

Doing It All

Why Title Dogs?

BY SANDY MCMILLAN



“NOTHING MORE REWARDING THAN TO ENTER YOUR HOME-BRED AND RAISED PUP WHERE YOU CAN SHOW THEM OFF IN A PUBLIC VENUE!”

I recently sat staring at the ice on the trees, reflecting on last year’s events and thinking ahead to the new year’s goals. I was tired of being shut in and yearned to get out and do something with my dogs. Guess I’m not a shopper! So, I began asking myself why doing things with my dogs was my activity of choice. I came up with a list, but then my curiosity surrounded the question of what others think about this topic. Why do other people seek activities with their dogs like I do? I decided to ask, and so I posted a question on Facebook about why people title their dogs and which titles are most meaningful. This article reveals the results of my informal survey, which I found fun and interesting. Respondents fell into six categories: breeders, trainers, licensed judges, performance enthusiasts, rescue dog owners, and companion owners.

Breeders tended to respond regarding their breeds’ Standards in that it was important to them that their dogs and puppies met the structural and working traits their Standards described. Bart West says, “My feeling as a breeder and active Labrador owner is to prove that we breed to the Standard. This requires, in my opinion, Conformation, Obedience, and Hunt Tests or something comparable. We have all heard that my show dog can hunt and retrieve as well as field dogs, but a title backs up that claim. As you know, it does require time and money, but if you want to have recognition as a breeder to people who do not know your lines, the titles give you credibility. I also believe the general pet owning market may not know the ins and outs of titles, but they respect them as well. As others have said, training is a time you and your dog bond; and for Sporting dog owners, it is a time for your dog to do something it was bred to do.” Mike Roehrs agrees, “As a preservation breeder of a rare breed (Field Spaniels), I feel a responsibility to have my dogs presented in a variety of venues to expose them to the public and create an opportunity to educate the public about the breed. Titling in a variety of arenas also helps show soundness of breeding. (Form Follows Function). Finally, it’s fun! Nothing more rewarding than to enter your home-bred and raised pup where you can show them off in a public venue! Let’s be honest—having bragging rights is fun!”



left: Bart West’s “Hatch” does well in the show ring with a nice Sporting Group placement.
right: Bart and Hatch finishing his Senior Hunter title.

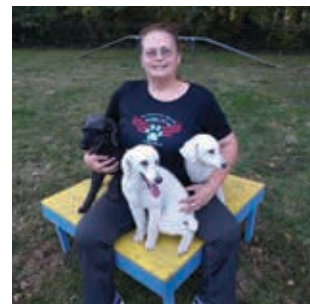
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This was a common response from breeders who also saw titles as a way to elevate the value of their lines and to display the capabilities of the puppies they produce. But one breeder disagreed, saying that people seeking companion puppies from him are often turned off by titled dogs.

Other breeders see titling dogs as a way to increase the value of their breeding dogs, especially if they are titled in multiple venues. Many breeders, whose dogs are recognized, profiled in magazines, or listed on special breed awards lists, find that publishing accomplishments is a good form of advertising which may lead to new liaisons and relationships that offer many new possibilities for the dogs and all involved parties. Sharing ideas and resources is often very helpful to me, as I tend to get stuck in ruts. I also think versatile lines of any breed attract more puppy buyers who are likely to do things with their new puppies, which hopefully ensures those puppies will have a great quality of life versus a life spent barking in the backyard.

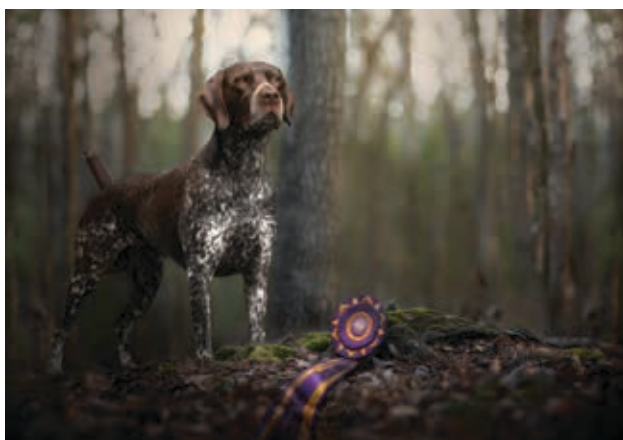
Professional trainers seek titles on their dogs for very practical reasons. Professional dog trainers need credibility to attract clients. That credibility can be attained through educational routes, but titles earned on trainer-owned or client dogs add stars to any diploma a trainer has earned. Advertising is one way to attract new clients. But I have found that advertising the accomplishments of my own dogs and my client dogs is a greater influence on people than any magazine ad, since many potential clients may not have subscriptions to those magazines. I have also learned over time that word-of-mouth is indeed the best way to find new clients. Depending upon the goals of new clients, titles may or may not influence their decisions but may instill confidence in one's ability to work with their dog.

Judges seek titles on their dogs for the above reasons but also to meet judging requirements. To become licensed as a judge in any sport, one must first meet requirements that include years in a sport and titles on dogs. Lisa Potts confirms this. She judges in several venues, including Agility, Obedience, Rally, Nose Work, Temperament Testing, Fetch, and CGC. She has had Miniature Poodles, a Standard Wirehaired Dachshund, and a Toy Poodle. "I love training them and earning titles, which gives me guidelines and goals," Lisa shares. "Since I judge, I feel the titles give me some documented credibility. I know what it's like to be in the ring, as we have earned hundreds of titles, including championships in four different dog sports."



left: Judge Lisa Potts and best friend and titled Poodle, "Jane," getting set to run an Agility Trial. right: Lisa Potts and her Poodle family.

Performance enthusiasts clearly seek titles on their dogs, but not to attract clients or puppy buyers. They do so purely to enjoy their pastime and the secondary gains achieved. Jean Bernier offers a good opinion of an enthusiast's thoughts as she takes up the challenge. She remembers that "older people told me that show dogs can't hunt. "Thus, it became my goal to prove them wrong," Jean declares. "So, for the last 45 years, my German Shorthaired Pointers have a Show Championship and multiple Field titles, even Retriever Hunt Test titles."



Jean Bernier's BISS BIS GCH / INT CH URO1 Knottypine's Whispers To My Soul JH CDX RI DN BCAT, NAVHDA NA PZI (110) TKI FDC, GSPCA RD, GSPCA VC, CGC

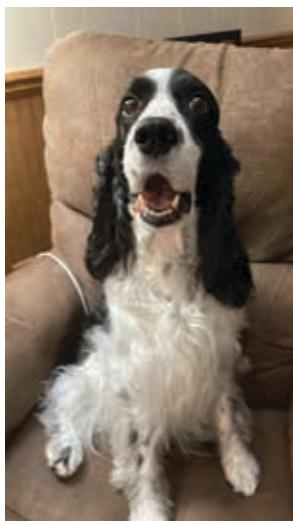
Rita Bakalar trains and titles her Labrador Retriever and English Springer Spaniels. She reports, "I title my dogs because they enjoy doing all the different trials. It also helps keep their attention on me, especially when out just walking. Agility keeps my current dog fit and agile, which helps her settle and negotiate positions when she works in Therapy Dog settings. Michelle Kasten has Schipperkes and titles her dogs because it's not about the ribbons, awards, or trophies but more about the bond between handler and dog. She offers, "Most of our breeds were bred to be part of our lives, not just a couch ornament. Titling enriches their lives, which is our way to return the enrichment they give to us." Similarly, Dawn Wheat says that since her dogs are not for breeding, she thought titles were useless. "However, I've learned titles are more about having fun with my dog and building a good relationship," she notes. I don't need tons of titles, but I enjoy earning the ones we have. I like proving to



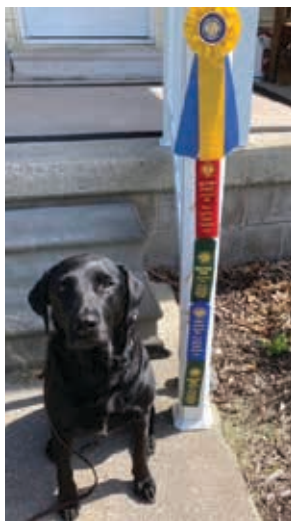
left: Mike Roehrs and GCHB CT Windward-Sandscape Boys Of Summer CD BN GN RE TD2 TDU DJ CGC TKE, "Rookie." right: Mike Roehrs and show dog Rookie passing a TDX test.

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myself that the work we do can pay off.” Connie Austin added that titling her Whippets and Cirnechi isn’t about titles and ribbons, it’s all about the journey. She enjoys meeting people and working with others, sharing thoughts and ideas. There are always great stories to share that enrich everyone’s life. And then there is Evaretta Moses who has Golden Retrievers. She has been training Golden Retrievers for over 60 years and today finds herself fighting chronic obstructive lung disease, using oxygen to enable her to do anything with her dogs over the past four years. Evaretta shares, “My dogs are my lifeline. Today, I was able to get ready, drive 45 minutes, and train for two hours in Obedience to get ready for a trial. It made my dogs and I so happy. I didn’t realize that we were all so depressed.”



left: Rita Bakalar’s “Star” loves Agility and runs joyously through courses.
right: Dawn Wheat’s “Willow” proudly sits among her ribbons to celebrate their success.



Evaretta Moses and “Rum” finishing their CD in one weekend.

how her Collies’ achievements often amazed some of her previously doubtful competitors. “Maybe I did it the hard way, but I don’t regret it at all,” she says.

I only recall one response from a companion owner who contributed some good thoughts. Jordan Wilton, a competitive horsewoman, cited that titles are important to her when locating a reputable breeder who is most likely to have the kind of companion dog she seeks. She relayed, “At this point in my life, I do not have any plans to title my dogs as they were purchased simply to be companions. However, I put a lot of thought into who to purchase from and looked for reputable breeders to ensure I would be getting a dog who meets the Standard. I know that titled dogs tend to produce dogs that are sound with good movement, gait, type, and temperament.” Thus, by buying from a breeder active in dog sports who used good puppy rearing methods, i.e., early stimulation programs and enriched environments, the risk of getting a dog with physical, social, or behavioral problems would be reduced; features so important for her lifestyle.

Reading all these responses has helped me identify my motivations for titling my dogs. There are lots of reasons, but the biggest reason is purely the joy I get from developing a great bond and working relationship with a dog and then watching a dog I bred, raised, and trained learn and grow into a good working partner, loving his “job.” My dogs are clearly pleased with themselves when we work, pass or fail, win or lose. As others have said, it’s all about spending time with Mom, living in the moment and having fun. As I age, I also realize that my dogs keep me moving and active physically, mentally, and socially, all of which helps me live a higher quality life in my golden years. Thank you, Pups. I hope I am offering you as much enrichment as you are giving me. ■



Ule James tracking Whippet, Jive, TD TDU TDX.

A subgroup of performance enthusiasts is the rescue dog owners who are taking up the challenge offered by people negating the value of a rescue. One of our local Obedience club members experienced open and subtle prejudices towards her and her rescued dogs. When AKC began registering this group of dogs, she vowed to herself to prove naysayers wrong by setting out to title her rescues. She rationalized that her dogs were right for her and were wonderful to live with, so why purchase purebred dogs for titling. She acknowledged that it wasn’t easy, but she thoroughly enjoyed