

## Field and Feather

The Retrieving Game

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### In their own words: Part III

This article is the third in a series where I have asked three people to share their stories. The first interview was with Thomas McClanahan of Sacramento, California who has Chessies. The second interview was with Susan Kluesner of Lakeville, Minnesota, who has Goldens. This interview is with Paulette Swartzendruber from Taunton, Massachusetts. She has Flat-Coated Retrievers.

**MK:** How long have you had Flat-Coats?

**PS:** I acquired my first Flat-Coat approximately 17 years ago. I had decided on a Flat-Coat after having great success with Shelties. I wanted something different for myself and also a breed that was not common in the obedience ring. I wanted something that was somewhat challenging, but more fun than work.

**MK:** When did you start participating in performance events and which events?

**PS:** I originally started out with Irish Setters, along with my good friends at the time, Janice DeMello and Terry Arnold. I started on obedience, as breed (the breed ring) did not interest me at the time. My step father had been an AKC breed judge and in going to one of the shows with him, I was amazed when I went over to the obedience side to see what you could teach a dog to do. Terry and Janie at the time had an Irish Setter already. The opportunity to acquire a littermate to Jani's came up and I took it.

My first attempts at a CD with this Irish were three consecutive scores of 199.5. I was hooked! After the Irish, I was drawn to the breed I loved--Shelties. Becoming very friendly with the breeders of my Sheltie, I started showing the Shelties in breed and also had success immediately with that--again hooked. The Sheltie I acquired from them turned out to be an awesome dog. We tied with a well-known competitor at the time in Open at the Eastern Regional. We had a long list of successes and he turned out to be my first OTCH.

Finding it almost impossible to come up with a great Sheltie to follow him, I looked to another breed. Flat-Coats appealed to me. There was a litter in my area that was sired by the only AFC in the breed. Thinking a good performance dog in field would produce the same great attributes you would need in obedience, I went and obtained my first Flat-Coat. He not only turned out to be a great obedience dog, having his OTCH by three-and-a-half years old, but he literally dragged me into field--along with some great prodding by fans of his talents. He became my first Master dog with very little knowledge on my part.

**MK:** How did you find out about the Hunt Tests and how did you go about learning more and starting to train your dog? (did you join a club, find a mentor, etc.)

**PS:** I learned about hunt test through my local breed club and was extremely encouraged by some great people, who turned out to be my life-time mentors, Bunny Millikin and Margot Hallet Brown, both well-known field “goddesses” in the Flat-Coat breed.

**MK:** Do you remember your first licensed field event? What went wrong and what went right?

**PS:** To tell you the truth I cannot remember my first hunt test, but it most of them have been pretty good as I continued to do it and am still having a great time doing it today!

**MK:** What is the one tip you would give a "newbie" to the sport?

**PS:** Try it! You don't know what you are missing--for both your dog and yourself. Don't let first impressions of field work discourage you or upset you. My first impression was not a favorable one, as my dog could not even remember his name once the guns went off and the birds fell. He also got quite scared by his first retrieve of a live bird, but experience and training soon turned that around. I find nothing more rewarding than seeing a dog do what he was bred to do and the unimaginable sparkle that comes over them when they are doing it!

**MK:** Where are your dogs now in their accomplishments and what's next?

**PS:** I now have a daughter (Tyma) and a grandson (Tripp) from my first Flat-Coat, Ram. Tyma is now OTCH Cliscocha Big Tyme Hob-B UDX, MH, OA, OAJ, WCX. She needs one more major to finish in the breed ring and one more leg each on her AX and AXJ. I also plan on running her in field trials this summer for the experience and fun of it. She is only four and needs more to do. I am also thrilled to announce that she is a mother of six right now, four boys and two girls (note: this interview was done in February).

My other Flat-Coat is Tripp, who is in training for his SH and will be coming out in February for his CD. He is just starting his career. I also have one Sheltie, who has most of her points in the breed ring, has her AX and needs only one more leg for her AXJ. As you can tell, having nothing to do is never an issue in my life!

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Paulette experienced what many obedience people have discovered when their well-behaved obedience dogs get the first taste of field work. They turn into totally different dogs because the excitement of doing what they are bred to do comes bubbling—no, gushing—to the surface!

And—once again—that issue of introducing your dog to live birds BEFORE attending your first event gets another testimonial.

My thanks to Tom, Susan and Paulette for sharing their stories and advice. We can all learn from those who have gone before us.

Happy training!

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Photo is OTCH Cliscocha Big Tyme Hob-B UDX MH OA OAJ WCX

