

# The Right Dog

By Jack Jagoda

*I am a waterfowl and upland bird hunter with a passion for retrievers. I often tell people I am a victim of the classic evolution from a hunter with a dog, to a dog man who hunts. Many people ask me what kind of dog I like and I always respond, "A good one."*



I have been hunting for many years but clearly remember some of my early experiences without a retriever. It didn't take me long to realize I didn't have the nose for locating birds or the desire to chase down a cripple in icy water.

Understanding the need for a good working dog was much easier than acquiring one. I was eager to get a dog and realized that once I got him home he was there to stay, so I needed to make the right decision. I was hungry for information to conduct my search but knowledge was slow in coming and I was impatient. Everything I read kept leading me in the direction of a dual purpose dog that could hunt both upland birds and waterfowl. I was mainly hunting quail and just getting into ducks and geese at the time.

Information was hard to come by in those days prior to the Web, and mostly hearsay.

I opted for a German short-haired pointer that I named Buck. The ad read "AKC Championship bloodlines" and pictured a dog with a bird in his mouth. Buck was not much better than I was at working cover. Buck loved water but refused to retrieve when it got cold, just like me. Buck had a championship pedigree, but it wasn't from working-dog heritage, it was all conformation, you know, the Westminster Dog Show stuff. I really didn't understand the difference at the time, but painful trial and error gave birth to my education.

Selecting a dog from one of the more popular AKC retriever breeds will offer you a greater opportunity to find one to suit your needs. The Labrador retriever is number one in popularity and registry with the American Kennel Club. Only one Labrador was registered with the American Kennel Club in 1917. Today, over 150,000 are registered annually. He is a charming, faithful and loving companion that exhibits exceptional enthusiasm for everything he does. Although the Labrador has a specific written breed standard, he is for all intents and purposes two breeds within one which are often referred to as the English Lab and the American Lab.

The Labrador retriever was imported from the United Kingdom in the early 1900s and employed on many of the wealthy estates in the northeast as pickup dogs for driven shoots. It is important to note that the early dog was used only as an upland





MHR Deep Run Crazy Horse  
Stuttgart Arkansas  
December 20, 2008  
Owned by  
James B. Feinman



*CH MHR Caer Bren Superhero MH*

retriever, placed in a stationary position to watch and retrieve fallen birds as human beaters thrashed the cover to flush birds to the guns. Even today in England the dog is used primarily on land in the time-honored tradition of his forefathers. I attended the International Gun Dog League National Retriever Championship in England a couple of years ago and was surprised to see the dogs were only required to make one short water retrieve of about 20 yards.

The use of retrievers in a rough shooting application to locate game, flush and retrieve is more common in America. The extensive use of the dog as a waterfowl hunting retriever is common in this country and Canada, and not in widespread application any other place in the world. This upland hunting flushing dog and waterfowl retrieving dog is known as “the American Lab.”

In 1933, the first-ever show of Labrador retrievers was held in the garage of Marshall Fields’ town home in New York City. The show was to determine which dog had the physical appearance that conformed to the written standard. Those first participants were also the field trial participants of the day. Since the first show, these dogs have been bred principally to conform to a certain look or standard. Over the years, the Labrador retriever breed (as well as most other sporting breeds) has diverged into two groups, the group that conforms to the physical written standard with no requirements for hunting abilities (the English Lab) and the group that measures success only in terms of performance, with no regard for the physical appearance of the dog (the American Lab).

To make things more complicated, there is a third faction of retrievers which is much larger than the English and American Lab combined. Its roots are originally from show and field

heritage. Through 90 years of indiscriminate breeding, it is hard to determine what abilities these dogs may possess. Individuals may have excellent conformation or retrieving skills but cannot reliably pass it on. Other breeds such as the golden retriever and the Chesapeake Bay retriever have essentially the same issue of show versus field heritage.

At our kennel, we enjoy the traits and talents of the American field lab and maintain a group of titled dogs to compete in hunt tests and field trials, and provide dogs for those who require a fearless, tough dog for severe hunting conditions. We also have worked hard to develop English dogs that can perform well in the field. We pride ourselves on our beautiful Labradors with the classic looks of the English dog and the abilities of these dogs to make excellent pets and companions and succeed in field situations, whether it is upland, waterfowl, or hunt testing.



*MHR Deep Run Crazy Horse*

The popularity and sheer numbers of the retriever breeds also perpetuate hereditary health issues. More important than the appearance or performance should be locating a dog within a breed that is free of hereditary and acquired health issues. The OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, [www.OFFA.org](http://www.OFFA.org)) can be very helpful with hereditary issues. The OFA maintains a current open database on which anyone can look up the genetic information on the parents of a prospective puppy at any time. Health related issues are bad hips, elbows, eyes, heart and neuromuscular diseases, all of which can dramatically affect performance and in more severe cases can be crippling or even cause death.

Unless you are sure of the heritage of a prospective dog, you may be better to seek the services of a professional. A responsible breeder should be able to provide you with copies of all certifications for the

sire and dam of a litter. Determine whether you like the stocky, broader-head show style or the taller, leaner field dog, then ask the breeder about the field or show heritage and require documented health clearances.

In the beginning, my training skills were zero, which added to my confusion and frustration. The more I learned about dog training, the more I realized how little I knew. It is this humility that opens the mind and allows you to acquire the skills you need to become a better trainer. The standard phrase I hear from most inexperienced dog owners is “I’m not looking for one of them competition dogs, I just want a hunting dog.” I can appreciate the candor because I said the same thing to a dog trainer many years ago. His reply, “Buddy, aren’t we all just looking for a trained dog?” left me red faced with embarrassment. The final application of your dog is up to you, but the dog still needs to be trained.

Dogs have natural and trained abilities. Natural abilities are passed on through their mothers and fathers and should include a good nose and overwhelming desire for birds. Most everything



Dr Phyllis Giroux

else is a trained ability which is directly related to intelligence and the trainer's knowledge. All behavior is developed by repetition, whether it is good or

experience and knowledge to help make your dog the best he can be. We welcome your input and questions. Spring is here; be sure your dog is up to date with heartworm and flea and tick preventative.

"May you always have a young one full of promise to admit you to those places of wonderment only accessible while in the company of a Labrador" *Gene Hill*

*Deep Run Farm is a retriever training, breeding and boarding facility in Goldvein, Va. Jack and his partner, Phyllis Giroux, DVM, are living their lifetime dream. Visit them on the Web at [DeepRunRetrievers.com](http://DeepRunRetrievers.com) and feel free to e-mail Jack at [jmjagoda@aol.com](mailto:jmjagoda@aol.com) with questions.*

bad. It is much easier to instill proper behavior from the start. Teaching basic obedience to an 80-pound dog that pulls you down the driveway standing on his hind legs can be quite a challenge. Likewise, a two-year old hunting retriever that barks in the blind or takes off as soon as you blow your call or lift your gun may be difficult to cure and likely require some professional help.

I offer this information to you with the hope that you don't make the same mistake I did in selecting a dog or that you have a better understanding of the type of dog you already own. Training issues are directly related to specific heritage, health and training knowledge. If your dog is out of control or exhibiting unwanted behavior, you are likely responsible for allowing it to continue.

The first six months of a dog's life is a crucial and formative period of time in which you must enhance natural ability and teach fundamental skills that will become the foundation for the rest of your dog's life.

The first three trained commands in order of importance are come, sit and hold. These basic skills, and enhancing natural retrieving desire and introduction to hunting scenarios, will be the topic for the next issue.

Good fortune has offered me a diverse array of opportunities to hunt, train and compete with my dogs around the world. My partner, Dr. Phyllis Giroux and I each have over 30 years experience breeding, training, showing, trialing, hunting, judging and loving retrievers. During the coming months we will offer our

## Dance's Sporting Goods

570 Southpark Boulevard  
Colonia Heights, VA 28334  
804-526-8399

# 10th ANNUAL GUN AUCTION

*Saturday, March 14th at 10 AM  
Preview, Friday 13th at 7 PM - 8 PM  
& Saturday 14th at 9 AM  
\$5.00 Registration Fee*

*We will be auctioning around 100 firearms, and we are expecting some of the best quality guns that we have ever had in our auctions.*

*We will also be having a large variety of sale and closeout items on special for that weekend only: Be sure to come join the fun, and don't miss out on the great deals!*

**MANY ITEMS ON SALE**

*Specials for this weekend only....don't miss the many great deals!*

Offers valid March 13th, 2009 through March 14th, 2009