

deerhound humour

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Deerhounds have a sense of humour and their humans need one too! This section is for stories illustrating that

I'M PREGNANT!



I thought I knew what I was doing. That's my excuse anyway. I forgot that Madame La Piranha was a bit different, that's all.

As usual the first problem was deciding on the father. I had my own thoughts on the matter of course, but believe that several heads are better than one, and most are better than mine, so I sought advice widely. I must say that everyone was very helpful. Each person that I approached had the most reasoned and convincing argument for using their own stud dog.

After changing my mind on an hourly basis for months, a decision was made, Piranha came in season and at last it was time for a visit to the dog. We almost didn't get there. 'See, see!' has always been my call when I spot prey in the fields, but it really wasn't very clever of Ian to shout 'See, See!' when a hare ran out and, as hares do, raced for some distance in front of the car. It only took a nanosecond for the deerhound snoozing quietly in the back seat to change into a shaggy guided missile intent on hurling herself between us and on through the windscreen. Ian still doesn't know how he stayed out of the ditch, but he did, and we continued our journey when we had both stopped shaking. He now refrains from commenting on wildlife seen from moving cars if there is a hound in the back.

When we arrived fast, furious and mostly airborne foreplay in the stud pen suggested that the pair certainly fancied each other. Soon a tie was achieved, and declared satisfactory. And that, we thought, was more or less it for the next nine weeks. How wrong can you be?

Once home, Piranha threw us a filthy look, and hopped up on her favourite settee. Both the look and the position were to become very familiar over the next weeks. From that moment Madame decided that she was looking after herself. Suggestions that she might like to go outside caused her to become absolutely rigid, and apparently glued to that wretched sofa. Attempts to forcibly remove her from it earned a glare which clearly said " *You can't do that ! I'm pregnant !* "

By the time the pregnancy was confirmed by scan, the great food battle was well underway. My attempts to provide a suitable diet for an in whelp deerhound were absolutely spurned. At first she refused to eat at all, as I was slow to realise what she wanted. She was forced to drag herself off the sofa and knock the cats' dish out of my hands twice in a row before I caught on. From then she would eat beef or liver flavoured Whiskas voraciously, and nothing whatsoever else. If I tried to balance her diet by adding anything to the cat food I was given a dismissive " *You're trying to poison me ... and I'm pregnant!* " look. At this point I visited a cat breeding friend for advice on delivering kittens, just in case

Madame's preference for cat food was not the only dietary problem exacerbated by pregnancy. She was always addicted to a good single malt whisky (blends were rejected with a look of utter disgust) but we rather unwisely decided that pregnant deerhounds, like pregnant ladies, should not drink alcohol. That was fine until we tried to have a quiet evening dram ourselves. During the ensuing pleas, begging, sneaking and finally attempted theft by frontal assault, an almost full bottle of 20 year old Bruichladdich was spilled and a good quantity lapped from the floor. Canicide was considered at that point, but Ian's trip to hall for the shotgun and mine to the kitchen for the cleaver were abandoned when she radiated an especially intense " *You can't murder me - I'm pregnant!* " look. Still, stern measures were called for, and we took them. We became teetotal until after the puppies were weaned.

Her aversion to exercise was only partial. Attempts to move the Madame from her sofa to the paddock, or even the floor where deemed inappropriate for pregnant deerhounds and were resisted with fervour from the start, but she was equally passionate in believing that long daily runs were essential for her health right up to the point of whelping. We agreed to a point, but felt that chasing small, fast herbivores over bad terrain was not altogether wise once she had taken on the proportions of a double decker bus, with steering to match. So much to her disgust she was taken out with the old dogs during the last couple of weeks. That worked well until my step-son came out with us intending to take Madame and the old dogs home while Ian and I continued along the disused railway line with the young hounds. We slipped through the gate to the railway cutting, and shouted that Colin should hurry home as heavy rain was forecast. When we returned two hours later a very wet and annoyed Colin was still standing where we'd left him at the gate, surrounded by patient, lounging elderly dogs and one young, upright, rigid, and extremely pregnant deerhound. Piranha had refused to take a single step in a homewards direction and Colin was just as intimidated by that " *You can't force me - I'm pregnant!* " look as we were. He left that evening, earlier than planned.

While I tried to get Piranha to take suitable exercise and eat properly Ian assembled the whelping box and repainted the whelping room, then Madame was introduced to her new quarters. It was a brief introduction. She took one look, a brief sniff and stalked into the downstairs spare room where she installed herself under the bed in decisive fashion. The eyes that could be a soft, loving brown were flat and black as they glared out from under the valance. The message was clear: "*You can't drag me out - I'm very pregnant now !*" The line was wearing thin by this stage, but combined with her elephantine shape it was still enough to dissuade us from hauling her forth bodily, particularly as we knew how effectively she could use her claws as crampons. An hour later having failed to tempt her out with Whiskas, coffee and even the last inch of Bruichladdich, we dismantled the bed and carried her into the whelping room.

Where she howled. And howled. And kept on howling. At 2 am I hauled a mattress, sleeping bag, and myself into the whelping room as a remedy to the increasingly acute marital disharmony upstairs. She settled down to sleep beside me on the mattress. At 2.30 am she asked to go out. Like I fool I acquiesced. As soon as the door was open she shot into the spare room and under the bed. I woke Ian, we had a row, dismantled the bed, had another row, carried the indignant Piranha back to the whelping room and the three of us each had a capful of Bruichladdich. We began to hate our hound.

On day 62 of the pregnancy she finally accepted the whelping room, if not the box, and she also began the first stage. At 1 am she produced her first puppy. One second she was lying on the mattress beside me head cuddled in my shoulder, the next she was standing over me and the puppy was dangling by its membranes an inch from my nose. I fielded it, did the necessary and popped it into the whelping box. She went into the box voluntarily for the first time and settled down to dry and suckle her pup. For the first time in nine weeks her expression became soft.

Three more pups arrived at brief intervals, then she decided to have a short rest. I took the opportunity to tidy up and get her a drink. Warm water, glucose and honey was absolutely spurned, but she did agree to take milky coffee with two sugars and a good dash of Bushmills whiskey. Fortified by this, she then delivered four more pups without problem or fuss. All the pups up to this stage had been evenly sized and healthy, but when the ninth pup appeared it was only 11 ozs and clearly weak although it was normally formed, cried spontaneously and suckled weakly. After it was delivered Madame sighed, settled all the pups at her belly, and went to sleep. I of course, didn't dare sleep.

By the next morning rather to my surprise, my diabolical deerhound was proving to be a devoted mother although she was clearly less interested in no. 9. The first eight puppies continued to feed well but by mid-morning no. 9 had stopped making any attempt to suck and was becoming chilled despite the high temperature in the room. So when Piranha stepped out to do her business, my mother (who was staying with us) removed the weak pup to another room and tried to warm it. This proved to be a mistake for as soon as Piranha returned she started to search for it frantically. As we felt there was little hope for the pup and she was so distressed we put it back and she settled, but inevitably it soon died. Piranha was taken out again, and the little body removed, but as soon as she returned she began to search again, taking a long, and for us worrying, time to settle with the rest of the litter. She clearly thought my mother had taken the pup again, and for several days Madame, who for all her faults was the gentlest of dogs, searched mum's clothes in a way that was rough and almost frightening at every opportunity.

The remaining pups grew steadily and progressed normally. None of them developed retractile claws or began to "miaow" and Piranha was a wonderful mother in complete contrast to the monster she had been whilst pregnant. By the time the pups were ready to leave at 12 weeks she was back to her usual athletic self and I was sad as ever when saying goodbye to each one. But even then I remembered what the pregnancy had been like and thought "Never again with her" as I waved off the new owners of the last pup to leave.

Of course that resolution didn't last and two years later Madame La Piranha was the perfect mother to a second lovely litter after another pregnancy that almost had us on Prozac. Each and every one of the pups from both litters, and a most of her more distant progeny inherited her taste for coffee, her love of whisky and some of her personality but none were or are so intelligent or quite so fond of playing to the gallery.

And now that our very special old deer has gone to the Bridge, still as wicked, clever, contrary, stubborn, awkward, still as much fun, still as loving as ever to the very last hour of her 14½ years, I'd give almost anything for just one more chance to share a good malt with her. Cheers Madame La P!