

[Bear](#)

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**Hall of Fame Sire, WTCH Hangin' Tree Black Bear RDg RTDsc PATDc DNA-CP**



Nearly everyone who knows something about the history of working Aussies has heard of Hangin' Tree Black Bear. Bear's name appears in the pedigrees of a large number of currently working Aussies, and he continues to influence the breed dramatically. However, as with all legends, it is sometimes hard to separate fact from fiction. As an owner of an outstanding Black Bear daughter (WTCH Bear's Aurora of Windsor RTDcs DNA-VP or "Rory") I had a

personal desire to find out about her background. What follows are the results of my interviews with all of Bear's owners, my personal observations of Black Bear, and research conducted from 1999 to 2002.

Hangin' Tree Buddy, Black Bear's sire, was acquired by Gary Ericsson from a line of dogs that had been in his family for many generations. These dogs were worked primarily on range cattle on ranches at the southern edge of Utah and in northern Arizona. Gary's family had been breeding Aussies, basically for their own work needs, for many years. However, if you go back deep enough you do see some of the Arizona (not Colorado) Thornton dogs in the pedigree. These Aussies were registered with the International English Shepherd Registry, and a review of their descriptions by Gary shows that many had full tails and some had non-standard color descriptions.

Gary acquired Buddy from his sister because he was looking for an outcross sire for his females. He wanted a male that would work reliably in tough situations. He felt that some of his previous crosses had produced dogs that were a little weak on cattle and in difficult environmental conditions. "I personally felt I had gotten nearly everything I wanted to with what Hangin' Tree Red Zephyr (a Charlie Glass son) was producing," said Gary. "The pups were pretty consistent, and I felt I had gone as far as I could with the crosses I had done with my current dogs". When asked why he used Zephyr's Angel Blue RDX (a Merlin Hart daughter) as the selected dam, he replied, "she was my best producing female, so who else would I use." Also, Angel was a very effective ranch dog in her own right, and tougher than most females, so Gary felt it would be a good match. Gary said that Buddy was an older dog that had at one time been injured, and that "he was a tough old cuss". He was mentally tough, smart and was fast and aggressive on cattle. Having also seen this consistently in Buddy's ancestors, Gary Ericsson hardshipped Buddy into ASCA so that the new outcross pups could be registered.



**Hangin' Tree Buddy**

His first cross between Buddy and Angel produced Hangin' Tree Black Bear, which Gary selected as one of his pick pups. However, he initially sold Bear to a neighbor friend who really wanted a tough male pup. Two months later, the friend relayed that this little black pup was a real handful, and asked whether Gary would be receptive to trading him for another "less challenging" pup. Gary traded him another pup from the litter and took Bear back. He observed

Bear's remarkable talent and intensity at a very young age and immediately took Bear into stockdog training. He said, "From the time I got him back, I had a really good feeling about Bear and I began working with him at the age of 4 1/2 months". He said that Bear was smart, tough minded and serious just like Buddy and his ancestors. Actually, he was more than smart said Gary, He was almost cunning, and was receptive to many types of training. He was stubborn, and just would not back down from a challenging animal. Bear was physically durable and had long lasting endurance, in addition to his speed. "He remains the toughest and most powerful Aussie I have ever seen," said Gary.



**Hall of Fame Dam Zephyr's Angel Blue RDX**

Bear was used regularly at a young age to gather and break tough range cattle, and became nicknamed "the Enforcer" around the ranch. On some days, Gary would describe Bear as the "evil Jokester". He was extremely tough, and worked close and hard on stock. Gary Ericsson was pleased that Bear equally hit both heads and heels, and was both agile and intense. Gary was quick to point out that Bear was really not biddable like his previously bred Hangin' Tree dogs, but he was willing to accept that shortcoming to gain the power he saw in Bear. Gary Ericsson had Bear successfully evaluated for an ASCA Ranch Dog title at 13 months, and only trialed him only once in an ASCA Working Trial. Due to his RD title, he was able to immediately trial at the advanced level, and he received all three ATD titles and his Working Trial Championship in one weekend in Alberta, Canada. All his scores were over 100. With Gary Ericsson handling him, Bear twice won the Idaho State Stockdog Championships, an all-breed competition.

In the Pacific Northwest and in Canada, Bear offspring were in high demand. Although best known for his female offspring, his male pups were widely successful ranch dogs. Gary said, "The female Bear kids were easier to handle for most folks, while the male sons could be a might tough for anyone but the most experienced ranchers." Bear's offspring were known to learn their jobs quickly regardless of the quality of their training. Sandy Moore of Nevada said, "the dogs (Bear pups) could be trained by just awful trainers, first time handlers, good trainers and just good ole' cowboys. They would simply adjust, and work. If you were smart you learned something from them along the way.

They were survivors, and honest workers. Bear fathered good work ethic and longevity and just plain tough clear thinkers."

The cross of Bear to Hall of Fame Dam, Hangin' Tree Cinnamon Teal turned out to what both Gary and Davene Peters Finkbeiner (Bear's next owner) considered to be the most successful single cross. Bear was not used as a stud dog excessively, averaging about 5 litters a year as a young dog. Bear had his eyes and hips checked periodically by an Idaho vet to confirm his continued soundness. Because Bear was the product of a total outcross, Gary was able to breed him tightly back within his older line.

When Gary Ericsson decided to develop his own cross bred Hangin' Tree cowdog, combining the best traits of the Australian Shepherd, Australian Kelpie, Border Collie and Catahoula Leopard breeds, Black Bear was the only Australian Shepherd that was allowed to contribute genetically to the new breed. As Gary developed his new cowdog, he recognized that this new crossbred dog was more like the dog he could successfully develop and market to the ranchers in his area. He decided to sell his Aussie breeding stock and devote all his time and resources to this new project.

In September of 1992, Davene Peters of Montana, who had previously owned several Hangin' Tree Aussies, including Hangin Tree Roja (Dude's dam) began the purchase and transfer of the Hangin' Tree Australian Shepherd kennel name from Gary Ericsson. Davene had worked cooperatively with Gary for several years, and continued to consult with him as she transitioned to full possession of the line. In the purchase arrangement Davene paid \$20,000 specifically for Black Bear, who was transferred to her ownership via ASCA registration in June of 1994. An additional \$8,500 was paid for the remaining breeding stock and kennel name, and the agreement included a 5-year non-compete clause that precluded Gary from breeding and registering any Australian Shepherds.

Davene began a business enterprise of breeding stockdogs for the ranch market. She had the policy that she would not sell to any homes not providing a full working home for the pups. She religiously followed the advice of two mentors, Gary Ericsson and Ernie Hartnagle. Gary gave her insight into pure working traits, and Ernie helped her breed for multiple traits and to the ASCA standard. She produced an average of 15 litters a year and many of the pups were unregistered and sold to farmers and ranchers throughout the United States and in Canada. Her dogs were in great demand at the time, and she maintained a near constant "deposited" waiting list, especially for Bear offspring. She fully guaranteed the working abilities of her produced Aussies and maintained a dog replacement process for any who wanted a different dog after purchase. She immediately had an economically viable breeding operation. Additionally, she began to assist and advise up to ten other kennels around the country that utilized Hangin' Tree dogs as their foundation breeding stock. Davene used both Peter's Ranch and Hangin' Tree kennel labels for her registered pups.

The majority of her crosses were based on Gary Ericsson's original directive to cross Bear daughters to Spook sons. Eventually, as Hangin Tree Dude demonstrated his excellence, Spook was removed from the breeding plan and placed in retirement. Bear's daughters crossed on Dude produced a near guarantee of a good working dog. Davene believed that Bear consistently stamped his offspring with three characteristics: instinctive knowledge of stock, early working drive and train-ability, and intensity to work.

Like all stud dogs, Bear occasionally passed on some undesirable characteristics as well. He occasionally produced some dogs that were smaller than the standard, and some offspring were characterized as being "high strung" in

temperament. However, when crossed with the Dude/Spook genetic material, the resulting dogs were structurally sound, more biddable, and temperamentally improved.

Davene campaigned Bear in the North American Professional Stockdog Association trial for several years, and won a year-long points chase and was awarded the title of Montana State Championship Stockdog. Bear did well in time and points-scored competitions against all breeds of working dogs, and his reputation continued to grow. He was a very difficult dog to trial due to his intensity. Davene said, "You had to keep your thumb on him every second. If not, he would move into stock control mode immediately." This same characteristic had forced Gary Ericsson to put an incredible "down command" on Bear as a young dog. Bear was always known to drop like a rock. As Gary said, "I had to have some way to slow the onslaught, didn't I?" The one characteristic he always demonstrated was power. Although he was known for his work with cattle, he was equally talented on sheep and ducks. However, as a ranch dog, Davene labeled him "a pain in the ass." He could not be left unsupervised around the stock, or he immediately went to work on his own.

In 1995, Davene officially registered both Hangin' Tree and Peter's Ranch with ASCA. Bear competed in ASCA trials throughout the western states regularly, and qualified for the Stockdog Finals at the Oregon Nationals. In late 1996, Bear was retired from trial competition. About that time, Davene suspected that a reproductive injury had made Bear incapable of continued breeding, and he was no longer used as a stud dog. The last Bear offspring that she whelped and registered occurred in the summer of 1996.

In 1998, Gary and Mary Hawley of Windsor Aussies decided to see if they could arrange a purchase Black Bear from Davene Peters. Gary had seen Bear trialed while working as a stockdog judge, and was instantly reminded of Mary's tough first Aussie, Gidding's Blue Bandit CWD (Certified Working Dog) Although Bear had not produced a litter in over two years, they decided to see if Bear was available. Coincidentally, Davene Peters (now Finkbeiner) had been impressed with how the Hawleys took such good care of their retired Hall of Fame Sire, Highlander of Windsor "Huggie", and thought that it would be a wonderful place for Bear to retire as well.

In November of 1998 the Hawleys agreed to purchase Black Bear for \$1,000 with the hopes that he could be brought back to some type of fertility. Davene requested that if he remained incapable of breeding, then, at no cost, Bear could live out his retirement with the Hawleys. After Bear arrived in Arizona, an examination showed the presence of a serious internal E-coli bacterial infection. It was initially detected in a blood-filled semen sample. Following a month-long high dose prescription of Baytril and other veterinary care, Bear was re-examined, and was found to again have normal viable sperm, and was deemed to be totally healthy.

At Windsor, Bear sired has three additional litters, and has produced his next set of accomplished offspring, including two recent WTCH daughters. His cross to Hall of Fame Dam Ch. Silver Sliver of Windsor STDs DNA-CP was a near total outcross, but has proven to be one of those rare golden crosses. Bear was DNA profiled and at 137 months of age his hips were certified OFA Excellent and CERF eyes clear. A real case of form following function.

Right up to his death on September 19, 2002, Bear was a happy, agile, and alert working Aussie. Just two days before his passing he was out heeling the goats and maintaining his top dog position in the Aussie pack at Windsor. Except for his gray muzzle (a consistent Hangin' Tree characteristic) and a slight directional hearing loss, he would have passed for a much younger dog. He was 21 inches tall and 48 pounds, and still retained his easy stride and some of his legendary speed. He had a moderate coat, and one unique feature is that his copper trim in evenly interspersed with

black hairs, a color trait he occasionally passes on to his offspring.

In his lifetime Bear sired 58 ASCA registered litters. The vast majority of those crosses have occurred with other Hangin' Tree linebred females. His offspring have achieved 12 WTCH titles and 20 others have working titles. His grand-offspring also account for an additional 24 WTCH titles and 45 more dogs with working titles. The majority of the grand-offspring are the results of variations on the Bear with Dude crosses.

Due to modern reproductive technology, the Hawleys have plans to cross Bear several times more in the future. First, they plan to repeat the golden cross to Hall Of Fame Dam Ch. Silver Sliver of Windsor STDs DNA-CP. Then they hope to cross two outstanding HOF WTCH Hangin' Tree Dude daughters: Phipp's Sand Creek Grand STDdcs RTDs DNA-VP, the Most Promising Started Aussie at the 2002 ASCA Nationals and the 30th Annual Silver Specialty, WTCH Diamond S Dox Sidekick RTDs DNA-CP the 1998 Louisiana Cattledog Futurity Winner.



#### Post Script

With the passing of Black Bear, this list was assembled thanks to Patrick's McRobert's wonderful pedigree web site so that everyone could take a look at the contribution Bear has made to the Aussie breed. Although the titles might be constantly changing, it gives insight into the greatness of Bear as a working Hall of Fame Sire. This list does not include hundreds of unregistered progeny working on farms and ranches around the country.

WTCH Hangin' Tree Black Bear PATDc RTDcs RDg DNA-CP Hall of Fame Sire  
1-4-88 to 9-19-02 ASCA E35820 Black with Copper and White

WTCH Offspring:

WTCH Bear's Aurora of Windsor RTDcs JS-E RS-O GS-N DNA-VP  
WTCH C Hangin' 5 Ben  
WTCH C Hangin' 5 Blue Merl Strepe RTDcs DNA-CP  
WTCH C Hangin' 5 Kate  
WTCH C Hangin'5 Jensens Workin Bear RTDs  
WTCH Hangin' Tree Workin' Class CDX PATDs RTDs DNA-CP Hall Of Fame  
WTCH Hangin' Tree Blue Bear CD PATDcs RD RTDcs Hall of Fame  
WTCH Kola Bear RD RTDc  
WTCH My Jasmine Breeze of Windsor RTDs DNA-VP  
WTCH Peters Ranch Bear's Blue Pepper PATDcs RTDcs  
WTCH Peters Ranch Teal Sydney Bear RD RTDcs  
WTCH Peters Ranch Blackbear Teal

Working Titled Offspring:

Bear's Primero Kid STDcs  
C Hangin' 5 Mr. Dexter Blue STDs  
C Hangin' 5 Montana Jake OTDc STDds  
C Hangin' 5 Midnight Tazz STDccls  
Four Bar X Cola of PetersRanch RD STDccls DNA-CP  
Four Bar X Blackbeary Patch STDcs  
Lukes Cool Blue Bear OTDs STDcd  
Paint It Black of Windsor OTDd STDccls DNA-VP  
Peters Ranch Bug Tussle RD ATDs OTDcd  
Peter's Ranch Black Bear Sioux STDd OTDcs  
Peter's Ranch Blue Demon STDd OTDcs  
Peter's Ranch Jack The Gripper STDs OTDcd  
Peters Ranch Jac OTDd RTDs STDcs  
Peter's Ranch Kali STDs  
Peter's Ranch Missy STDd OTDc  
Peter's Ranch Obe STDc  
Peters Ranch Pepper Annie STDccls  
Peter's Ranch T Bueno STDcs  
Windsor's Bad Boy OTDds DNA-VP  
W Too BJ OTDd STDcs

Grand Offspring-Working Titled:

WTCH Hangin' Tree Bessie Red Bear  
WTCH BJM Taylor RTDcs  
WTCH C Hangin' 5 Annies' Breeze  
WTCH C Hangin' 5 Workin Class Cosmo DNA-VP  
WTCH C Hangin' 5 Chippewa  
WTCH C Hangin' 5 Holly Bear NT RD RTDc DNA-CP  
WTCH Diamond S C Hangin' 5 Joker PATDc DNA-CP  
WTCH Diamond S Bozo RD RTDsc DNA-CP  
WTCH Diamond S Sam PATDs  
WTCH Diamond S Sammy PATDcs RTDcs DNA-CP  
WTCH NT Connected Lucky DNA-VP  
WTCH Pincie Creek Raven Bear  
WTCH Pincie Creek Radiant Ruby CDX RTDcs  
WTCH Pincie Creek Carly Jo CDX RTDcs  
WTCH Pincie Creek Bears Best Joe PATDcs RTDcs  
VCH WTCH Ch Pincie Creek Blue Nash CDX RTDc  
WTCH Pincie Creek Osceola PATDcs RD RTDcs  
WTCH Pincie Creek Crimson Tide Indy  
WTCH Pincie Creek Running Bear RD RTDcs  
WTCH Pincie Creek Hunting Bear RTDcs  
WTCH Pincie Creek Cherry Sota RTDc DNA-CP  
WTCH Workin' Class Dodger

C Hangin' 5 Roxanne STDc OTDds DNA-CP  
C Hangin' 5 Cinnamon Twist OTDs ATDcd  
Choctaw Maverick Workin' Class STDs  
Diamond S Scrub RTDc  
Diamond S Lady Zee STDc DNA-CP Hall of Fame  
Diamond S Lookin For Trouble STDds  
Diamond S Liberty Rose STDcs  
Land Of Oz Jewel STDc  
Judie's lil'sage STDc  
Judie's Bud at the Glen STDc  
Peters Ranch Cowboys Jig STDd  
Peters Ranch Touch RD STDc  
Peters Ranch Nickolus STDds  
Peters Ranch Razzberry OTDds STDc  
Peter's Ranch Silver Sage STDcs  
Peters Ranch Joe STDc  
Phipps Sand Creek Grand OTDc  
Pincie Creek Punch Cigar STDs  
Pincie Creek Cicso Kid STDcs  
Pincie Creek Lil' Miss Dixie STDc  
Pincie Creek Ranch Hand STDc

Pincie Creek Twist of Fate RD STDs OTDcd  
Pincie Creek Semi Tough RD DNA-CP  
Pincie Creek Bittersweet Babe RD STDcds  
Pincie Creek Troublemaker STDcds  
Pincie Creek Tres Manchas STDcds  
Pincie Creek Storm OTDcs  
Pincie Creek Red Dawn STDcs  
Pincie Creek Blaze of Glory STDds  
W Lazy J Calamity Jane STDs  
Workin' Class Hooker STDcds DNA-VP  
Workin' Class Chip of Quatro K STDcds  
Workin' Class Justus N' Copper STDs OTDc ATDd  
Workin' Class Just a Trace OTDcs ATDd  
Workin' Class Bar JHs Osita OTDd STDcs DNA-VP

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