

Upland Hunting Style of the Labrador Retriever

History:

In 1830 a noted British sportsman, Colonel Hawker referred to the Lab as "...the best for any kind of shooting...generally black, extremely quick in running, swimming..." Accurate pedigrees of today's Labs go back to 1878. The Lab was recognized as a distinct breed by the English Kennel Club in 1903. The first registration of Labradors by the AKC was in 1917.

According to the AKC Breed Standard, the Labrador Retriever possesses "... a sound athletic, well-balanced conformation that enables it to function as a retrieving gun dog; the substance and soundness to hunt water fowl or upland game for long hours under difficult conditions;..." As evidence of the breed's usefulness and its abilities on upland game, there exist today many old and new photos of Labradors in the field with a mixed bag of waterfowl and pheasants.

Hunting Style:

The versatility of the Labrador is demonstrated by its ability to be a biddable companion as a family dog and hunting partner. The natural desire to retrieve will be rewarded by its excellent bird finding abilities. While most Labs will find birds because of their nose and scenting capabilities, the use of a proper wind pattern, if not already present, can be easily introduced with experience. If properly trained you will see a Labrador methodically working for its handler in all types of cover - heavy or light. It should not avoid dense cover for its persistence to find game is of the utmost importance. Because of its size and stature, the breed usually hunts with speed or quickness and always with determination.

The Labrador when on game, either by air or ground scent, will become more excited or animated. As it nears game it may drop its head somewhat to better find or locate the bird, but will continue to move forward. Most Labradors will naturally flush in a bold to moderate manner, their desire to find and retrieve continuously driving them toward the bird in an attempt to either catch or flush to wing. Anything less would be unacceptable and should be scored accordingly, as the Spaniel Hunting test is intended to demonstrate the traits and values of a flushing dog.

The Labrador is always ready to perform any portion of the retrieving requirements, either on land or in water. They should demonstrate excellent marking abilities. When released they should do so with haste and a quick pick up and return to the handler. The water entry for a Labrador will vary, but most will be bold to deliberate and should show no reluctance. The mouth on the Labrador will be firm but gentle on game. All retrieves should be in a proud and determined manner. The Labrador should have no difficulty in trailing and finding wounded game.

June 2013