



Dual-purpose: is there a way forward?

Graham Cox

THE EVIDENCE that discussion of dual-purpose possibilities in, say, the retriever breeds can all too easily generate more heat than light is all around us. In fact it's not even a straightforward matter to decide what the problem is. In using the term people can, quite legitimately, be referring to dogs which are attractive representatives of their breed and which have an ability to work satisfactorily in the field, of which there are many. Or they may equally be referring to dogs which have attained their Champion and Field Trial Champion titles of which there are presently none. Indeed, the last retriever to have scaled such heights did so in 1957.

Anyone who thinks about the matter seriously will surely be able to explain how it is that Dual Champions represent high achievers of another era: a pre- and immediately post-war world that we have lost. Whether we should bemoan the fact is another matter entirely. That last Dual Champion was a golden retriever, Int Dual Ch David of Westley. Since then, in the breed, only two bitches have had any such pretensions. Derek Price-Harding's Ch Deremar Rosemary, born in 1970, was wholly show bred: indeed she was actually sired by the breed's longtime CC record holder Ch Camrose Cabus Christopher. But as well as gaining her bench title she won an Open Stake. A decade later Daphne Philpott campaigned Ch Standerwick Thomasina. Despite being sired by a FTCh, Michael Dare's Holway Spinner, she got not only Open Stake awards but also her title in the show ring. Whether she would have with anyone else on the end of the lead is anyone's guess. Certainly Daphne's huge reputation in the show world as half of the record breaking Westley partnership cannot have hindered Thomasina's prospects. It meant that judges looked seriously at her and noted her obvious quality.

That looking and noticing is something we need much more of. Indeed, it is a precondition of making any progress in bridging what has become a gaping chasm. For Daphne Philpott's achievement, still some distance from attaining the Dual Champion title, was 30 years ago: 30 years during which the demands made in the two spheres have become more particular and, certainly on the working side, more exacting.

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So, without in any way decrying the ideal, we can confidently and responsibly say that the chance of there being a Dual Champion in retrievers in the near future is vanishingly small.

When I started in goldens 40 years ago folk would often talk of breeding 'back' to Stubblesdown lines. Bill Hickmott had made Stubblesdown Golden Lass a Dual Champion in 1949 (see *Gundog Legend* page 117) and she was the dam of FTCh Westhyde Stubblesdown Major, himself the sire of FTCh Mazurka of Wynford, winner of the 1954 Retriever Championship, so the attractions were obvious. But Wilson Stephens had some relevant words of caution about such hopes. In his preface to the first edition of Dr Nancy Laughton's *Review of the Flatcoated Retriever* published in 1968 he wrote: 'The fatuity of 'getting back to the old type', applied to any other activity is self evident. If motor manufacturers were similarly to be frozen to a design of 1923 we should all be driving about in bull-nosed Morris cars now. Gundogs must not be valued for their old-fashionedness, as if they were reproduction antiques.'

If we want dual-purpose dogs we shall have to line-breed them with those qualities in mind. That old adage that holds that the bane of the gundog world is poor well-bred bitches put to good or fashionable sires still holds. We need more careful research and flair. Deeper analysis of pedigrees shows why capabilities not suggested by immediate ancestry are often present. The resources are there: but we will have to use them imaginatively. ✎

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