become a champion. Add to this the number of shows held, and I don't know how a Greyhound should look to not become a champion in America, do you?

It has also become easier to get a title in Scandinavia. But there are countries where it is still difficult to become a champion. The champion title in France is still hard to get because you have to win either the national breed show or the annual major show - so only 4 representatives of each breed can become champions once a year.

The English title is also hard to get as several shows award CCs (Certificates of Conformity), and you need to beat all the champions to get one. I think this is good. If the dog cannot beat the existing champions, is it a champion itself?

Many Greyhounds from the USA end their careers beating champions.
Yes, but it is not necessarily so. Of course, the best dog should win regardless of class. For me, this is a given. Just judge the dogs and choose the one you think is the best according to your understanding of the standard. If it is a champion - good, if not - also good. Some made a big fuss over me making a class bitch Best of Breed at last year's Whippet National in the USA. It was in April, and she went on to win many BIS titles. Now wouldn't that be great? But it's the same bitch.

I think, as a judge, you have to deal with self-confidence.
Perhaps, you have to deal with self-confidence, but I think even more so with the fact that you are at the forefront. Being a judge means hunting for treasures, and this is a great privilege. The point of this activity is that you have the opportunity to promote your interpretation of the Standard. It's your day when you can look at all the dogs and choose the best.

There is nothing more terrible than losing the good experience of a judge if you are engaged in everything except judging. This can make the treasure hunt less interesting and even less significant. You don't want to lose this unique opportunity. I love judging dogs. I perform this "ritual" once a month and look forward to the next show. Judging is not something I have to do. It is something I chose because it brings me pleasure.

As a judge and breeder, what changes have you seen in Greyhounds over the years?
I have seen changes in quality; the breed has become very unstable. But within my lifetime experience, I have come to the conclusion that everything in the world is cyclical. The Greyhound is a breed that has changed very little over the years. It is difficult to pinpoint a specific direction in which Scandinavian Greyhounds are developing, but it seems to me they have lost mobility.

When we go to shows with our best dogs, I feel like we leave the other Greyhounds behind. It is very difficult to compete with a dog like Gustav, especially if he moves with full power. If the assessment is solely about movement, there can be no competition. Fate gave us a very good rival for all these years, Ingeborg Stenogen, the owner of the Dogcastle kennel. She bred several outstanding Greyhounds. We took her Int Ch Dogcastle's Peacock for an important outcross to get Int Ch Jet's For Your Eyes Only, the ancestor of Headed Like a Snake on the male line.

Some American breeders saw our dogs as radical, and we were accused of changing the breed. I don't see anything like that. We are trying to get all the characteristics, never stopping at what has been achieved, despite having already bred several excellent Greyhounds.

In the list of my household dogs, I would name Int Ch Jet's Some Like It Hot and Int Ch Jet's Once Upon A Dream as favorites. The latter was heavily criticized, but I think she is quite nice. This year, only 11 international shows were held in Norway. In 2001, she won 9 BIS at international shows. People look at dogs as if through a microscope, searching for the smallest details...

However, I digressed. Returning to changes in Greyhounds, we were accused of making changes on our initiative. An article in an American magazine mentioned a defender and a fashion breeder, and I was chosen as an example of such a breeder. We do not consider ourselves such by any means. We are just trying to put all the pieces together in one, better in many individuals. This is not an attempt to turn the breed into something non-original. Nowadays, there is a lack of types of dogs. I am sure that the main quality of a Greyhound was better in the 1970s and 1980s. I don't think there is a broad arena for improvement if you have a dog like Royaltan in the photo of Tosca, an example of what existed 50 years ago. Characteristic features have been formed over decades.

It's interesting, looking at old tapestries, to see how similar today's Greyhounds are to those depicted in hunting scenes. We are dealing with their long history, aren't we? Deerhounds and Salukis also have a long history. These three breeds have been bred according to their types for a long time. And maybe there is little that one would want to change in them. They have been perfected and developed over many centuries for a specific purpose.

What do you think about the Internet? Do you think it has made a positive contribution to communication between breeders? It depends on how it is used. The World Wide Web can be a wonderful tool for facilitating communication. Nowadays, you can easily write 20 emails a day, which you would never have done many years ago. But as the only source of information, the Internet is dangerous. When people start buying dogs, importing them, importing semen based only on photoshopped Internet pictures, it can really be dangerous. Communication can be organized outside the Internet, but we never sell puppies by email. We prefer to meet people. I never give a dog away without having sufficient information. Now, when the borders of Scandinavia have sharply opened, people can acquire dogs anywhere, but without any guarantees. We had to have a guarantee confirming that our "import" is the finest. Nowadays, you can buy a dog through the Internet and fly home with it the next day. It is frightening. You can bring back so many "skeletons in the closet."

In your career as a breeder, handler, and judge, have there been any brilliant moments you would like to highlight? There have been many such moments. When you breed many generations of animals, important moments come every time you get a new litter and evaluate from these puppies how far you have progressed. We were spoiled by success at shows. If I were to highlight a specific moment, it would be the victory of Int Ch Jet's Once Upon A Dream in the BIS nomination at the Stockholm International show because the show was very extravagant.

The judge in this category, Pamela Cross-Stern, was magnificent in a silver dress, with her hair up; slender, she looked like a mermaid. Artificial snow fell from the "sky" inside the building; there were even Christmas trees and Santa Claus. It was a theatrical performance. In the BIS final that day, there was the Dog of the Year nomination from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. Four BIS winners made it to the final. They managed to win in their Groups. We would have felt strange if we had taken third place in this chain. It was wonderful to lead a bitch on a leash who overcame all barriers to surpass the best representatives of the BIS category in Scandinavia. When we arrived at Westminster in 1998, Jerry Ann Hendrick registered Ch Jet's The Ravishing Redhead as a youngster. She had never been shown outside of Texas. Ed handled her. When the judge pointed to Redhead as the Best of Breed, skipping all the best dogs in the country, we were shocked. Here, in the United States, judging at National or Parent Club Specialties was a personal achievement.

Another shock for us was the victory of Int Ch Jet's Headed Like A Snake in the BIS nomination at the world's largest Sighthound show in Skokloster. About a thousand dogs were registered that day. Headed Like A Snake was 16 months old. I showed her in the Junior class. She received Best of Breed, beating all the champions, and went to the Best In Show nomination under John Reeve-Newson. That day, three of our dogs became finalists, winning BOB in the categories: Greyhounds, Afghans, and Whippets.

But the best sparkling moments are getting such puppies, making such combinations, working for the next generation. The point is not to live in the past, but to use it for the benefit of the future. We are always in this time frame between the past and the future. As a breeder, I can tell you that this is a very exciting position.

You are called a true breeder! What is in store for you and the Greyhounds of the Jet kennel in the future? Breeding, showing, and judging have become a way of life. Sometimes I miss the usual things due to the chosen lifestyle. I have been living with a friend for 15 years. We have no children, no grandchildren. But our life is not monotonous. We are engaged in dog breeding, showing, and judging. It has become an integral part of us, as there is no other choice. And it will continue.

I think it's not bad. Yes, I think so too; otherwise, we would not continue to do it. Recently, I started judging some new breeds. For 17 years, I judged the same dogs, focusing only on sighthounds. I didn't have to judge Basenjis or Ridgebacks. Now I started working with most other Hounds and some Toy breeds. Maybe I will have to be a judge more than once a month.

Being experienced in dog breeding, I would like to try other combinations. We will continue breeding as before. I will have to direct my ambitions in another direction. We need to produce more excellent males to continue line breeding. We are on a long way to breeding a dog with perfect characteristics. But if one day we have a dog that we call perfect, what to do next? So, perhaps it's good that we haven't created perfection yet. As a breeder, I am extremely picky. If you can't pinpoint flaws, how are you going to eliminate them? I think this is a big trap for most breeders. They are blind to their dogs and cannot foresee strengths and weaknesses in perspective. As a judge, you see many ordinary dogs without bright flaws, but also without any distinctive virtues. Such dogs can hardly be representatives of the breed. The goal of any serious breeder should be to develop the necessary qualities and constant dissatisfaction with mediocrity.

But the achievement I am most proud of is 7 consecutive generations of bitches, multiple BIS winners, because now this is our main activity and the "secret" of our success. Perhaps we will continue breeding for several more generations in the hope of improving or at least preserving what we have. But like anyone else, I need help. I need other breeders to provide some pieces of the overall "puzzle."

Do you have any advice or guidance you could share? I can easily sum it up. Be satisfied with nothing but the best. Be very strict in selection and make sure you do it at the right time so your efforts are not in vain. Your horizons can never be wide enough. Do not boast about yourself and the dog next to you at the moment, but try to learn as much as possible about dogs in other countries. Travel, observe, ask questions. You can start well if you drink from the fountains of wisdom and experience. You don't need to make all the mistakes yourself. Try to learn from both others' mistakes and achievements. I must be the last person to tell you this, but... keep your mouth shut and your ears open.

Thank you very much, Espen, for your candor and authoritative approach to talking about you and the Greyhounds of the Jet kennel. I am sure our readers will gain new knowledge and examples from this conversation.