

MY VISIT TO SKANSEN KENNEL

By Lisa Hawes, featured in *Beards & Browse*, 2012 Vol. III

You don't have to own a Skansen bred Giant Schnauzer, or any Giant at all for that matter, to appreciate a visit to Skansen Kennel. With so much history, and success behind it, there is much to be learned from a large operation like this one. Most of us will remain relatively small breeders, and therefore as a result, there are simply some goals we will never be able to accomplish in a lifetime. World famous larger scaled kennels like Skansen, Gloris, Gently Bon, Stablemaster or Ingebar's, definitely have the advantage, but I am sure all will tell you none of them, as of yet, have bred the perfect dog.

Skansen Kennel was founded in Sweden in 1950 by Sylvia Hammarstrom, and then moved to Sebastopol, California in 1964, where Sylvia has been continuously breeding top show, family, pet and companion Schnauzers for the last 48 years. The kennel is located on 100 acre ranch only hour north of San Francisco in Sonoma County. The Sonoma Valley is a very beautiful place, and I know I am going back there as soon as I can!

Skansen's driveway is a long way off public road, you first drive up a narrow long tree lined (and bumpy) unnamed road where you will pass a small horse farm. If you are lucky you might spot some wild turkeys which were made famous in the story Sylvia told at the Nationals during a nutritional seminar she was asked to speak at. If you missed that one you really did miss out on a hilarious tale. I am sure you can find it on YouTube somewhere.

As you're driving down the road to the kennel, and just after you pass the big sign welcoming you, the first that you see are the Llama's, and lots of them! They are amazing looking creatures, dare I say, almost

regal. I had never seen any like the fancy ones that Skansen Kennel breeds and shows.

At the fork in the road there stands a large wooden sign, a trio of Schnauzers which beckons the visitor to keep driving to the left. After that you will finally be on the kennel's driveway. (The other way would take you to the main residence.)

The kennel's driveway is another long road, up a windy hill. As you travel up this road, on your left, several Giant pairs greet you with enthusiastic barks. All are housed in a multitude of well treed and roomy pens. On your right, a herd of Giant youngsters greet you; their pen is about an acre or more in size! Just as your car climbs the final hill, you pass a charming old farmhouse on the left, which as it turns out is the main office. You have just arrived into the main parking area, which is right in the middle of all the action!

There were many first impressions for me when I arrived. I will list them in no particular order.

As we pulled in, the sun was just going down, a silhouette person came out of the office, with her free and easy gait, I assumed it was a young lady walking towards us. This person was wearing work clothes and had her hair pulled up, which gave the impression of someone young. She had headphones hanging loosely around her neck, work boots, and blue jeans. She looks fit, tanned and happy. I don't know how old Sylvia Hammarstrom is now, but I know she isn't a teenager, she looked amazing.

She greeted us, and told us to go have a look around and then we would go out for dinner. It was wonderful; we saw Giants, Standards, Mini's and more Llamas.

There were a couple of things that surprised me, first was there was no overpowering smell of urine, which I was prepared for as I have a very keen sense of smell. I saw no poop; I can't even say that about my own yard with two to three Giants living here. The runs were very large, with some of course bigger than others, but all had good houses, good shade from the California sun, fresh water (which is no easy feat with all those young dogs sticking their feet and heads in there) and meaty bones.

There was one roofed kennel run close to the office, which we were told was dubbed "Lucas' run". It was named in honor of Skansen's famous import, and talented escape artist, Lucas de Campos de Oro. That gave me a chuckle as my boy Rubin is a grandson to Lucas, and is an amazing escape artist in his own right! I guess the apple didn't fall far from that tree!

Because we arrived a little bit late we decided to go have some dinner and finish the tour the next day.

Dinner was fun, we went to a nearby sushi place that Sylvia is fond of. Side note here, Sylvia discovered sushi a few years back when she was judging at an International show in Vancouver, Canada. She had never had sushi before that, she loved it instantly and has been eating it regularly ever since!

During the meal, Sylvia told us many stories of old times and old dogs. What a fabulous history lesson we received! Clearly well read and witty, Sylvia kept us thoroughly entertained throughout the entire meal. She reads at least one book a day, either a talking book (hence the

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headphones she forgot to remove before dinner) or written, she works tirelessly with the dogs and it shows, she is fit in both mind and body and an inspiration to all.

The next day we went back to the kennel where we were greeted again by friendly employees, they told us to look around and enjoy. First we went into the office and met Carrie, who seemed to be lost behind papers, books, and dogs. It was quaint and cluttered, but warm and clean. One had to be careful where you stepped as there were a few minis and one or two Giants laying under foot. There were pictures and ribbons on every inch of wall. Not wanting to distract her as she clearly was very busy we moved onto the dogs outside.

All the employees we met were very accommodating; some have been with Sylvia for a very long time. There were a couple of hard working staff members who were running with buckets of fresh raw meat, bones and hoses to get everyone fed and watered. All were friendly, which seemed to rub off on the dogs as they were all very outgoing and friendly too. The dogs were all groomed and clean; some were even a little bit chunky, which showed that everyone is well fed!

We were given permission to go into any of the runs and take out which ever dogs we wanted a better look at. Which of course we did! I think we can safely say the quality was impressive.

I should mention here that the day before, and the main reason we had made this trip to Skansen, was that we had to return Gatsby. Gatsby was the pepper/salt Giant that we had been showing in Canada and the USA for the past year and a half for Sylvia.

At first, we felt a little bad for him, as Gatsby had become a welcomed member of Janine's and my household. How would he react to being left behind in a kennel environment, albeit an amazing one? Well, once Laina took his lead, he never looked back! He was so excited to see all the dogs and he seemed to know he was home again. Gatsby has a job to do, strengthen the P/S lines and he cannot do that while lounging on a couch in BC. Sylvia assures us that once he has completed his tasks, which he is always keen to do ;), then he will be offered for adoption, as all her retired dogs are, to a great home and get the retirement he deserves! As there is lineup of homes who want him, this is not going to be a problem.

As we walked from run to run, there were a couple of pregnant females running loose on the kennel grounds. These lovely ladies would meander with us as we walked between office and the pens. Well socialized and beautiful, it is clear that Sylvia knows exactly what she is doing with the breed. Whether you agree with everything she does or not, you have to admire her work ethic, her vision and more importantly, her great dogs.