



*When Vixen, Deb Owens Boxer, knows she has done a good job of herding, she takes a victory lap around the arena.*

# A PASSION FOR PERFORMANCE

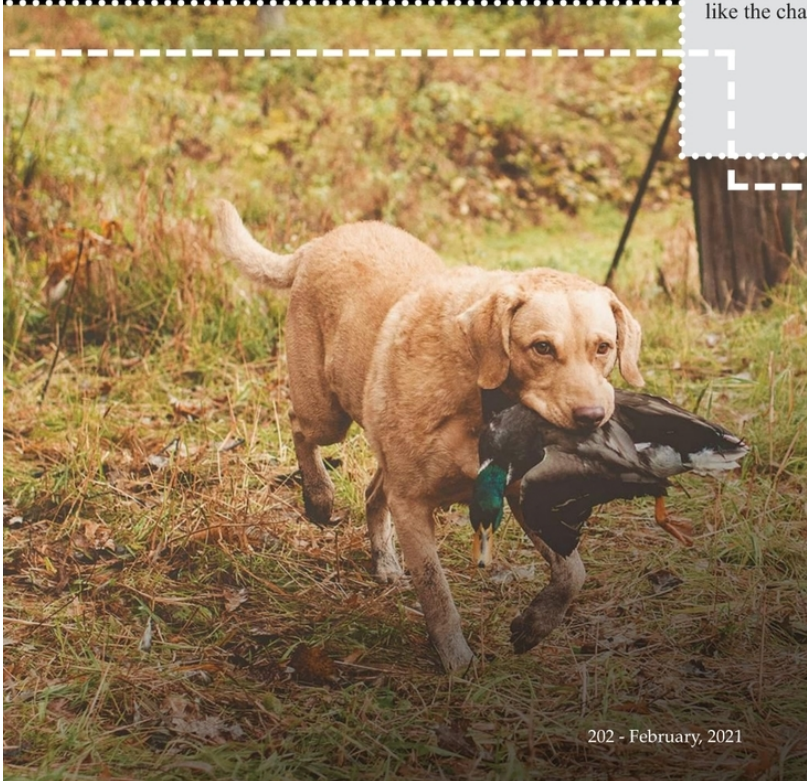
By Chris Robinson

On numerous occasions, I have wished that my dogs would show just half the animation and interest in the show ring as they do when I merely pick up a shotgun. For Bo, my current Chesapeake Bay Retriever, the shotgun isn't even necessary. He starts barking, whining, "aarooing" and dancing when I take my hunting boots out of the closet. Oh, all my champions have liked the treats, the happy talk and Stan and Jane Flowers, their professional handlers in the show ring. They've been successful show dogs with group wins both north and south of the U.S./Canada border and one even owned a Canadian BIS.

However, watching them trot around the ring, most often with a slightly bored air about them, it has been obvious that there's big difference between liking what they're doing and having a white-hot burning desire to do it, such as they exhibit whenever they think there's a chance they'll get birds.. But, there is some small comfort in the knowledge that many others with successful show dogs have uttered that very same wish and made that very same discovery.

"My dogs are happy in the show ring but it is not a passion—I think that's the proper word—for them like field work or hunting or even agility," says Maureen Kolasa who, with her husband Michael has owned several champion, master hunter Flat-Coated Retrievers, some of which have also reached the master levels in agility. "They would choose field work or agility over food any day. Their passion for anything in the field runs deep in their bones and is something so innate in them that even when they are old and near death, it's something they want to do. Working dogs truly only live when they are engaged in their passion. If we are lucky, we have something in our own lives that drives us to the depth of our souls like the chance to hunt birds does for most sporting dogs."

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*LEFT - Bo starts barking, whining, "aarooing" and dancing when hunting boots come out of the closet. (photo ©Krista Smude)*

*BELOW - DC Kinwashkly Tempo is one of 15 dual champions bred by Leslie Andreas.*





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Leslie Andreas, who has bred 15 dual champion Brittanys and owned and handled many of them, expresses similar thoughts. “While my dogs have enjoyed the show ring, they haven’t exhibited the same sort of excitement about conformation as they do about field work. All I have to do is start gathering up training collars, whistles, a blank pistol and the dogs are on high alert, quivering, dancing and ready to go. I’m lucky enough to live where I can train almost exclusively on wild birds, so when I turn off the paved roads onto gravel or dirt trails they know we are almost in bird country. The joy they feel when they run and hunt is palpable. It has been said that pointing dogs have a release of endorphins—pleasure hormones—when they point birds. It is so much more than a trained behavior. Watching dogs do their thing – running at top speed, searching for birds with intelligence, hitting scent and freezing into a point is a thing of beauty. Having your dog disappear from sight and then riding over a hill to see the dog frozen on point having held there trusting you will arrive to work the bird is a thrill. You would have to be a dead soul not to have a sense of awe watching this play out.”

While most hounds would prefer to hunt wild game—jackrabbits, raccoons, fox, coyotes, boar and pumas—that’s not an option for many. But for sighthounds there is an acceptable substitute in coursing and straight or oval track racing. Carolyn Coile says her Salukis like the show ring because all they have to do is look happy, stand pretty and eat treats. “They like rally, obedience and tricks because it’s fun to do and, once again, involves easy treats. Same with agility but it’s more fun because they get to run and jump. But, nothing compares to lure coursing. They would rather do that than everything else combined. They are hardwired to chase. When we go to a coursing event, as soon as they see where we are, they get excited and once they hear the lure machine, all hell breaks loose. Ponzi (BISS RBIS BIF GCHS. Baha Pyramid Scheme JC BCAT NAJ CGCA TKA) screams like his toenails are being pulled out one at a time. Once they’re blanketed, they start shaking; and walking to the line is like being dragged by a herd of bison. Waiting our turn, my arms are like Stretch Armstrong’s after all the jumping and lunging. Bambi (Multi BIF DC Wynsyr Baha Oh Dear Deer SC) gets so excited she’s likely to bite at her slip and the legs, arms and body of whoever has the bad luck to be holding her. She usually destroys all three lures before we can catch and control her at the end of the course. All of them strut off the field at

the end of a run and I’ve never seen this level of excitement or this sense of pride and accomplishment on their faces when they exit the show ring,” she says.

Although their historical work, except those breeds developed specifically for fighting, always involved hunting some sort of live quarry – mainly vermin – terriers tend to decide what they want to do and they can be fickle, according to Julie Nicony whose Cairn Terriers definitely have minds of their own. “My first performance Cairn finished her junior earthdog title and decided she’d had enough. My second was working on her master barn hunt title when she decided she was finished with finding rats in tubes. When Mo (GCHS. Scotch Broom Mo Ghrahd CD BN RE FDC MX MXJ SE FCAT RATO CGCA TKP) started earthdog she was crazy about it and felt the same way about barn hunt. Now neither excites her. She loved tracking but then one day, when we started her track, she decided she was not going to do it and when a terrier decides they don’t want to do something, there’s nothing you can do to change their mind. What does drive her into a frenzy, at least at the moment, is FCAT. She whines, barks



“Rick” - Ch CT OTCH MACH HC VCCH UCH UOCH UUDX UROG URX2 SCH NGC EN NHD C-ATCH ARCHMX Skyland Ricochet UDX10 OGM VST TDX TDU PUDX VER GN GO RAE2 HXAsd HXBsd MXS MJB MFB T2B SWM SWNE CGCA CGCU TKI FDC EAC OJC WV-N TN-N NCC RL1X3 RL2X3 RL3X3 RLVX RL3-AOE RLV-AOE RL2-AOE RL1-AOE NW1 SPOT CCSS-L1, one of Gerianne Darnell’s Border Collies, would like thumbs to open the latch on the gate to get to the stock.

(photo ©Michelle Thorsteinson)

and screams the Cairn scream—think how a banshee would sound—she jumps around and starts shaking. Believe me, she never did that prior to going in the show ring. She screams the entire run and at the end she has to ‘kill’ the lure. She attacks it and getting her to release it is not an easy task. But, to be honest, I think I get more out of our participation in dog sports than my dogs. I love the constant learning process of working with my dogs. I even love the challenge of trying to figure out how to train a terrier.”

While sporting dogs, hounds, some non-sporting dogs and most terriers have the added incentive in their traditional work of pursuing some sort of live quarry, that is not the case with the working breeds whose historical work covers a multitude of tasks ranging from draft work to herding to livestock guarding to helping fishermen and water rescues. For Deb Owens’ Boxers, herding is the big thing for one while another views tracking as the most fun. “My dogs know when it’s ‘their day’ and they get very excited watching me get ready to go. For Vixen, when we get to the farm, she wants out of the van immediately and goes right to the gate of the arena. Rigel, the tracker, knows his harness and gets very excited when he sees it, bouncing about. He’s a pretty happy guy ordinarily, but he gets especially bouncy and some-

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"Rad" - Ch. RDCH Koira's Rdrock Radagast the Brown CD RD RDX, one of Peggy Strupp's Dalmatians, escorts her horse, Shadoffax, at a road trial.

times quite vocal when he is doing well in training. Vixen absolutely knows when she's done a good job. She makes a 'victory lap' around the arena and will go to each of our friends, in turn, to demand 'pats' as we leave the arena."

The non-sporting breeds also have multiple traditional jobs that excite them more than being shown. For Peggy Strupp's Dalmatians, going for trail rides with the horse is like going to Doggy Disneyland. "My current Dal jumps up and down and turns circles when he sees me get out my riding boots. Then he stays really close to me and sticks his nose in my face just to make sure I don't leave without him. I love all dog sports that I've tried but road trials really allow my Dals to 'be what they were meant to be.' Unlike other dog sports where you can compete almost every weekend, we only get to do a road trial once or twice a year. The rest of the time we spend training but our daily adventures on the trail bring fulfillment and joy that lasts the entire year. It also means I end up with a very well-trained dog that is reliable off leash and in distracting situations. That means I can let him run loose to chase his dreams outdoors without worrying that he won't return when called and his off-leash obedience lets us perform in parades and participate in other events besides road trials," Strupp says.

For herding breeds, the passion seems to be just about any dog sport but according to Carol Donnelly (Pembroke Welsh Corgis) and Gerianne Darnell (Border Collies), although their dogs have earned titles in many different sports, they're at their enthusiastic best when moving livestock. "My Corgis love agility because it's all fun and games. Run, jump, climb, bark and get cookies. What's not to love? But herding is where they really shine. Herding is an extremely complex activity that involves a lot of problem solving – both by the dogs and by me as a team. When it all comes together, it's just magical. Know-

ing that your dogs are doing what they were bred for centuries to do, working in tandem with you to accomplish the very visible goal of moving stock – that also has a mind of its own – is incomparable," says Donnelly.

Darnell adds, "While my Border Collies enjoy all of their other activities, herding is what they would do until they drop. They run down to the field and stare at the gate latch, probably thinking 'If only I had thumbs!' It is a quiet intensity. Dog sports have created a bond with my dogs that I don't believe would be there without all the training we do."

That brings us to the smallest dogs, the toy breeds. Most of them were originally developed to be lap sitters. While some are content to fill that role, many toy dogs are not only very active but very athletic. Darnell also has Papillons and she says that's one toy breed that is not happy unless it has a job that is challenging both physically and mentally. "Papillons especially like the sports in which they get to use their nose, as they are bred-down spaniels. I have had several Papillons finish their TDX titles and I've added nosework to my dogs' sniffing activities in the past five years. My current Papillon is a UKC nosework champion. But, what they love most is tracking. When they know they are going tracking, they are just beside themselves while I put on their harness. Then, they drag me up to the start of their training track and I don't think the only reason for their enthusiasm is the



"Ponzi" - BISS RBIS BIF GCHS. Baha Pyramid Scheme JC BCAT NAJ CGCA TKA wearing the yellow blanket, one of Caroline Coile's Salukis and his sister, Mecca, Ch. Baja You Mecca Me Crazy square off at the tallyho to see who's fastest on this course.

treat hidden under the start article."

So, if you are not doing some performance activity with your dog, you are missing out on an important aspect of dog ownership according to all these owners. Perhaps Leslie Andreas put it best saying, "Winning is almost secondary to the pride you feel watching your dog perform correctly. I have been watching my dogs in the field for more than sixty years and I don't know of anything in the dog world that beats watching a good dog do what it was intended to do."