

# GOLDEN RETRIEVER

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## News

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# NEVER SAY NEVER

by Pat Quinn

A year ago I would never have considered sending my dog to a field pro for training. The harsh rigors of training with a professional would squash his spirit! My dogs are my constant companions and without me would pine for days! The reality is that my dog did indeed go for field training and the end result is that he adores his trainer and thrives in the training environment.

The summer of 2007 demonstrated that my dog needed more training than I could provide. While helping at one test, I watched a particular man run several dogs. I was impressed with how well his dogs worked. Each dog was treated with kindness and seemed to tremendously enjoy what they were doing. About a month later, I entered a JH test and this same gentleman happened to be one of the judges! Once again, I saw courtesy and respect as he related to handlers. Determined to find some help, I learned that this trainer lived about 2½ hours from me and contacted him about some private lessons.

First of all, since I have trained and titled dogs for both the JH and WC, the knowledge base of a trainer was very important to me. The trainer I contacted had much more experience than I, as demonstrated by multiple mid and upper level titles. Training philosophy and methods are tremendously important too. Take the time to discuss methods and be certain that you are comfortable with the approach used by a particular trainer. If you can schedule a visit to observe the trainer working with dogs, that will provide even more information. And, if you

are able to work with the trainer, you will have a better idea of how your dog will respond to the methods used. If a visit isn't possible, try to chat with others or ask for references so you can get more input.

Although I did work drills with my dog, sessions often were not pleasant for either of us. After being shown a different approach for drills, both the speed and willingness of my boy increased significantly. We also worked on confidence for water entry. Training effected improvement because it was adapted to my dog rather than demanding he fit into a certain predetermined program. Not only did the trainer understand the mental make-up of a Golden Retriever, but he also adapted training to fit specific issues.

Concern about how I was progressing with my dog, even as the trainer went south for the winter also impressed me. Wanting very much to earn a Junior Hunter title, I finally asked about short term training. Even considering sending my dog off to train for a month was a huge step for me.

The trainer explained that it may take several days for a dog to become accustomed to a new environment and routine before being ready to progress in training. He accepts only a limited number of dogs since they live in the house to provide a stronger bond and monitoring of overall health. (Obviously a dog must have a stable temperament to live in close contact with multiple dogs.) This philosophy differs from some field pros who feel that dogs will be more eager to work if training time provides the main interaction between dog and trainer. Neither situation is for all dogs. Not everyone will agree that a dog will bond more and respond better in training when with the trainer at all times, but I was less hesitant to send my dog for training knowing that he would not live in a kennel.

Since my dog would not go to the



*The return after a retrieve. The configuration of this pond works very well for teaching various concepts. Paul Kartes photo*

trainer for several weeks, I was also encouraged to continue running drills and going to group training sessions. Having some physical stamina and muscle development would make it easier for him to deal with the physical rigors of training more than once a day. A contract that clearly stated expectations for both parties was also sent for review. Basic guidelines of the training program were outlined as were all fees associated with training. Such a contract provides an opportunity to ask pertinent questions. If a trainer is too busy to take the time to enlighten you about the training process prior to sending your dog to him, then how realistic is it to expect that trainer to take the time to communicate with you while your dog is in training?

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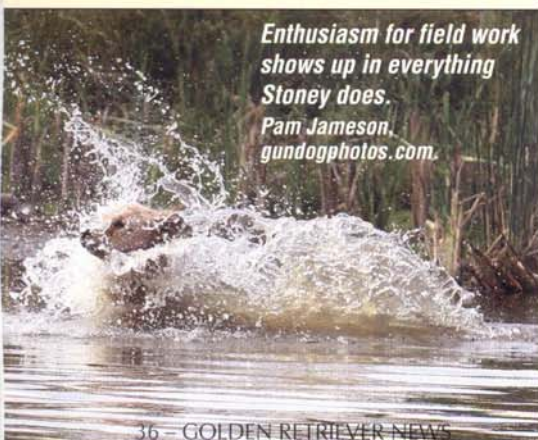


*Who says show Champions can't have great style in the field as well as the ring?*

*Kim Norvill photo*

*Enthusiasm for field work shows up in everything Stoney does.*

*Pam Jameson,  
gundogphotos.com.*



Finally the day arrived that my dog would leave. My nervousness dissipated a bit when I was invited to stay for some training. Once again, the trainer displayed understanding by trying to make the day less traumatic for me. After an enjoyable day my dog eagerly hopped into his "slot" on the truck. As I left, the trainer promised that he would make me feel a part of the training process. That evening I received a phone call to tell me how my dog was adapting to his new environment. This thoughtfulness helped alleviate some of my anxiety and confirmed that I had found the right trainer.

While I fully recognize that not all trainers need to do things the same way, the email and phone call reports I receive truly help me deal with having my dog gone. In addition I receive photos and videos of training sessions. Both advancement and weaknesses in training are detailed, giving me a realistic picture of my dog's progress.

It didn't take my dog long to settle in with the trainer. In less than 10 days I saw improvement in training that amazed me! My dog's potential was molded and expanded by a caring professional who had the knowledge and experience to expand my dog's skill set. And, the body language and expressions of my dog in pictures and video updates clearly demonstrated how much he was enjoying his work.

Since the trainer was directly responsible for instilling competence and confidence in my dog, my one month timeline was forgotten. The trainer had effected the positive changes and I felt he should run my dog for his Junior Hunter title. I received a phone call report immediately after each test. When my dog needed only one more pass, the trainer again made me feel a part of the process by suggesting I run my dog in the next test. As a reward

for his new title and my original goal, I brought my dog home for a visit.

There is tremendous importance in the relationship between dog and handler, but there should also be open, constructive communication between owner and trainer.

I was asked about my goals but I was no longer in a position to realistically evaluate work ethic, strengths or weakness. Since I completely trusted the trainer to provide an honest assessment of my dog's potential, we decided together that training would continue.

I have been blessed with not only a talented dog, but a committed and talented trainer who created in my dog the willingness and desire to play this field game. Only 11 weeks after earning his JH, my dog earned his UKC Hunting Retriever title. Two weeks later the Senior Hunter title was added, then a WCX. This isn't just about titles, but the awe you feel when a dog exhibits enthusiasm and enjoyment while working in the field. The trainer poured his heart and soul into training my dog and they became a team. I think the trainer would have been content to keep my dog indefinitely, but when I expressed the desire to bring him home for a long visit my feelings were once again appreciated. While my dog was home, we entered an obedience trial and the trainer came to visit with us. Not only was my dog thrilled by the reunion, but if he could have crawled inside the trainer, he would have! So much for skeptics who told me trainers will tell you what you want to hear and that you should use caution since your dog is just a means to an end for a professional. Anyone witnessing this reunion would recognize first hand the bond between trainer and dog!

This winter now finds my dog "south for training." The visit at home showed me just how easily he can put a smile on my face and how much I miss him when he is gone. There was a sting in my eye and a catch in my voice as I said goodbye, but I have every confidence that my boy is well cared for and having fun being a "Huntin Dawg." I know now that it is only me doing the pining...



**"Handsome is as handsome does," says Stoney (HR, U-CD, CH. Springcreek Everlore All Time Hi CD, RN, SH, WCX, VCX) Booth Photography**

Sending a dog to a professional for field training is not possible for everyone, nor right for everyone. But, don't automatically shut your mind to the possibility. Dedicated, knowledgeable and caring trainers are out there! Absolutely do your homework and be confident about the trainer you choose. But, when you find the "right" trainer for your dog, you may also find that your dog just thinks he now has not one, but two homes!



**Leaping into the water, Stoney puts the lie to those who claim Golden Retrievers never get wet!**  
Paul Kartes photo

*The author has owned Golden Retrievers since 1989 and has participated in obedience, field, agility and conformation.*

Update from Glenda Brown: As this was going to press, Pat was ecstatic about Stoney getting his first Master Hunter Leg! Next I heard from her, he had his second MH leg with two passes out of two tests. Go Stoney!

*An FEC presentation.*



**I'm ready to go! Would they just shoot those birds for me."**

**Pam Jameson, gundogphotos.com**