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RETRIEVER TRIALS

By Charles Gilliam

I was talking to "Cotton" Pershall the other day. He is the Manager of Nilo Kennels for Olin Industries, Inc., and resides on their model controlled shooting area near Brighton, Illinois. Last November he brought King Buck, Black Labrador, through to win the National Retriever championship.

"What," I asked him, "aside from being a fine job for you, is the value of Retriever Trials? You got a beautiful silver trophy and a dog worth several thousand dollars but what does that have to do with helping sportsmen to better shooting?"

The blond trainer's eyes narrowed a bit. "In the first place this 'fine job' starts about 6 a. m., and the day ends when the sun goes down. It last 365 days in the year with no time out for golf and quail shooting trips. We have puppies coming along all the time to be started with their training. Only five or six of our adult dogs ever see a retriever trial. Most of them go out in the world to retrieve ducks and pheasants and help some sportsman bring in the birds he might otherwise have lost without their help."

"O.K." I told him. "That still doesn't answer the question. What is the value of retriever trials? I will go along with you 100 percent on using a dog to bring in fallen game. That is a real conservation measure all the hunting magazines and sportsmen have been boosting for some time. Why not just raise and train pups. You don't save game in going to a retriever trial."

Pershall looked almost as patient as when he first starts yard-breaking a puppy. "Who in the heck is going to bring good blooded dogs into this country and breed them for hunting? You got to get top blood and a lot of training to win retriever trials and that's just where the value of this kennel comes in to the sportsmen of America. We have about 60 dogs here and I told you that only a small portion of them ever enter retriever trials. The rest of them go out to the sportsmen and believe me, they are much better than average hunting dogs. They have puppies that go on to other duck and pheasant hunters and do their bit to reduce the birds that are lost in heavy cover, or escape wounded and benefit no one.

"Unfortunately, people get careless, or rather they allow their dogs to get that way. Good blood runs out. Puppies are born of dubious parentage and cannot be registered as pure-breds. Here again the retriever trial dogs are worth their weight in gold. They provide sires or dams for additional pure-bred pups and more good dogs go forth to help the 14,000,000 sportsmen who annually go hunting in the United States.

"Get me straight on this," Cotton stopped to look at the foot pads of "Hot Coffee," one of his favorite retrievers. "The boys who raise pointing dogs and specialize in field trials for setters and pointers have been at this business longer than we retriever people. I don't think there would be a good bird dog in America today if it were not for the field trials that have been held in this country