

Are there any more dual champions?

The gap between working and show retrievers has become a chasm. Is there any hope of bridging it, asks **Graham Cox?**

I acquired my first golden retriever from a farm near Wisbech in 1972 for £18. Out of an unregistered bitch's third litter, he made the transition from chasing balls (after I came to realise what I might be able to do with him) to being a steady retriever who could be handled. Other than the occasional indiscretion (typical of dogs called Sam, according to June Atkinson), he could more than hold his own in Open Working Tests. More to the point, after we moved to Bath he showed a prodigious appetite for work, collecting thousands of birds over many seasons on the Castle Combe shoot with the sort of drive that many commented on.

So far unremarkable, you might think. What's incredible, from today's standpoint, is his breeding. By Honeyboy Zimba, sired by a 1968 winner at Crufts, and out of Sultan's Golden Pride, he had but one recognisable working name in his pedigree. A great grand sire on the dam's side was Palgrave (Eric Baldwin's prefix) Joe: otherwise it was wall-to-wall undistinguished show dogs. What his case demonstrates is that dogs that look distinctly unpromising on paper can often have surprising capabilities.

The law of probabilities

In 1976 I got my second dog (Holway Swift) from June Atkinson, who was good enough to win me a Novice Stake and Reserve in the Golden

Retriever Club Two-Day Open in 1980. The advice at the time was to avoid show breeding like the plague. It was good advice too, for when it comes to breeding we are dealing not with certainties but with probabilities: we are seeking to maximise the chance that a pup

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from a given sire and dam will have certain desirable capabilities. No one is claiming that only dogs with such breeding will have those qualities: merely that if we hope to inject a degree of predictability into what can otherwise be a chancy process, that is the way to go. That's as true of show dogs as it is of working dogs.

A chasm of wilful misunderstanding

The result now, in very general terms and with honourable exceptions, is a chasm of what can seem almost wilful misunderstanding. Enthusiasts from the two spheres often talk past each other with the sort of megaphone diplomacy that generates much heat while casting little light. Many look back to that 'land of lost content' even though

there is little hope of ever walking there again: an era when dogs could excel in both the field and on the bench but which is virtually irrelevant to our present concerns.

The distant golden age

Examples of dual-purpose excellence now seem very distant. The last retriever to have achieved both Champion and Field Trial Champion titles was the golden Int Dual Ch David of Westley who did it both here and in Ireland in 1957. In the period before the Second World War five show champions and five dual champions between them qualified seven and nine times for the IGL Retriever Championship, and Major Twyford's Labrador Dual Ch Titus of Whitmore won it twice in succession in 1923 and 1924. Already by the 1930s, though, the number of dual and show champions running in the IGL had declined, and the last dual champion to do so was Ronald Macdonald's Labrador dog, Rockstead Footspark in 1953.

Exceptions that prove the rule

The last show champion to gain an award in the IGL Championship was the golden Ch Dai of Yarlaw, who gained a Diploma of Merit in 1964. Since that period, in goldens, only two bitches have had any pretension to the dual champion title. Derek Price-Harding's Ch Deremar Rosemary, born in 1970, was wholly

