



Working Standard

The Cirneco dell'Etna is a breed recently classified among the “Primitive Dogs” and included in Group 5. Its hunting vocation is the wild rabbit.

The Search. In the initial phase, exploration of the terrain alternates between periods of free trotting or light galloping and periods of brisk walking, depending on the roughness of the ground.

The search for the scent is always meticulous, detailed, attentive and thoughtful. These characteristics become particularly notable in the “sciara” of the volcanic areas.

The Method. When the Cirneco perceives the presence of game, it darts off rapidly, nose faithfully following the scent, towards the point where the rabbit has left its trail on the ground; if, however, the scent fades or weakens and in any case does not lead to the game, the dog regains its searching posture and continues to explore the terrain. If, on the other hand, following the trail, it realises that it does indeed lead to the game, it continues with the same utmost dedication, following and interpreting with promptness the quality of the trail to reach the game.

Its expressiveness becomes more tangible and its action grows in impetus as the distance to the rabbit decreases.

In the final very short stretch, the Cirneco starts to give a few sporadic, sharp barks which gradually become more frequent, almost frenzied, when it believes it is at the *forte* or at the correct entrance to the game’s burrow. Here, the Cirneco tries to dig with its forelegs, sniffs forcefully into the hole, snorts loudly, and its barks become lively, vibrant, categorical, at times turning into muffled, plaintive yelps filled with frustrated anger, as it persists in its digging attempts. Its voice becomes sonorous and vibrant again to signal that the rabbit is moving and shifting inside the warren.

At this point, the ferret comes into action: the dog must respect the mustelid, suspend digging and step aside, in absolute silence, perhaps curling up with apparent indifference but in reality paying sly and lively attention to what is about to happen.

In the case of particularly nervous Cirnechi, it is tolerated for them to step aside.

When, during the search, the Cirneco comes across a strong scent that leads it to the game nestled in a bed far from the *forte*, whether it is in a bush or up against a stone, at the base of a wall, at the edge of a bramble patch, under a few stones or in any other non-underground location, its behaviour is identical to that already described for the final stage of approaching the *forte*. In tangled, impenetrable bushes, to reach the rabbit, the Cirneco bites and tears determinedly at branches, brambles and thorns, showing courage and determination. If it suddenly finds itself close to the game in its bed, the Cirneco will leap, forcing the rabbit from cover and compelling it to flee.

Some individuals, in such circumstances, display a pointing stance, more or less prolonged and expressive. This behaviour should be highly valued by the judge. On a warm rabbit bed, where the rabbit

has slipped away quietly, a brief pause is permitted, without insistence or barking. However, the dog must detect the scent and follow it quickly and faithfully to the trail, both in “ *sciara* ” and in bushy or bare terrain.

Style. The head carriage of the Cirneco is that of a dog searching for ground scent, so its muzzle is not far from the ground. The tail, carried in a high arch above the backline, at times stretches out and wags vigorously during the search phases. The ears alternate between full erection during moments of alertness and a certain lowering towards the nape during physical effort, but never to a degree of relaxed inattentiveness.

However, the ears must never be relaxed.

When, during the search, the Cirneco senses the presence of game, it immediately raises its ears, tenses so that its musculature becomes highly pronounced, simultaneously stretches its tail, lowering it almost horizontally and wagging it side to side with frantic energy.

The style is a harmonious blend of physical, psychological and physiological qualities, so even the tone of the voice, as well as the elegance and distinctiveness of the gait, all contribute to the assessment of the breed's salient characteristics.

Assessment Criteria. Retrieving is not a particular trait of the breed. Some individuals do it in exemplary fashion; others perform impressive distant recoveries; most simply bite the rabbit to release tension and then abandon it. Any of these behaviours are acceptable and not decisive in the evaluation, but are noted as merits.