



Dual Ch (FT and Ch) Bitcon Gold Coast at Northey JW

“If you don’t have a dream, how you gonna make a dream come true”

A ‘Full Champion’. Something I had aspired to since first entering the gundog world and discovering the pleasures of having a dog that was worthy of gaining at least a Show Gundog Working Certificate (SGWC) plus 3 CCs in the ring, *writes Christine McDonald*. In those early days in the gundog world the terms full Ch and Dual Ch were interchangeable in my mind. How wrong can one be!

My first Welsh Springer paved the way of interest in dual purpose gundogs. Way back at Leeds 1978 she won a CC under Violet Yates then a couple of years later her SGWC, along with her daughter, and son who became Ch Northey Woodpecker. A full Ch was realistically the most competitive dual award available to a minority breed spaniel. Only a handful of WSSs have even run in Any Variety Spaniel Field Trials, let alone have gained an award and have CCs in the ring, and I was proud as punch of ‘Woody’, who also won a Championship show Gundog Group, and at the time my goal was stretched that I wanted to do the same with a bitch. Ch Northey Stormcloud fulfilled this for me, gaining her ‘qualifier’, as it used to be called, and 17 CCs, many with BOB plus a Championship show Gundog Group. Her daughter Ch Northey Showboat also won her full title, and her son Ch Northey Whittington - who was handled by Andrew to gain his SGWC, best qualifier of the day, and a couple of minor spaniel field trial awards in All-Aged stakes.

Vast Difference between Full and Dual Champion

There set the mortar between the slabs on the path that if I had another breed, the least to aspire to would be a full Ch, but in a shift of the goal posts - in a different sub-group of gundogs. By this time, I had learned the vast difference between full and dual Ch titles, and I felt full Ch with a totally different style of gundog work, would be a high enough goal to set.

At the time, I was active at the open shows in Essex, and interested in all Gundog breeds. My day-job involved visiting schools in south Essex and I would often spend my lunch breaks with friends that I had made on the show circuit. My eye had been taken by Vizslas at shows, and when Jackie Perkins invited me to visit her home kennel in Prittlewell, my love for the breed increased. I travelled with Jackie to a few events - shows where she introduced me to the Vizsla folk of the time and working events including the Large Munsterlander Field Trials at Titsey, where I saw Chs Gardenway Grebe, Bula and Dawn gain their Show Gundog Working Certificates, and was coerced by the LMC club Secretary Fred Alcock to steward many times at their trials. Little did I know that one day, it would be Fred and his wife Irmgard that would be the judges to cap my own Vizsla to win the ultimate competitive working gundog title - that of Field Trial Champion.

After a lifetime of spaniels – an HPR

Fast forward some 25 years or so, and within that period a lifetime of devotion to owning spaniels, for me to show, and husband Andrew to work. I spent nearly 20 years on the Welsh Springer Spaniel Club committee, and bred about the same number of litters, many of the puppies being sold to homes where they were both shown and worked. I think it’s fair to say, I was involved in every aspect of Welsh Springers, whereas Andrew was an out-and-out working English Springer man, beating on local driven shoots with a bustling liver and white spaniel flushing birds here, there and everywhere.

I was invited to take on the role of Gundog Correspondent for Our Dogs from the late Jim Norfolk in 1995. Since then it has been a great opportunity to learn about different gundog breeds and the work expected by the different sub-groups of gundogs. I wouldn't say any breed I have featured has been my favourite – but some individual dogs certainly made a significant impact on me.

One such dog was Yogi (Sh Ch Aust Ch Hungargunn Bear Itn Mind). He was inspirational in his correctness and grace of movement, but to me it was his biddability combined with his aesthetic beauty that re-kindled my fire to have a Vizsla. I was reminded of this a few months later when following the untimely death of a WSS puppy I was running on, John Thirlwell said, "Why not have a Vizsla – you've always liked them and Moray has a litter by that dog you like?" And so it came to pass, as they say in the great book, that a 10 week old Vizsla and his brother, two unsold pups from a litter of eleven, came to join the spaniels at Northey. It wasn't long before I decided it was Coast and not his brother that was my choice, and Moray kindly found a buyer for the other.

Our path with Coast was successful from day one. Everyone who saw him fell in love. In the dog world, firstly my WSS friends and then at local match and shows. On the working side, he was as biddable as his father at learning what was expected in new environments. Andrew was coming to appreciate his worth as a working gundog when at 4 months he was obedient and good at retrieves including game. We didn't know much about the early training of an HPR and probably spent a lot of time on steadiness, rather than free-running for Coast to learn to work the wind.

Early training and SGWC

We signed up for a course with Peter O'Driscoll on the grouse moors to encourage free hunting, and took up training opportunities from various clubs and individuals. We were fortunate to be established on our local shoots for providing spaniels for the beating line and picking-up, and the keeper agreed to allow Coast to work the wind on the outside of the drive so if he went on point he would not hold up the line. It wasn't ideal experience to work alongside spaniels, and we tried to get as much experience as possible with Andrew shooting over him, but it is not easy to train an HPR to produce a bird on command whilst concentrating on aiming a shotgun. Although our son and friends who shot were willing to come out with Coast, it was only Sundays when they were free – and it is illegal to shoot game on a Sunday.

However, we felt he demonstrated enough natural instinct and with the training we had put in to encourage this and his natural biddability to please his handler to obey commands to produce the quarry and retrieve, we entered him for the SGWC. He gained this with a retrieve of a Woodcock under Suzi Burton, who was to support us throughout our campaign and was present on the day Coast became a Dual Ch, and Geoff Hargreaves, who was later to award Coast one of his 9 CCs in the show ring, together with BOB. Both judges were complimentary and encouraged us to train him to a higher standard and enter competitive field events.

Show career starts with a bang!

Alongside his HPR training, his career in the show ring had started with a bang! At six months and a few days, he won the Puppy Gundog Group at a local Open show. His fan club grew as people saw him. He won his first RCC as a puppy (Terry Thorn) and his first CC at Windsor 2007 under breed specialist Sheila Gray (Abbeystag), beating his sire. His second CC came a couple of weeks later from Donna Holman, and his third from Julia Iles-Hebbert at SKC in May 2008. As he already held his SGWC he automatically became a full Ch at two years old. His CCs were interspersed with RCCs, many to his sire as they were being campaigned at the same time.

"One of the most photogenic dogs I have ever pointed a camera at"

The previous summer, David Tomlinson of the Shooting Times, came to visit us to report on our teenage son Christopher's success as a Young Shot and gaining the Working Gundog Certificate with a young English Springer bitch he had trained himself. That was the plan anyway ... until he met Coast. David wrote of him, "He is one of the most photogenic dogs I have ever pointed a camera at". David's subsequent article confirmed how we had made our game plan. Although we had both handled spaniels in the shooting field, we had decided a deliberate division of handlers for Coast – me in the show ring and Andrew for working.

Aiming much higher – to become a Dual Champion!

With Coast now a full Ch, and David's article and the encouragement of dozens to spur us on, I felt we had to aim higher – towards the ultimate competitive accolade of Dual (FT Ch and Ch). A dog that is both a Show Champion and has a working 'qualifier', but hugely more than this ALSO is a Field Trial Champion, i.e. has two wins at Open Field Trial Stakes. This was heady stuff. At the time, (although since then there have been two Brittanys and a Gordon Setter) I had only known about one Dual Ch Gundog – the O'Driscoll's Pointer Dual Champion (FT and Ch) Fowington Slezak who gained his title in 1995.

We entered a few Novice stakes. Coast was going well. In one of his first trials the conditions were favourable – scent, supply of birds, and well-aimed shooting – and he was achieved a Certificate of Merit. A COM means the dog is not awarded a place in the trial awards, but it has to the judges' satisfaction shown merit in hunting, pointed and produced a bird on command, retrieved to hand, and completed a water test. Coast ran in a few more Novice stakes, gaining a 2nd, and then one day – a 1st. Ooh! We could enter the top level of Field Trials – Open stakes. We had a brief crisis of confidence and questioned whether we had the experience or indeed the commitment to continue up to this higher level but were persuaded to 'Go for it'.

We bought every DVD available on HPR training. At the advanced level the retrieves seemed so long, and the water tests were blind without a shot and much further than we were used to. Loads more training needed! The first Open we entered was in Canonbie - 400 miles away. I'd travelled this distance for shows, but this was the first time Andrew had been such a long distance away for a competitive event. We were in a new world. Up there with the top notch of HPR trialling. This was stuff we had only read about or watched on DVDs.

Andrew cast Coast off and it looked like he was going well – people started to whisper behind me. "Gosh that dog's hunting that back-wind well. Who is he?" My ears were bent backwards to hear more. "It's that Vizsla from down south we've heard about." It was when Tom Brechney, the trainer featured in many of the DVDs we had so avidly watched, came over to us and said, "I'm impressed with your dog. He hunted that backwind well but he did back-cast a couple of times", then gave us tips to how to make the best of the ground and wind, that we were made to believe Coast had the ability to compete at this level with the best of the best. He gained a 4th place that day. Tom won and made up his dog to a FT Ch. He had made it look so easy – the best dogs do!

On the Open Trial trail

We were on the Open trail. A couple of weeks later, December 2009, Coast won 1st place at The Kennel Club Open Stake. He had a 'Leg Up'. Field trial language for winning one 1st place in an Open stake that qualifies a dog towards the title of FT Ch. He was the first Vizsla who had qualified for his Sh Ch title who had also won a 1st in an Open FT stake. There had only been two FT Ch Vizslas – both bitches - FT Ch Vizsöny of Vallota, born in 1980, and her granddaughter, FT Ch Archenfield Crusty, born in 1991. Coast 'just' (!!!) needed one more 1st in an Open stake to join the ranks of Vizsla FT Chs. Anyone who trials will tell you how difficult this is! Up until the day, 29th October 2013, he was made up to Dual Ch Bitcon Gold Coast at Northey JW (subject to KC confirmation) he has won 9 CCs, 5 Best of Breeds, 16 Reserve CCs, and apart from being a leg-up towards his FT Ch title, he had 11 other awards in Open stakes, including two 2nds, two 3rds, five 4ths, and two CMs, plus wins in Novice and All-Aged and a handful of places and CMs.

Latest outings

At his latest show outing on 6th October 2013, the day after a full day's picking-up, and less than a four weeks prior to him becoming a FT Ch, he won Veteran and Field Trial classes and the RDCC at the Hungarian Vizsla Club Championship show. A previous show outing had been the Hungarian Vizsla Society Championship show, where he won the same classes and also the RDCC. At Crufts this year, he won the Gamekeepers' class for working HPRs for the second consecutive year, and in the breed ring Veteran and FT classes and the DCC under Larry Wilks, who wrote in his critique, "McDonald's Ch Bitcon Gold Coast of Northey JW, Filled the eye from the off. Correct head, kind eye and expression. Very balanced of medium size. Good muscle tone and showed to advantage on the move. I have shot over this dog on trials and I was delighted to award him the CC. Truly a dual-purpose dog."

And so to his Open stake run on 29th October 2013, which he won and thereby gained his FT Ch title. Handler and co-owner my husband Andrew described Coast's performance, "On his first run, Coast hunted a head wind, came on staunch point and on command, produced a partridge that was shot and fell about 80 yards out. It was obvious from the way the bird fell that it would be a runner and the judges were quick to ask me to send him. He went to the point of fall and searched, unable at first to find the bird. I sent him out again two to three times and each time he hunted a different area. He appeared to pick-up wafts of scent, until he found a good line and located the bird, picked it and made a speedy return to hand. A good find of a strong runner. I felt pleased with his performance. On the second run, we had a back wind. He went out well on the outrun and hunted back to me with good ground treatment. With his second cast, he spun around on the backwind facing me bang on point. It was another Partridge. He produced, it was shot, and fell some 100 yards away. I sent him.

"He had marked the exact point of fall, picked and was returning at speed when he came face to face with a hare running in the opposite direction. He stopped, acknowledged the hare away, and resumed his gallop to me. I prayed for the judges to end my run, but no! 'Hunt on', they said. With great relief, Coast hunted on with gusto, and after a couple of casts was called up and put 'on ice' for the water." The water retrieve is a test at every HPR field trial at any level. For Novice it is a seen retrieve heralded by a shot, for All-Aged and Open stakes – unseen and unheralded. Coast carried out the water retrieve with ease, and we all returned to the shoot lodge at Boreham Hall Shoot for the awards. Great excitement all round when it was announced a 1st place had been awarded to Coast, which gave him his FT Ch title. This win qualifies him for the Kennel Club HPR Championship on 15/16 November 2013, after which he will be retired from competitive field trials.

Living the dream

So, subject to Kennel Club Confirmation, Coast is now Dual Ch Bitcon Gold Coast at Northey JW. He is the epitome of a multi-purpose dog. It is his ability to inter-mingle the various activities asked of him – HPR rough-shooting, picking-up at local shoots, companionship and playing with puppies as well as participate at the highest level of shows and field trials with willingness that makes him so special. But without any of his titles, he is simply a wonderful dog. He enriches our lives by just being a pleasure to live with. He is simply a dream to live with, and dreams enrich lives.

Thank you one and all

It's impossible to list all the people who are responsible for spurring us on to campaign Coast showing and working. We couldn't have achieved all we have without the support, friendship, opportunities, advice and especially latterly the persuasion of our field trialling peers to persevere aiming towards his FT title.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you one and all.

Christine and Andrew McDonald

Cheryl Maguire, Specialist - Working Dog Activities: "I can confirm that Kennel Club Regulation K2.d states that a Dual Champion is a Gundog which has been awarded the title of Show Champion and Field Trial Champion. Dogs can be awarded many Champion titles but the only ones that entitle it to be called 'Dual Champion' are as stated above."



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Dual Ch Bitcon Gold Coast at Northey JW



Club show photos by Trevor White

2008 HVC RDCC and RBIS



2010 HVC DCC and BIS



2013 HVC RCC from Veteran and FT classes