



(DAILY Photo by Mark Davis)

T.R. Russell's two-legged Bear proves he still moves faster than a two-legged man

Two-legged dog 'just as natural as if he had four'

By KEITH CLINES
DAILY Staff Writer

GANDY'S COVE — Bear Russell likes to run through the woods, can "swim up a storm" and considers himself a lady's man.

He gets around as much as anybody with two legs. Nothing unusual about that, you say. Nothing, until you consider Bear is a dog.

"He's just as natural on two legs as if he had four," T.R. Russell says, as he stands in his driveway here in southern Morgan County with 7-year-old Bear at

his feet. "He doesn't have any problem getting around."

Bear, a Treeing Walker of the hound breed, lost his left rear leg in a hay mower when he was a 6-month-old pup. "He didn't have any problem with that," says Russell. "He just took those three legs and kept going."

Bear had his right front leg amputated when he was 3 after a neighbor shot into a group of dogs around his female dog and hit Bear, Russell says. The bullet shattered the bone.

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A few days after the amputation, Russell brought a bandaged Bear home.

"I turned him out, he had these bandages on his side, and he took off, went under the fence and treed a squirrel," says Russell, who adds that the 25- to 30-pound Bear has a big heart for a small dog.

"I was surprised. I thought he'd kind of hippity-hop around since he was not used to having two legs. That amazed me. I thought he'd lay around awhile."

Russell, 75, says Bear's most difficult problem after the amputation was with awkwardness and balance. He says Bear hasn't gotten into any bad situations that his handicap kept him from escaping.

Bear's only difficulty is keeping his balance when he stops. "It's like riding a bicycle," explains

Russell. "When you have to stop you quit. As long as you're going, you've got your balance."

Both Russell, who retired from Russell and Co. Inc., general contractors in Decatur, in 1982, and Bear are avid hunters. About three years ago, Russell quit counting the raccoons that Bear has treed and killed, but he estimates that there may be as many as 50.

When he lets Bear out of the garage, where he usually sleeps, it's only minutes before he'll tree a squirrel, raccoon or opossum. "You've got to go get him or he'll stay there all night," Russell says.

Two of the raccoons Bear has treed and killed are mounted on the den wall at the Lazy Acres Ranch, between Falkville and Eva, where Russell and his wife, Pauline, live.

Along with Bear's trophies are Russell's. Those include a bear skin from a 7-foot, 450-pound grizzly he killed in Canada's Yukon Territory in 1962, a 9-foot, 100-pound sailfish he caught in the Pacific Ocean off the Mexican coast in 1978 and a mounted mountain lion measuring 6 feet, 4 inches

and weighing 96 pounds he killed in Colorado this past year.

Russell said he only carries Bear squirrel hunting these days; anything else the dog hunts he does on his own.

Bear has no problem navigating the large pond near the house. "He swims up a storm in it," Russell says.

He says the normal life span for a hound is 12 to 15 years. The absence of two legs might make it harder than usual for Bear when he reaches old age.

"He's slowed down now," Russell says. "He's not the dog he was four years ago. He's ready to lay around and rest on his laurels."

Then again, maybe he doesn't feel like resting.

Until bringing him home last week, Russell kept Bear fenced for about two weeks at his daughter's house.

Russell says he sent Bear for a visit after he chewed his way out of the garage a couple of times to visit a female dog down the road.