

CH MH prospects, and my thoughts on breeding CH MH and DC dogs in 2022

1. Purchasing CH MH or DC prospects:

I get asked about CH MH or even dual champion prospects every now and then, so wanted to address this.

Half of the people who email me looking for pups want an attractive performance dog with moderate to high drive and structure to hold up to their sport of choice. The other half want nice active pets. I'm happy to place pups in both types of homes and can do that pretty easily. I don't place more than half of a litter into upper level performance homes, so get on my list early if that's what you want.

Once a year or so, I get asked about dual champion prospects. Usually it's someone who has been in a breed like Chesapeakes, where DC dogs are still common and possible. Unfortunately, the last dual champion in the Labrador Retriever world was several decades ago. I do believe it's possible to recreate another one, but that dog probably does not exist yet and I definitely (unfortunately) don't own it yet. We absolutely need more people with a DC goal to create that dog, so please get involved in the breed and help us breed some good prospects.

If you are looking for a CH MH prospect, I'm a generation away, at least, from being able to "consistently" produce that. Most of what I have is just nice looking performance stuff. If I do breedings that have the potential to produce CH MH dogs (e.g. my Poppy x Demo litter produced several with solid potential), you need to know that:

- 1) I would prefer to keep that myself, so you need to be a really attractive home (e.g. current upper level competition) to entice me to place that puppy with you.
- 2) I'm more likely to place a male than a female. You are also more likely to be able to finish a CH on a male than a female, FWIW. Bitch entries are competitive.
- 3) You need to be on the list early and expect to be on the list for a year or two. I won't place a pup if I don't think the pup has the potential to meet your goals, so it might be awhile.
- 4) There are other breeders out there who can produce a CH prospect more consistently. You really need a CH prospect. As long as you get a puppy with a nice training attitude who takes environmental/physical pressure well, has reasonable field talent and some brains, and you are a decent trainer or will put a pup with a decent pro, the MH is doable. Not every show-bred dog is able to get a CH title. Get the puppy who truly has CH potential. Other breeders with proven CH and/or MH dogs, who you might look at for the CH MH prospect include Ganderhill, Empress, Shadowglen, Hidden Springs, Mar-Moye, High Voltage, Windycanyon, Deep Run, Everso, Dunn's Marsh, Cedarwood (Maine), Endeavor, Sight to Sea, Rhumblin, Double Banded, Chilbrook, Boyne, and probably several I have forgotten and unintentionally excluded.

2. My thoughts on the CH MH prospect or FC CH prospect:

If you are new to Labradors from another breed, please read my article (also on my page) about "[Are your dogs English or American Labradors?](#)" as I discuss the different types of Labradors present in the U.S.

The Labrador Retriever breed has some wildly different extremes, and everyone is convinced they have the "right" type of Labrador based on their interpretation of history, interpretation of the breed standard, what wins in the show ring, and their mentors' interpretation of the breed's development. No one is going to argue that there are at minimum, two separate camps: specialty show dogs, and field trial dogs, and neither is going to come to a half-way point. I don't really care about how we got here. I do care about how to develop a dual champion from here.

A couple myths about why we don't have a dual champion, or reasons why the majority of breeders are not trying to create a DC:

MYTH. Show dogs are obese. People don't want to put 10-20lbs on their show-bred performance dog or field trial dog so it can win in the show ring.

FACT. Some areas of the country do tend to reward overweight Labradors. I've heard show breeders say the dog should have at least an inch of fat to "stay warm hunting" (having done surgery on a lot of dogs, an inch is morbidly obese!). Not all areas of the country reward these dogs, however. I finished Elle's CH with two Best of Breed wins over 20 dogs, at an all breed show when she was a Body Condition Score 5/9 (Purina BCS chart). She was even a little on the low end of that 5/9, as she'd just recovered from a severe illness where she'd dropped an extreme amount of weight (spine, hips, and ribs showing; as a veterinarian, I was not OK with how she looked).

The reason field trial dogs don't win in the show ring is not because they aren't fat. The reason some of the show bred performance dogs don't win in the show ring is not because they are too thin. It is because their topline is weak, they aren't balanced front-to-rear, their front end is too upright, they have a poor tail, narrow head, etc. Yes, fat does cover up some flaws because fat is deposited in the abdomen, tail head, and brisket, which helps the general appearance. Fat does not fix toplines or shoulder angle or the headpiece. Fat does not change a long dog into a short-coupled dog. Fat does not fix dentition or missing teeth. Fat does not fix "helicopter ears."

One professional handler told me "head, coat, tail, the rest is irrelevant." Ouch. I'd like to think judges care about more of the dog than just those items, and I think many of them do. However, there are absolutely things that judges are looking for, and when the dog doesn't have those things compared to competition, it isn't going to win.

Owners tend to make a lot of excuses for their dogs when they don't win. Handlers sometimes make excuses for the dog also, because they want the owner to keep paying to show the dog. It doesn't mean the reasons are right.

MYTH. Show dogs don't win at field trials because they aren't fast enough.

FACT. Field trials are not a speed event. They are a marking event. They are a memory event. The dog needs some style (tail wag, nice attitude, evidence of desire to get the bird, gotta move faster than a walk or a trot). The dog does not need speed, and there are absolutely some FCs who are described as being slow, e.g. NAFC Tubbs, FC AFC Hudson, etc. This theory that show dogs have to be fast to win is B.S.

MYTH. Field trials are not realistic hunting situations, so show breeders shouldn't even try to run field trials.

FACT. Field trial marks may be anywhere from 100-400 yards. 200-300 yards is pretty common in my area. I have absolutely shot ducks and geese that sailed that far before going down. That is a totally reasonable distance for a hunting scenario. 200 yards is also not. that. far.....

MYTH. Labradors are supposed to be "swimming specialists" so should not have to run on land, and field trials are unreasonable distances on land. Show breeders shouldn't try to run field trials or really anything more than JH tests.

FACT. Given that field trials have huge water blinds and water marks.... like 200 yard triples, 300 yard blinds in technical ponds, etc.... if the show Labradors were truly swimming specialists, they should excel in field trials. Given that speciality Labradors don't run field trials, the obvious conclusion is that 1) show Labradors are not really swimming specialists (ever watched a field trial Labrador swim? that's where the talent really is), and 2) hunting situations absolutely require more running than swimming, so no, the Labrador Retriever should not be a swimming specialist. Go watch some hunting videos on YouTube to understand what a hunting scenario looks like.

MYTH. Mixing show pedigrees and field trial pedigrees just results in dogs who aren't any good for either area.

FACT. Yay. This false statement is frequently made by people who have no interest in dual purpose dogs, have never investigated into show x field pedigrees, and sometimes by people who believe that if the dog is not bred to something that "fits the breed standard" that the breeder is a backyard breeder (BYB).

In reality, there are a *LOT* of MH and even some QAA dogs that have come out of show x field trial pedigrees. I've bred some of them and I own some of them. GCH Poplar Forest Play It Again Sam UD MH was bred to some field trial bitches and produced at least one QAA dog. My dog Rush is a 1st generation show x field trial dog, and he has both his HRCH and MH. My dog Delta is a 1st generation show x field trial dog, and she has her MH. There are some all breed CHs who have come from pedigrees with field trial dogs, including CH Kerrybrook's Troutbeck II, who was a heavily-line bred, 3/4 show 1/4 field trial dog., and CH Castlerigg of Kerrybrook JH, who has field trial lines, albeit 5th+ generation.

It is true that the 1/2 and 1/2 dog is not as good as either parent - e.g. they won't be a CH prospect or an FC prospect - but you have to create the 1/2 and 1/2 dog in order to get the 2nd and 3rd generation dogs. The 1/2 and 1/2 dog is a stepping stone to the generation(s) you really want.

Clearly, both sides have some incorrect assumptions about the other venue. I think show breeders perpetuate the majority of the myths, and field trial breeders don't investigate the breed ring because they have no interest in it.

Real reasons that we don't have more CH MH dogs (and by default, CH QAA or CH FC prospects):

1. It takes crazy amounts of money to develop a CH MH dog. If the dog is placed with a pro trainer, 8-10k for an MH is on the low end. A less talented dog might take 20k or more to get their title. If the dog goes to a pro handler for breed ring competition, anywhere from 2500-10,000 is possible depending on how good the dog looks, how well trained the dog is, who is handling it, and what competition the dog has at any given show. Not everyone wants to, or can, spend that level of money.

Pro trainers for hunt tests and field trials cost 700-1000 (or more) each month for training, excluding entry fees, handling costs, travel expenses, etc. The average FC is about 5-6 years old when they finish their title. The typical MH (with a good pro trainer) is 2-3 years old. Professional handlers for the breed ring can be 250-600 for a weekend depending on whether the dog is dropped off "ring-side" or stays on the handler's truck, and how many days of competition, and who the handler is.

Is it possible to do as an amateur? Yes, absolutely. Is it possible for just anyone to do as an amateur? No, apparently not, as there's only 80ish CH MH dogs in the history of the breed.

2. Labradors are competitive in the breed ring. Finishing an AKC CH title requires 2 "major" wins (3-5 points each) and 5-9 additional points to finish a CH (15 points total). Less popular breeds (e.g. Chessies) may only need 3-5 dogs to have a "major." Labradors may have to beat 15-20 dogs to get a major win depending on the area of the country (see the AKC point schedule for any given year). When there are many other very nice looking Labradors at a show, majors are hard to get.

3. There aren't as many people interested in dual purpose dogs in the Labrador Retriever world as there are in the Chesapeake, Dachshund, Setter, Pointer, or lure coursing breeds. No idea why the Labrador breed does not attract those people, but we need more of them.

4. Labradors that do well in the show world are happy, relaxed, confident, low drive dogs, sometimes with a "look at me" bratty attitude. Many, if not most, show breeders are older women. Most show breeders don't want the level of drive or energy that accompanies a field trial prospect. The effort to get a DC is probably not going to come from the show side, because they don't want to live with that type of personality in a dog.

5. On the same lines as point #4 - many of the hot, high drive field trial dogs can be skittish, spooky, and/or nervous in response to environmental pressure, all of which result in a dog that carries his ears back and his tail down. It isn't a problem in field trials. No one cares what the dog looks like going to get the bird as long as he is going, and as long as you aren't tapping your foot and watching the clock waiting for him. Dogs don't win in the show ring if they don't look like they are having fun. Due to the way Labradors are presented in the ring and the way that dogs are trained in the field, it is difficult to have a dog that plays both venues *well.*

How to get a CH MH, my perspective:

1. The first priority has to be purchasing or keeping a puppy with show potential. Training will get you to the MH. You cannot put into the structure what the parents left out. It is not possible to make the average field trial dog win majors in the breed ring no matter who is at the end of the leash or how you feed the dog.
2. You have to get a puppy from a pedigree that shows some field talent (e.g. multiple JH, SH, MH titles). Listen to what the handlers say in both the breed ring and the hunt test circuit. Goofy, lazy, sweet but no brain cells.... those are not descriptors you want when looking for an MH prospect (and yes, those are all words I've heard handlers use to describe dogs). Look up the puppy's parents and ancestors on Retriever Results and Entry Express. If they took 30+ attempts to get 2 or 5 MH passes (yesssss, that is absolutely a thing!), I promise there is a reason for it. Whether the owner or the trainer will critically evaluate their dog or their training enough to tell the reason is another story.
3. You have to get a puppy from someone who competes at the level you want your puppy to run at. Every breeder thinks they have perfect puppies. Every breeder thinks their dogs can do anything you want them to do. It isn't true. If the breeder has never put a JH on a dog, or never put anything above a JH on a dog, be very cautious getting a MH prospect from them.
4. Along those lines - contact people who own dogs from that stud or bitch. Contact trainers. Contact handlers. Contact other people in the region who would have seen the dog(s) compete, and ask what they think. Go watch the dog(s) compete and see if you like them.
5. You have to follow a program (Lardy, Hillman, etc) or place the puppy with a pro trainer who has a good track record (look them up on Retriever Results). It is true that many show dogs do train differently than field trial dogs, but that doesn't mean they cannot be placed in the same program as field trial dogs. The trainer who "has trained lots of show dogs" is not necessary, and some of those have painful pass/fail ratios. My dog Rush, who is 1/2 show 1/2 field trial, went 6/8 for his MH title, which is a reasonable record for a dog to have.

It is probably another article to discuss how to pick the right pro trainer for a particular dog. I have used 4 field trial pros and 2 hunt test pros at this point (2022). Sometimes I made good choices. Sometimes I did not. Scout is going to a field trial pro this winter because I want a certain type of foundation and this particular pro will be a good fit for her temperament. I'll revisit this article in 6 months and see if I was happy with my decision (lol).

6. If you have a dog you think might have CH QAA or FC CH potential, not just CH MH, he needs to go to a field trial pro (or be trained by you with a field trial group) from the beginning. It is so much easier to go from a field trial pro to a hunt test pro, than from a hunt test pro to a field trial pro (yes, I have done both). It is, in some cases, not possible to go from hunt test to field trials because you cannot redo the dog's foundation and the mindset that was instilled in the dog when the foundation (basics and transition) was done.

7. The puppy needs to have some show training first, before he gets a ton of pressure put on him in the field. I'm not saying he has to get his CH first, only that he needs to do conformation classes until he decides working with you is fun. Develop the mindset around the show ring that you need. You can come back to it later.

How to breed a FC CH:

Several of us "dual purpose" breeders have opinions on how to do this. Here's mine.

1. The dual champion prospect is not going to be a speciality dog. It will be an all breed dog. Many of the all breed dogs are - believe it or not - really not that far off from the better looking field trial dogs. However, to get the right structure, e.g. head, balanced angles, nice shoulder layback, correct tail, etc, there has to be a significant influence

from specialty pedigrees. You have to go fairly extreme on the show side in order to make improvements in conformation on the field dogs.

2. The dual champion prospect cannot come from a 100% show pedigree. You need the level of talent, intelligence, problem solving ability, memory, and marking ability from the field trial lines, and you will not find that in a 100% show pedigree. I've seen some nice show dogs, but nothing nice enough to run AA stakes. 10% of the dogs win 90% of the points in field trials; plenty of well bred and well trained field trial dogs can't even win. You aren't going to get a 100% show pedigree to win an AA stake. The dual champion has to have at least one Open win.

3. The field trial portion has to have marking ability. Field trials are a marking test. Pick field trial lines to incorporate into the pedigree that are "pinpoint markers." The number one most important characteristic is marking ability, followed by tractability.

4. The dual champion prospect is not going to be a first generation show x field trial cross. It's probably going to be a 3/4, 2nd generation, or 3/4 x 3/4 multiple generation pedigree. IMO it will be more heavily weighted towards the show side.

5. The dual champion prospect is probably going to have a heavily line bred pedigree on certain specialty-winning conformation dogs, and incredibly talented field trial dogs. It isn't going to be created by accident. It's going to take years of planning and thought, and multiple breeders more-or-less working together with the same skill and goals.

6. The FC CH prospect is probably going to be a male. Two reasons: 1) it is easier to finish a CH on a male than a female, and 2) it is easier to get a competitive male field trial prospect than a female. Bitches can be sulky, not have enough heart to go through cover, pick up that tough last bird, etc. Get the male puppy.

7. The field breeder (because the effort is probably going to start on the field side; training an MH or FC is so much harder than training a CH) has to make a conscious effort to learn what conformation to look for, and utilize some show breeders to pick the right puppies each generation. Creating CHs isn't as simple as breeding CH x CH or breeding a field trial dog to just any CH.

8. The breeder has to put the puppy with the right home. That home has to have the interest in spending 30 or 50k to train and show the CH QAA or FC CH prospect. There are people who have the money and have that interest, if someone breeds the puppy for them. They contact me occasionally. I know they are out there. And there are field trial homes with that kind of money, who would want the prestige of owning the first dual champion in 40 years, if there was a pup with sufficient talent. As breeders, we just have to create the prospect.

The goal is achievable. Dream big.

Claire Klatt DVM
Kolfyre Labradors
11/6/2022