

Field and Feather

The Retrieving Game

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A Title at Both Ends

With many of the retrieving breeds, there has been an unfortunate schism between the field dogs and the conformation dogs. It has been gratifying in the last few years to see more and more dogs participating in multiple venues. With Labradors, there are now over 25 animals with both Conformation titles and Master Hunter titles, but considering how many thousands of Labradors there are, we could do better! My own Master dog, Ruthless Scalawag's Scarlett, also has her CD and is pointed in the breed ring. Scarlett's dam, Ch Plantier's Ruthless Ruthie, MH, CD, was the first Labrador bitch and the first chocolate Labrador to achieve CH/MH status. Scarlett's sire is the first chocolate National Field Champion (NFC).

I have always worked toward handsome dogs that meet the Labrador standard, and also have the retrieving desire and trainability to succeed in field events. Scarlett is the first dog I have put in the conformation ring, but my focus is still mainly field.

It is exciting to see more conformation dogs participating--and succeeding--in performance events! There are also more dogs with field bloodlines (like my Scarlett) showing up in the breed ring. I feel it is important that "retrievers" still have the desire to retrieve and that they are physically sound to meet the rigors of field work. Form follows function. Intelligence and trainability also play an integral part in the process—if a dog is intelligent but not responsive to training, then you will have an extremely difficult time controlling a dog in the field or obedience ring.

At the suggestion of a reader, I interviewed two owners of Conformation Champion, Master Hunters to see where they started out and how they "crossed over" into the different areas. I talked with Jeanna Brushwood who owns Am/Can CH Clarion's Bad As I Wanna Be, MH, WC, CGC, known as Hooper. I also talked with Nancy Brandow, breeder of Ch Plantier's Ruthless Ruthie, CD, MH and owner of CH Ruthless Blazing Brentley, CDX, MH (Brentley was the second chocolate to be a Ch/MH). This is a two-part column—this issue will be Jeanna's comments and next month will be Nancy's comments. Here is what we talked about.

MK: What did you start with first--obedience, conformation or field?

JB: My first introduction to the world of dogs was through obedience. A friend of mine was doing obedience with her Doberman and I thought I could do the same thing. I started training with Gloria McGrath, a top obedience trainer (she won the 2001 AKC Invitational). She taught me so much and gave me a great foundation in obedience.

My next Doberman was titled in both conformation and obedience. He was showing in Utility when he was injured and had to be retired. He was an American/Canadian Champion with a CDX, Canadian/UKC CD.

My first Lab, which is Hooper, has had a mixed career. He started in conformation at six months and then when he was 10 months old, his field training began. I sent him to Jim Fulks in Eugene, Oregon who trained and showed Hooper from his JH through his MH. I would have gone on with Hooper in the field, except Jim doesn't do the field trial training. (Author's note: the hunt test program and the field trial program are different levels of difficulty, with field trials being more difficult and set up to be elimination events—top four or five dogs place—as opposed to the hunt test format of being graded against an ideal, similar to obedience. Hunt test dogs receive passing scores, not placements.)

MK: How did you first get interested in doing field work with your dogs?

JB: Hooper's breeder wanted me to put a JH title on him. I knew nothing about the field work but knew enough to send Hooper to someone who could bring out the best in him. I realized that Hooper's talents were far superior to mine.

MK: Field work takes a smart, trainable and sound dog. What specific characteristics do you look for in your dogs?

JB: Health and soundness of the parents is important to me. Hooper and his litter brother are the only field titled dogs in their pedigrees, although there are several champions. Hooper is a completely show bred dog. I honestly believe that most Labs are capable of at least a JH. In every litter you're going to get a range of field drives. Not all dogs will be capable of [completing] a SH or MH. Just as in obedience, most dogs can do a CD but not all can do the CDX or UD.

Health is an extremely important factor for me. I decided that if I were going to do all these things with Hooper then he would have to be completely health tested. It's very important that any female he's bred to also has strong health as well as being accomplished in some venue. Hooper is bred on a limited basis and I want it all: health, temperament and accomplishments.

I also make it a part of the agreement to breed to Hooper that I get the puppy owners' names and addresses. They all receive a letter from me requesting that I get pictures, brags of any sort, titles and health test results (be it good or bad). I want to know these things. During the Christmas season I compile all the results from the previous year and publish the "Hooper Report" which details the Hooper kids' accomplishments and send it to the breeders and puppy owners. That way everyone knows who is doing what. Last year was the first Hooper report and it went over big. It's my holiday card to the puppy owners. This year's edition will contain details of championship pointed kids, agility titled kids and any other accomplishments I get.

MK: A friend of mine told the story of how her wonderful obedience dog just went insane when he first got to retrieve a bird. It is like you awaken a need and desire in them that they **have** to satisfy. I have seen the same thing in my dogs...my dogs actually pout if they go too many days without retrieving. Have you seen a different side to your dog in the field?

JB: What I see in Hooper in the field is that he's thinking all the time. He's acutely aware of his surroundings and also what he needs to do. He's always looking for that next retrieve. He can be stubborn and want to do things his way in the field. He is far more biddable in

obedience and in conformation. He is one of the easiest dogs in the world to show in conformation.

MK: When you are working with a new pup, when do you introduce field elements?

JB: Hooper was introduced to bird wings at about six weeks of age. He took his and ran with it. He was introduced to deep water at four months.

MK: Do you have your dogs participating in multiple activities--field and show for example--at the same time, or do you complete one aspect before working on the next?

JB: Hooper has always been a dog that is working in multiple venues. He started in conformation, left to get his JH at 15 months, came back to California and at 20 months earned his first points by going Best of Breed over specials. Shortly after that, he headed back to the field to do his Senior. After the SH, it was back home again to the conformation ring. Hooper finished his Master Hunter in August of 1999 and then we went to Canada in March of 2000 to finish his Canadian Championship. He finished his AKC Championship in May of 2000. He received a Judges Award of Merit at the LRC National Specialty in October of 2000 and his CD in December of 2000.

Hooper would go off with his trainer and be a kennel dog for four to six months out of the year and then come home and be up on my bed the first night back, just as if he'd never been gone. This past summer he went up to Canada to earn a Canadian WC (Working Certificate), WCI and WCX which are all hunting titles. Just as a lark he was entered in some conformation shows. There was a weekend of three specialties and Hooper won Best of Breed at the last one, the very next day went out into the field and earned his WCX in the field. People were surprised by that, but I wasn't as I expected him to do both.

It really is possible for dogs to work in multiple venues. They can distinguish between the different events, switching back and forth without much difficulty. For the most part, it makes their lives—and ours—much more interesting and challenging too! Next month will be Nancy Brandow's comments.

Happy training!

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