

Working Our Labrador Retrievers

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The Sporting Group is comprised of workers. So, why don't more of us work our show dogs? We spend many weekends during the year attending dog shows but never seem to find enough time to field train our dogs. Our excuses range from; It's too hot, it's too cold, it's too windy, or I don't like carrying a shotgun, I don't like dead birds, you want me to walk way out there?! Once you start field training, no matter what level of expertise you strive for, it's such fun that you won't even notice the weather and the walk will be therapeutic.

Our dogs love to retrieve, but as breeders it's not enough that they catch a tennis ball or retrieve a stick, as far as fulfilling their accountability to be efficient gun dogs. It may transfer over, but there is no real proof until we are able to place a basic performance title at the end of their names. Field training our show dogs is the other part of our obligation to the breed.

If you've never tried it, you're missing out on an exciting day that will find you thrilled at discovering your dog's natural abilities of scent, marking and courage. His exposure to field training will give him confidence, stamina and the physical development that may enhance his movement in the ring. It will not negatively alter his behavior as a show dog other than when you stand for your win photo and the photographer throws a toy. Be prepared for your Labrador to take off after it and possibly retrieve to hand!

There are many levels of field training and many clubs to join that will start you on your way. Try training for a Working Certificate award first. WC's are non-competitive, casual events that give the newcomer a chance to experience some basic skills that are required of them at the hunting retriever tests and field trials they may eventually attend. Tests are designed to show a dog's basic retrieving instincts on land and water with opportunities to retrieve fresh killed flyers. It can be a great day for puppy socializing, family picnics and an opportunity to learn. One or two days a week of training for a few months should be enough to attain this level and by then you'll know if you want to go further.

If you haven't already, your next step should be to join a retriever training group. There you'll find not only Labradors but Goldens, Chessies, Flatties and possibly even a Poodle. Most importantly, you'll have the opportunity to meet experienced amateur trainers who will help you teach your dog while you learn the nuances of field training.

Take advantage of your dog's natural retrieving abilities. Let him show you what a day outside with birds, holding blinds and duck calls can do for you. Keep our show dogs' retrieving instincts in the forefront of your breeding program. You'll find it's a great adventure for both of you.

For a list of requirements and future events for a Working Certificate test go to thelabradorclub.com. For a list of retriever clubs involved in hunting retriever tests and field trials, go online to Working Retriever Central.

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January 2005 | *Revised: August 19, 2019*