

A challenge to Labrador breeders

By Sherry Kerr

The true dual-purpose Labrador is becoming a rather rare individual. The definition of "dual-purpose" as being one who can do hunt test or field trial work, can go to a conformation show and win points and is also intelligent and easily trained. It is a very rare dog who can become a show champion and a field champion and thus earn the title dual champion.

For the past 40 years this breeder has been attempting to breed true dual-purpose Labradors, a challenge if there ever was one! Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that it takes much time and knowledge to train a field dog, and it also is very expensive to campaign field dogs and show dogs. To do both takes a very beautiful and talented dog along with a talented owner.

I began with one female by the name of Tar. I spent several

years in Canada attending school and there Tar produced Can. Sh. Ch. SharLe's Baron and his sister, Can. FT Ch. Spanky. Spanky also had eight

AKC show points (one major) and SharLe's Baron was trained for field trial work although he was not campaigned because of an injury. Baron produced the AKC F. Ch. SharLe's Snowbird, owned by Nelson Sills, president of the Labrador Retriever Club, Inc.

Spanky produced the Can. Dual Ch. Black Lobo, and the



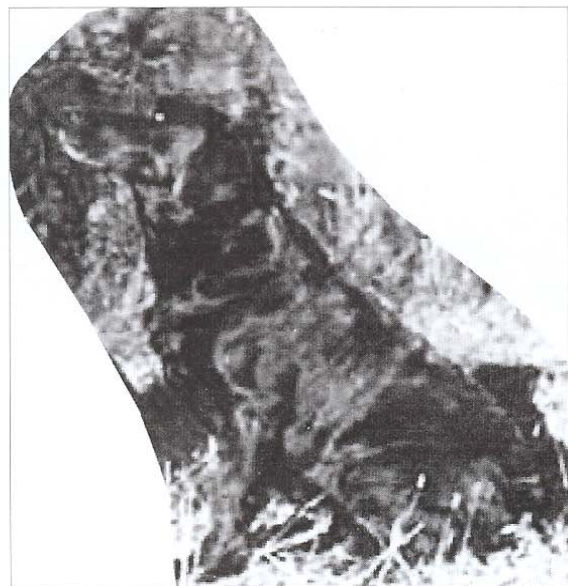
Can. Ch. SharLe's Baron.



SherLab's Sadie, daughter of SharLe's Baron (early 1970s).



Left: Ch. SherLab's Spectacular Sport, earned many wins and placings in fun field trials, including the Open All Age Stake. Son of SharLe's DeeDo and Ch. Shamrock Acres Light Brigade (1970s). Right: Sport being sent for a 120-yard water blind.



Can. FT Ch. Spanky, eight AKC show points, one major (late 1960s).



SharLe's DeeDo, daughter of Can. FT Ch. Spanky (1970s).

two littermates SharLe's DeeDo and SharLe's Tiny Tina. SharLe's DeeDo was a lovely, talented female who earned ten AKC show points in Colorado and other places, and won and placed in many club field trials (unlicensed). At that time there were no hunt tests. SharLe's Tiny Tina was on the Top 10 list of Derby field trial dogs and was the dam of FT Ch/AFT Ch. Jonas Abraham Malarky who was the sire of 1986 National Field Champion Jubilashus TC Malarky.

I have produced ten or twelve generations of Labradors,



Above: The Baron of SherLab, son of "Special," starting his field training work (1970s). Right: Ch. SherLab's Especially Special, daughter of SharLe's DeeDo and Ch. Shamrock Acres Light Brigade.



to retrieve at an early age, six to seven weeks. They can be taught simple things such as coming when called and sitting before they are fed. At six to eight weeks they are very tuned into one's thoughts and learn very easily, particularly when a food reward is offered!

As puppies grow older, they are taught longer single retrieves. They are taken to water and learn to swim and are taken on romps in the field. At six months of age or older, obedience training for field work begins and they are taught to hold the bird and deliver it to hand. As soon as they can do this, they can often be started on short double and triple retrieves, blinds, and hand signal work.

Training is, and should always be, fun. Sessions are short, well-planned, and designed so that puppies make few mistakes. Building confidence in themselves, and their ability to retrieve, is very important and is encouraged. The attitude, "That looks easy, I can do that!" should be very carefully cultivated. From an early age, they have heard the training pistol go off and very soon the sound of the gun means "training time" and they love it.

Young Labradors can be run in the Derby Stake at field trials or in Junior Hunt tests. In the Derby they are expected to do long and short, single and double retrieves on land and water. They must be steady-to-shot and deliver to hand. Junior Hunt tests are slightly less demanding and dogs can be held, must deliver to hand but not as crisp and exact as a derby dog, and the retrieves are usually single retrieves at no more than 100



SherLab's Sporting Spudnut, shown only nine times, earned nine show points, seven Bests of Breed. Son of Ch. SherLab's Spectacular Sport. Above left, "Spud" is showing his flying water entry (1980s).



Left: SherLab's Shaimus, age twelve, six show points, two Bests of Breed. Sire of two Junior Hunt titled dogs. Grandson of Ch. SherLab's Especially Special. Above: Tarshaimus CD, JH, son of SherLab's Shaimus (2002).

all descending from Tar, my original female, including several show champions, several field champions, and one dual champion. I have not produced great numbers of Labradors but always tried to produce quality, not quantity.

The true Labrador is a wonderful dog, very devoted, quick to learn and eager to please. He responds to training easily and loves to learn. In fact, he can't wait for his lessons and they are the high point of his day. He loves praise and will do most anything for a word of praise or encouragement. He is quiet

around the house, but out in the field he is raring to go. He loves children and makes an excellent family dog. He seems happiest when he is working with or for his master. He has a tremendous desire to please and be of service to his owner.

True Labrador puppies like

Right: Three generations of SherLab Labradors. Left: Ch. SherLab's Especially Special, (center) SherLab's Sparkle, out of Special and Can. Dual Ch. Black Lobo, (right) SherLab's Herr Shaden, twelve show points, out of Sparkle and Ch. SherLab's Spectacular Sport.



yards in distance.

The foundation for any trial, hunt test, or hunting dog, begins with obedience training, "heel, sit, stay, come, and lie down." These commands, are taught and practiced for many months until they become habit. The dog is kept happy through all training and is praised much and rewarded for performing correctly. Soon obedience is easy and fun and the more advanced forms of training can begin.

As the training and experience progresses dogs can be entered in Senior Hunt tests or the Qualifying Stake in field trials. Here the dog must be able to remember and retrieve triple marks and be handled to blind retrieves. From here dogs can go on to Master Hunt tests or the Open All Age Stake in field trials. Usually it takes three to five years, or longer, for a dog to be taught such advanced work. Dogs who are able to earn these advanced titles can surely be thought of as the "PhDs" of the retriever world!

Having covered a little about field trials and hunt tests, we must now turn our attention to conformation shows, another very important aspect of a breeding program. This is where we can prove to others, and to ourselves, that we are breeding dogs that, do indeed, look like Labradors! Here something completely different is required of our Labrador. He doesn't have to know how to retrieve, nor does he have to be particularly intelligent, but he must have the physical build, color and leg movement of a true Labrador.

He must have a broad head, short, level, back, thick tail, good solid bones, and a fairly thick, well-muscled, body. He must not toe in or out in the front, nor be cowhocked in the rear or have other faulty leg movement. He must be happy in the ring and "show well."

The show Labradors are becoming beautiful Labradors and, as the dogs become better looking, with fewer physical faults, competition is becoming very keen in the show ring. Competition is also very keen in field work as dogs are being bred for only one thing, and that is their ability and desire to retrieve.

Unfortunately, as in many of the Sporting breeds, because

of the difficulty, complications and expense involved, breeders tend to specialize and breed only for show or only for field. As a result, very often the show dogs lose much of their field instinct, and the field dogs lose many of the physical characteristics which make a Labrador distinct from other breeds.

In order to preserve the Labrador, the goal of every breeder should be only one thing, and that is to breed the true dual-purpose Labrador. This is a difficult, time-consuming, often frustrating, and expensive goal and yet, in order to preserve this wonderful dog, it

must be done.

It would be ideal if all breeding stock could be shown and earn a few show points, and it would be ideal if all dogs could be trained for hunting, or hunt tests, or field trials, and entered in local club tests or trials in order to prove their field ability. If all breeders could do both, a very ideal situation would be created for the preservation and the improvement of the Labrador.

Even though this would be the ideal situation and not possible to attain for all breeders, each must do his or her best to breed dogs that would fit this

ideal.

The Labrador is an extremely popular breed nationwide, with many people producing Labradors, often in a very haphazard fashion. We, as breeders, have an obligation and a responsibility to preserve and improve that which has been developed in the past.

The challenge to each breeder then is not in breeding great numbers of show champions, and not in breeding great numbers of field champions or hunt test titled dogs, but in breeding dogs that can compete, and win, in both field and show, true dual-purpose Labradors. •