

# FRONT & FINISH®

June 2012

The Dog Trainer's News

CH CT OTCH MACH HC VCCH Outburst Chasing Butterflies  
UDX RAE TDX VST HXAsd HIBd HSBs

## "Riva"

**Janice Gunn's**

Video Tips

**Catherine Zinsky**

Crossing The Threshold



**Ozzie Foreman**

From The "Are Today's Exhibitors Spoiled" File

# Cover Story

## A REMARKABLE JOURNEY TO A QUINTUPLE CHAMPION

*An Interview with Gerianne Darnell by Sally Sherman*

After living in Dallas for 21 years, in 2009 I landed in Omaha, Nebraska, as a result of a job transfer due to the economic downturn. Not knowing a soul in Omaha and badly in need of a dog trainer, I was referred to Gerianne Darnell who owns Sunshine Obedience School, across the Missouri River in nearby Council Bluffs, Iowa. I immediately “connected” with Gerianne and felt lucky to have found such an awesome trainer. Here is Gerianne’s story, in her own words, and her remarkable journey to a Quintuple Championship with her Border Collie, Riva.

### **1. Gerianne, how long have you been training dogs?**

I have been training dogs for 35 years. Although I’d like people to think I started when I was ten years old, we picked up our first dog, Basset Hound Esther, on the way home from our honeymoon in 1977. Esther became a UDTX, Can CDX TD, Ber CD. Esther was followed by my first Border Collie, Skye, in 1979. Skye was my first OTCH dog, and he also had a TD. I got my first Papillon, Zipper, in 1984. Zipper was my first CH OTCH TDX. Zipper was followed by three more paps, CH OTCH Zack UDX TDX MX MXJ, OTCH Rudy UDX TDX MX MXJ, and CH OTCH MACH Rumor UDX RN TD. After the paps I really wanted another Border Collie, and I searched for one who could get four or five Championships. Riva was my dream come true! She was born in 1999 and is now CH CT OTCH MACH HC VCCH Outburst Chasing Butterflies UDX RAE TDX VST HXAsd HIBd HSBs. Riva was followed by another Border Collie, DC Raymond UD RAE HXAsd HXBd HIBs NA NAP NJP and his son TC Rick UDX3 OM5 RN MX MXJ MXF HXAsd HXBsd. Rick is almost halfway to his MACH and tracking will eventually follow. I also have a young Papillon, Robert, whose career is just starting. I have also titled the dogs in UKC obedience, rally, and agility, NADAC, ASCA, CPE, and USDAA agility, ASCA herding, and CKC conformation, obedience, and tracking. Too many titles to list!

Photo by Kathy Ubben



## **“Baby Riva”**

### **2. What dog sports have you competed in?**

Obedience, conformation, agility, rally, herding, and tracking.

### **3. What championships have you earned? Other recognitions (such as numerous HITs)?**

I have earned seven OTCH's, seven CH's, nine UD's, five TDX's, three HC's, two MACH's, and one CT. I haven't added up the High in Trials in awhile! Let's see, Esther had one, Skye had two, Zipper had twelve, Zack had 39, Rudy had eight, Rumor had four, Riva had nine, and Rick has had seven so far, so that would be 82 High in Trials. Lots of High Combined in there too, but I don't know how many, to be honest. I've also had many High in Trials in herding.

### **4. What are your most memorable events?**

There have been a bunch over the years. My pap Zipper had a 200 in Canada for his CD, and the next time he went up to Canada he finished his Canadian CH, CDX (with a HIT) and TD all on the same day, which I thought was pretty amazing. Zipper's son Rudy also had a 200 for a UKC CDX leg. Earning my first CH OTCH TDX with Zipper was exciting. Zipper only weighed a little more than five pounds, and agility came along after his career was over. He was a fabulous tracker, I wish the VST had been around when he was a young dog.

My pap Zack did all kinds of amazing things, he was the first dog to earn both the UKC UOCH and UACHX. He also earned his AKC OTCH and TDX in the same year (as did my pap Rudy), and was ranked in the Top Ten OTCH dogs that same year (1992). Zack also competed at both the first National Obedience Invitational and the first AKC National Agility Championship; there was just a handful of dogs who qualified for both events. Zack was also the fourth MX in the country, and the first to earn the MX from Novice A (the first three were grandfathered in at a higher level.) I've always said that Zack was my dog of a lifetime, now with Riva I wonder, can a person have two dogs of a lifetime? ;-)

Rumor placed Fourth at the 1997 AKC National Agility Championship in the 12-inch division, which was the first year that the AKC Agility Championship was televised on Animal Planet. Unfortunately for Rumor and I, he wasn't in the finals so they had no video footage of him, so they only showed three placements on the TV screen. I'm still disappointed over that one! So many dogs crashed and burned in the finals that Rumor moved way up in the standings and got a placement. I also had some placements at the Gaines Regionals and Classics over the years, those were so exciting to participate in.

The Border Collies have also had a lot of memorable wins, they were all multiple High in Trial herding dogs, and all three of them competed a few times at the pro-novice level in USBCHA herding. One exciting week with Rick was winning the Janet Larsen Versatility Award at the 2010 Border Collie National, ending the week with High in Trial out of Open B with a 199. Rick competed in herding, agility, conformation, rally, and obedience that week. And of course the MOST memorable event of my entire doggie career was seeing that number 4 ending article on Riva's VST track. I can not even begin to explain the emotions I felt at that moment. Riva is the first Border Collie to earn five AKC Championships.

### **5. Tell us about Riva's career:**

The first title Riva earned was the TD, and the last title was the VST to complete her CT and Quintuple Championship. The twelve years in between were a wonderful journey, full of excitement, disappointments, hard work, and the highest of highs and the lowest of lows.

Riva's first Championship was her Conformation Championship, which she finished easily in 2000 at the age of 13 months. Riva's second Championship was her MACH. It wasn't an easy Championship, but it wasn't a particularly difficult one, either. Riva finished her MACH in 2005 at the age of 5 ½.



## Riva

“Riva flying through the weave poles”

I thought that  
point the dog toward the

What started out as a casual “taking my dog to see the sheep” once a week eventually turned in to a total obsession. Now, ten years later, I raise sheep and currently run about sixty ewes. I also have herding trials and clinics at my place as well. In 2006 Riva earned her HC in four weekends with five majors and several HIT’s, and she was also ranked in the Top Ten Advanced Border Collies in 2006. Finishing her HC made Riva a Triple Champion!

Our attention then turned to the Herding Championship. The actual earning of the HC was a piece of cake for Riva, it was the GETTING to that point that was so hard! When I got Riva, Border Collies just “did” herding, you just had to sheep and the dog would know what to do. HA!



“Riva tending the flock”

Riva’s obedience career started in 2003; she was a fabulous Novice Dog with twelve First Places, five High in Trials, and an average score of 198. At one memorable show she won a runoff for High in Trial with a 199, and she also earned a Double Q in agility on the same day. Riva’s CDX came in the spring of 2004, and she also earned a Double Q the same day she finished her

CDX. While finishing up her MACH and getting ready for her HC, we continued to train in obedience, and Riva finished her UD in January of 2007. At her very next weekend out, Riva picked up a First in Utility B, a First in Open B, and 37 OTCH points! Wow! Eight months later, Riva finished her OTCH at my local club's show, and it was an exciting and memorable day. Now Riva was a Quadruple Champion, and I wondered, did I dare to dream that she could be a Quintuple Champion???



Photo by Gerianne Darnell

"Riva with her OTCH loot"

had several Papillons and a Basset a VST. Riva was the first puppy that I did grass. Riva earned her TD at the age of 8 months. It was a warm day in April in central Iowa, and the ticks were everywhere. The grass was short and sparse, and there was a lot of goose poop on her track; Riva thought that was a great reward! Shortly after what I assumed was the last turn, Riva came across a glove. I knew it was too soon past the turn for the article to be there, and I picked the glove up and turned around to the judges and said, "Ummm, is this it?"; and they said, "Go on." My silly young puppy was pretty sure we were done, but I convinced her to keep going, and in another 75 yards or so we found the REAL glove! It turns out that the tracklayer had accidently dropped one of his own gloves while laying the track, discovered his error when he finished laying the track, and then told the judges what had happened. The judges had decided to go ahead and use the track anyway, and if Riva had

I started tracking with Riva shortly after she came home in the late fall of 1999. I had TDX's at that point on Hound, but I had never earned tracks on other surfaces besides

had a problem re-starting after the first glove, she would have been given the alternate track. Thank goodness she did re-start, as I don't think she had another track in her that day.

I didn't track again with Riva until the late summer of 2007, towards the end of her OTCH. Dee Dee Rose was instructing at my "Obedience Camp For The Small Dog" in August of that year, and she had been working with a tracking method developed by Steve White. Steve does a lot of work with police dogs, and it requires a reliable method that produces quick, nose down results on any surface. The name of the method is "Hydration Intensified Tracking Training" and in a nutshell, the tracklayer sprays a stream of water on asphalt and then walks the track again while putting down tasty treats very close together. The water "traps" the scent and makes it easier for the dog to smell the track on a hard surface, and the closely spaced treats encourages the dog to work in a nose down manner.

Photo by Dee Nelson



"Riva learns hard surface tracking"

I LOVED the results that Dee Dee and I saw in the campers' dogs that weekend, and I started Riva the day after camp ended. Riva, being the penultimate chow hound, thought the

HITT method was a MARVELOUS idea. Over the next several months, Riva and I tracked at least four or five times a week. I had a friend make me a hunter orange vest that said "Working Search Dog" on the back to hopefully answer the question in people's minds of "What is that woman DOING out in that parking lot?!" I'm surprised that I didn't get more questions than I did.

Riva and I progressed from asphalt to concrete to crushed rock to bark. We did straight lines, curves and serpentine, and then turns, all on hard surface. We slowly increased the distance between the treats, and then decreased the amount of spray, occasionally still spraying water at surface transitions and turns. Eventually we strung the surfaces together, started

working around buildings, and added grass back in to our training plan. Whereas before I would longingly look at green, rolling fields as a potential place to track, now I was looking at Community Colleges, Business Parks, church parking lots, and schools as new places to train.

Looking back on it, I think I entered Riva a little too soon in her first VST test in September of 2008. That said, she did a great job, but veered left at a fork instead of right and couldn't recover. I entered another test that fall, and it was very windy and warm, and all Riva missed was the moment of truth turn (the moment of truth turn is a turn out in the open, where the dog has to find the turn on a non-vegetated surface without being able to fringe-track on any nearby vegetation.). She did the rest of the track beautifully.

Due to Riva's age at the time (9 ½), I was doing her TDX training at the same time as her VST training, something many of the "experts" think is not a good idea. Riva's first TDX test was also in the late fall of 2008, and again, she almost passed. In March of 2009 I entered what can only be called "The TDX test from hell", in southern Iowa. A friend and I both got in to the test, and we stopped to look at the test site on the way to the motel the night before the test. It just looked beautiful. As we drove in to the parking lot of the motel that evening, the first raindrops fell, and then the skies opened up, and it never stopped raining all night. When we got to the test site the next day, some of Riva's track was actually underwater! In all of the training and showing I did with Riva over almost 13 years, I think I was most proud of her on that day. She started well, picking her way through the sodden vegetation, and after the second turn, she was in deep, sucking mud. She actually managed to make another turn in the mud, came to the edge of what looked like a wide stream (which was not there the day before), and proceeded to more or less SWIM across the area. It was up to her neck. Riva came up out of the water and in a little while, came across the first article. When re-started, we both just ran out of gas to the dreaded whistle, but I couldn't have been more proud than if she had passed. No other dog got as far as Riva did that day.

I decided after that test that since Riva was now going on ten years old, we should concentrate on the TDX and get it out of the way. Although VST is ridiculously hard mentally, I don't think it is as physically hard as the TDX, and I didn't want to ask Riva to plow her way through the tough cover much longer. After another near miss, Riva passed her TDX on a glorious, HOT day in November of 2009, in an area where the deer run wild. We struggled at the first turn, but after that Riva just motored on through and did the rest of the track in about 15 minutes, the only dog to pass. Now, at age ten, with the TDX title in hand, the only



thing that stood between Riva and the Quintuple Championship was the VST, the one thing in dog training that had eluded me for many years.



Photo Courtesy of Nebraska Kennel Club

### “Riva finishes her TDX”

In the spring of 2010, I was way, way down the alternate lists of the VST tests I entered. I was feeling quite blue that “the luck of the draw” might keep me from my dream. And then, around Memorial Day of that year, something happened that made the VST mean nothing, as I almost lost my wonderful girl. During a routine chiropractic exam, a lump was discovered on the side of Riva’s neck. I could tell the vet thought the lymph nodes were involved, and after an agonizing 20 minutes waiting for the results of the aspiration, I found out that Riva did NOT have lymphoma. Thank You God! But, there was SOME kind of large growth on her

neck. I had pulled a tick off of Riva during that time

frame, so the chiro vet and I decided that a course of doxycycline was in order. Thank goodness my husband is also a vet, as he recognized that Riva was having a severe allergic reaction to the doxy. Her liver values went off the chart, and it was a very scary couple of days. Once we got Riva’s blood work stabilized, she had a very involved surgery to remove the growth. After the surgery I found out that the growth was entwined around both her jugular and carotid arteries! Riva came home with a drain, and the surgery really took a lot out of her. We didn’t track for a couple months after that incident, and it never really was determined what caused the lump to form, and it has never come back, thank goodness.

Riva was in a couple of tests in the fall of 2010, one of which some wonderful friends drove her to St Louis all the way from Iowa to meet me at the Border Collie National. Now those are true friends! I found out when we were halfway to the National that Riva had moved up on

the alternate list and had made it in to a test about an hour from St Louis. But sadly, in both tests that fall it was warm, and it just wasn't Riva's day.

The winter of 2010-11 was when the thought began to surface that Riva and I were going to run out of time, as Riva was going on twelve years old. When I got the call that we had made it in to a test in Denver in late May, I was worried about the altitude, the heat, and traveling so far with an older dog, but I knew we wouldn't pass if we didn't go when we had the chance. The draw was very early at 5:45 AM, and I was disappointed to draw the next to last track. We waited HOURS for our turn, and the sun was climbing in the sky. Riva started well, made the first turn, and went out in to the parking lot. After some searching, she made the moment of truth turn and found an article. Yeah! We re-started, had some trouble on the next turn that was also on hard surface, but eventually we were tracking strongly down the side of a building. Riva went out in to a scrubby field, but soon came back to the turn and continued through a courtyard. She then went down some stairs, and I was thinking we were quite a ways through the track at that point. There was a huge parking lot in front of us, and Riva went out in to the parking lot, missing the turn at the bottom of the stairs, to hear that awful whistle. When put back on the track, it was just one more turn and the final article. I was so disappointed that we had made it through all of the "hard" stuff and had come so close to our dream. But I was convinced more than ever that we could DO this.

Again, we didn't make any of the draws for the "local" tests in the fall of 2011. I then found out that we HAD made the draw in to a test in Wisconsin. I was very excited, as although it was a long drive, the pass rate there was really quite good, and I had heard wonderful things about the site. The weekend before the Wisconsin test, I was entered in three local agility trials with my younger Border Collie, Rick. When I got home from the Friday trial I got a call that I had moved way up the alternate list and gotten in to a test in just 36 hours in Chicago. My gut said "Don't go!" and wait for the possibly more favorable conditions and better mental preparation for the Wisconsin test the following weekend, but I thought, what if THIS was the test that we were supposed to pass at, and I didn't take the chance to go! To make a long story short, a friend and I drove to Chicago, and it wasn't Riva's day, nor any other dog's day for that matter. Sometimes a person should listen to her gut!

I was worried that I was now asking a 12-year-old dog to do two long trips on back-to-back weekends, but of course we had to go to Wisconsin and take a shot, as this could be her last chance. We again drew Track number 5, and the wait was long. A dog DID pass before us, so

I knew that the conditions were favorable. Riva pulled me to the start, and I could hardly get her harness on as she was ready to go. She started beautifully, and made the first turn in to a parking lot. Later the tracklayer told me she was right on the track as she went by a picnic table. The track kept going in the parking lot, and then Riva cast around for a bit, and all of a sudden I saw the first article in front of us. Hurrah, we had made the moment of truth turn!

Riva continued forward in to a bus barn full of busses, and I had a moment of panic that there was no WAY they would go between all of those parked busses, would they? I also saw no judges behind us, so I convinced Riva that maybe it didn't go that way, and she obligingly backed out of the bus barn and went around the building. The judges still stood there. At that point I realized what an idiot I was, and that RIVA was the one who had the nose, not me. She drug me around the building to the point that the track would have come out of the bus barn (and yes, the track DID go in there), made another turn and found ANOTHER article. This was getting serious! Riva then went out in to some grass, and at that point I knew that a lot of what was left had to be vegetated, as so much of the entire first half of the track had been on hard surface. Riva made a turn in the grass, and then she really ran in to a problem. She wanted to go out in to a real trashy area, then she broke off, and started down the side of a building. I questioned her as she just didn't seem sure, and she again broke off and went almost all the way back to the judges. I re-scented her with the start article, and then she turned and went down a sidewalk on the other side of the building. Then she started pulling HARD, and I knew she was dead on the track and my heart started to pound as I knew we had to be close to the end.

At the end of the sidewalk Riva showed loss of track. I knew it didn't go forward as the judges had told us at the beginning of the test that none of the tracks crossed the main road. I was pretty sure it didn't go left, as I could see our start flag down that way. But, when I looked right, I saw all of the spectators standing not that far away, along with the start of the next track. So, when Riva went left, I thought, well MAYBE it does go that way. We had not gone that far, at least to me it didn't seem that far, when Riva started to break off and I thought we should back up and try to go right at the turn. And then I heard the worst sound in the world, the whistle blowing, and my heart literally broke on the spot. The track did indeed turn right, and the final article was right there, next to a rock, and my dream had been just 30 yards away.

I went back to the tracklayer and judges, expecting to hear "Oh, how awful, we're so sad for you, as you were so close, and your dog did a great job", and then was shocked to have one of the judges tell me in a not kind tone of voice that it was all my fault and that my dog would have passed half an hour ago if I had been paying attention to her. Then the judge spun on her heel and stalked off. I was STUNNED. I literally just sat down and cried. The tracklayer was SO kind to me, and later sent me a wonderful card telling me how terrific my dog was and how honored she had been to lay a track for Riva. I am still so grateful to her for her kindness. For the next two weeks I would wake up in the middle of the night and see that judge's face and hear what she said to me, and I had to wonder if finally all of the stars had lined up for Riva to pass, and I had BLEW it.

Two months later I was thrilled to get in to another test in Colorado. Riva had been training GREAT all fall. About an hour from the test site, eight hours from home, I got an email on my phone that the test had been cancelled due to SNOW (none of which was visible from where I was at the time.) Now I was starting to think that the tracking gods REALLY didn't like me....

In March of 2012 I entered three tests, one in Kansas City, one in Tulsa, and one in Chicago. Of COURSE I didn't get in to the one I wanted to, Kansas City (three hours from my house), and got in to BOTH Tulsa and Chicago. On the day of the Kansas City test I laid a full length VST training track for Riva at a local school in 30 mph winds and she NAILED it. I was so sad that she couldn't have done that great work in an actual test that day, but again, at almost 13, I still KNEW that she could do this, I just knew it, and that even if it never happened, I would always know that she was capable.

On the weekend of March 24-25, 2012, I was entered in obedience in Kansas City on Saturday with Rick, who needed just four OTCH points to finish, and in the VST test in Tulsa with Riva on Sunday. When I left home on Friday my husband said to me, "Well, you'll get an OTCH on Saturday and a CT on Sunday!" and I laughed and said, "You know, it is possible!" never DREAMING that it could happen. Rick kept up his end of the bargain, earning a Second Place in Open B with 197 ½ and a First Place in Utility B with a 198 to finish his OTCH on Saturday! As it was a double obedience trial, we didn't get out of Kansas City until after 5 PM on Saturday, so we didn't pull in to Tulsa until almost 10 PM. As Riva had spent most of Saturday in the van, it was a very long day for her, but I could only hope for the best.



“Rick finishes his OTCH the day before Riva’s VST”

Sunday dawned sunny and warm. The draw was in the McDonalds parking lot, and I parked in the shade and tried to keep both Riva and I calm as we waited for the draw. The numbers for the various tracks were in plastic Easter

eggs. I was the next to last person to

draw, and from the beginning, I had my eye on a pretty, sky blue egg. I figured somebody else would certainly choose that one, as it was the prettiest color in my opinion! The first four people who drew picked tracks 3, 4, 5, and 6, I couldn’t believe it. One person even said, blue is my favorite color, but I’m going to pick THIS color instead. So that beautiful blue egg was still there when it was my turn, and inside it was Track number 2! I figured that was my first bit of good luck, as it was going to be a warm day of 80 degrees.

Riva started beautifully, and shortly down the track, a neighborhood boxer charged the fence barking at Riva, which badly startled us both. Unknown to me at the time, that happened close to the first turn (it was a short first leg.) I thought the first leg would be longer, and when Riva went down the second leg of the track I wondered if she was just trying to get away from the barking, snarling Boxer. Since she seemed to be tracking, I made the (good) decision to go with her. Riva then entered the opening to a covered parking garage. As she went in to the garage, her nose turned to the left, and she then continued forward, all the way through the garage and out the other end. When she came out of the garage, she cast around a bit but didn’t commit, so we backed up and worked our way back in to the garage. Riva went down the second half of the garage, then broke off and came back, and we worked our way back towards the original opening. Riva’s nose then snagged

on the crack in the pavement, and off she went, and we soon spied an article ahead of us (a crushed wire basket of some kind.) GOOD GIRLIE!

Riva re-started strongly after the first article, and the track came out of the parking garage and after a little casting, Riva hung a right. We then went through some sidewalks and other areas and came to the corner of the building, where Riva turned hard left. Over sidewalks, grass, bricks, and to another article (bandana). NOW I was getting nervous.

After the second article, the track crossed a road and went in to a grassy area. Riva showed loss of track and went left. As I followed her I questioned her whether it really went that way, and she broke off and turned around and went right. Now I knew we were on the last leg and my heart was pounding. After our near miss at her last test in October, I didn't think I could take that disappointment again. Riva too knew we were at the end, and she was diving on every piece of trash she could find that might be an article. Her tongue was hanging out and she was getting HOT. Finally, ahead of us, was a plastic article with the coveted number four on it, and our long training journey culminated in a PASS, and Riva became a Tracking Champion, an AKC Versatility Champion, and now a QUINTUPLE Champion.

Photo Courtesy of Indian Nations Tracking Club



“Riva at the end of her VST Track”

The Indian Nations Tracking Club knows how to do up a tracking test, with a beautiful plaque customized with Riva's name on it and a place for a picture, and longtime INTC member Ruth Harris donated \$100 per pass so each passing team received their entry fee back. Wow! There was also another

pass, a 12-year-old Border Terrier, who had had some of the same “near misses” at previous tests that Riva had had. A very exciting day for the old girls (and I mean the dogs, not their handlers <g>)!

## **An OTCH on Saturday and a CT/Quintuple CH on Sunday, oh MY.**

I have many people to thank, and I hope I don't forget anybody. First of all the biggest thanks goes to my long suffering husband George who had to listen to more whining than anybody else and deal with the occasional tears after the flunks. Thanks to my friend Dee Nelson who started the VST journey with me and laid MANY MANY tracks for Riva. I especially remember one day that Dee and I tracked with Riva and Powder in the rain at Iowa Western Community College, and we marveled at what our dogs could do. Also thanks to Dee Dee Rose who turned me on to Steve White and the HITT tracking method. Thanks to my friend Sharon Johnson Brewer for the many, many hours spent discussing tracking, VST, and various other subjects <g> often over a bottle (or two!) of wine. Thanks also to Bert, Linda, Pam, Deb, Norine, and Peggy for listening for literally years about this tracking thing I wanted so badly. HUGE thanks to Jerry Lewis for his inspiration, his positive energy, and his constant belief that Riva and I could do this. Thanks to Vince Ramirez for the training advice over the years, and who said to me as I went out on Riva's track Sunday morning that my dog DESERVED to pass. Thanks to Dian Quist Sulek who told me to NEVER give up, and who laid many tracks for Riva and offered up much advice and encouragement. Thanks to the judges Carol Clark and Charlene Dunn, who plotted a fair and doable track, and then gave Riva and I the time and space to be successful. And thanks to the Indian Nations Tracking Club, especially Bob and Gail Brown, for their hard work and wonderful hospitality.

### **Obviously, it takes a village to earn a VST :-)**

This is truly the HARDEST thing I have EVER done in dogs, and this is spoken by the person who was the world's biggest herding idiot ten years ago. What I went through to get the VST made the HC's look easy :-)

But the biggest thanks of all goes to my wonderful Riva, my best girl friend and my constant companion. Riva is almost 13 years old, and what she has accomplished is nothing short of incredible. George and I shared a bottle of wine when I got home late on that Sunday night, and we talked about how the time had been growing short for Riva to earn this title. I told George that I would have walked away from the quest in a heartbeat, but not once did Riva

ever say to me, "You know, I really don't care to do this any more". She was ALWAYS up and ready to go when I said "Do you wanna go track?"

And of course the excitement and elation is tinged with a hint of sadness, as the training journey really has come to an end. How lucky was I to have met up with this incredible animal. I hope that she feels the same.



Photo by Gerianne Darnell

"Riva rests up after all of that hard work"

**6. What are your plans for the future?**

I want to enjoy every MOMENT with Riva, and never forget all of the things we have done together. Riva has always been a garbage hound, and I jokingly tell friends that now I take the garbage out of the can for her and spread it on the kitchen floor so she doesn't have to go to all of that trouble of knocking the can over! I want her to be healthy and happy for as long as possible. And every once in awhile I'll lay her a track, so we can continue to have that wonderful bond. It will be VERY short and have lots of food on it!

For the other dogs, my current goal is finishing Rick's MACH, no easy task for a World Team caliber dog who has a decidedly NON World Team caliber handler!! I can hardly count the Double Q's we have missed because of some dumb thing I've done or one bar down. There



will be some tracking in Rick's future as well. My young pup Robert has many miles to travel with me in conformation, obedience, agility, and tracking. And my wonderful old boy Raymond continues to enjoy tracking and UKC rally.

But no matter what I do or accomplish in the future, I will NEVER forget how I felt the day that Riva got her VST. I can still re-play every moment of her track in my mind. And when I'm having a bad day, all it takes for me to feel better is to conjure up that track in my mind! What a glorious feeling!

*Gerianne Darnell and CH CT OTCH MACH HC VCCH UCD UAg1 Outburst Chasing Butterflies UDX RAE TDX VST HXAsd HIBd HSBs MX NAP MXJ OJP, STDsd, PDI, EAC EJC OGC TN-E WV-O TG-N ASCA RS-N, CL3-SFH*

Riva is exceptional, there is no doubt about it. And Gerianne is accomplished in whatever she does. **An OTCh and a VST in the same weekend** – absolutely unheard of! Sure, it takes a great dog, but the dog can't do it without the great handler. Thanks, Gerianne, for sharing Riva's story.

*Sunshine Obedience School was established in 1984 and offers classes in the sports of obedience, rally obedience, agility, and tracking. Gerianne also hosts various seminars and clinics. For more information on Sunshine Obedience School and Gerianne's classes, DVDs and book, contact: Gerianne Darnell, 11092 240<sup>th</sup> St., Council Bluffs, IA 51503, (712) 526-2252, [www.sunshineobedience.com](http://www.sunshineobedience.com).*

## **Every month we have small spaces to fill. Would you like to help?**

Write a small tribute to your dog, the sport of obedience, or a special exhibitor. Taking into account available space, we'll place these on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Email your recognition to [mailbox@frontandfinish.com](mailto:mailbox@frontandfinish.com). Be sure to include the word "FILLER" in the subject line!