



The Flatcoated Retriever Society Field Trial Sub-Committee FCR Training, Tests & Trials Newsletter



This is the first of what we propose will be regular email communications from the Society's Field Trial Sub-Committee to the membership of the Flatcoated Retriever Society regarding the working side of the breed; if you have received this it is because you are a member of the FCRS and one of the 67% or thereabouts of the membership who have provided an email address to the Membership Secretary. Of course the opposite is also true, if you didn't you won't have!

For the other 33% we need your email address and hope that you read the AGM papers you received recently or will visit the Society website or Facebook pages and see the reminders there; you will find useful links at the end of this newsletter. If you are one of the 67%, and know anyone in the 33%, please tell them about this and ask them to send their details to the Membership Secretary, Brian Broadbent.

One of the roles of the Society is to maintain a "dual purpose" breed; dogs that are equally at home in the shooting field as they are in the show ring. Or put another way, dogs that show good conformation with the breed standard and are generously endowed with working ability. Very many Flatcoated Retrievers can be classed as "dual-purpose", combining good conformation with working ability, but while the Show side of the breed has gone from strength to strength with a very high proportion of the breed appearing in the show ring, the numbers being used in the shooting field have declined significantly, as have those entering field trials.

The causes of the decline in the popularity of working Flatcoats are many and complex and it is unrealistic to think that somehow the clock can be turned back on over 100 years of breed history. A few think that it is inevitable that the breed will split, as has happened with very many gundog breeds, and others who consider that trialling Flatcoats should end. The FTSub-Committee don't think we are there yet and believe that the reduced popularity of working Flatcoats can be reversed. For those that continue to work the breed; picking-up, in working tests and for the few that enter field trials, many will share the view that the true beauty of a Flatcoated Retriever lies in its natural marking, hunting and game finding abilities. After all, it is what they were bred for!

There is a little evidence of a view amongst some of the membership that the FTSub-Committee only exists to run field trials and that it is elitist. While Field Trials are very important to the Society, the Field Trial Sub-Committee's primary purpose is to support the Society's membership in training and working their Flatcoats. We want more owners to work their dogs, and will support them as much as we can to achieve the highest possible standards. And of course we also want to encourage more to enter working tests and to try field trials.

As a group we have set some objectives to help us achieve this and which we will use to focus our activities and the training, tests and trials that we organise and promote. They are:

- to encourage more Flatcoated Retriever Society members to work their dogs
- to assist members in the identification of good quality training for them and their dogs
- to organise working tests, field trials and other tests for the Society membership and to raise the standards across all working disciplines, and
- to support the maintenance and preservation of a "dual-purpose" Flatcoated Retriever.

TALKING TO MEMBERS:

The first thing that we want to do is to improve communication with the membership and we have taken some initial steps. We have made some changes to the "Working" pages of the Society website so these better reflect who we are and what the Field Trial Sub-Committee is trying to

achieve. There is still some work to do but hopefully by the time you receive this the website pages will all be up to date.

A few months ago we started a new Facebook page: Flatcoat Training, Tests and Trials. Currently almost 200 people regularly view the information posted, provide feedback and ask for help regarding training. We hope that we will be able to attract even more members to this site as this is probably the most effective way of keeping members up to date.

Also, this newsletter; we plan to produce regular editions but are not going to commit to a strict number or frequency until we have seen how this is received! We will also look at sending out specific information by email when appropriate.

Finally, we hope that we can establish a dialogue. We want to hear about the training you are getting, the Clubs you have joined, competitions entered and how well you did. Tell us your stories!

TRAINING:

We know that for the majority, routine training needs to be provided locally but realistically we cannot cover all areas of the country, not yet anyway. On the Society website you will find details of the training currently provided by the Society, NEFRA, the Southern FCR Club and that run by Society members. We shall keep the list up to date as more is identified and developed. Updates will be notified via the Society's website and via Facebook.

For those parts of the country where we don't currently have resources we will try to identify independent providers, either professional or experienced trainers or suitable Gundog clubs. We have already had some requests for help in providing suitable training via Flatcoat Training, Tests and Trials and we will do our best to match the needs of individual members with suitable training.

Whilst we are happy to provide suggestions concerning training these suggestions will always come with a health warning; there is no single best way to train a dog and some techniques (and trainers) you will like and some you will not; for example, clicker training is popular with some trainers but frowned upon by others. So don't be afraid to try different clubs and different trainers, until you find one that best suits you and your dog. Please feel free to contact us via email, Facebook, phone etc, and we shall do what we can to assist.

For more experienced handlers, organising training with others can be a very useful way of progressing. Use the Facebook site if you are looking for others to train with or contact your Area Representative.

Like all good things, training comes at a cost unless it's DIY. Clubs sometimes charge a training session fee on top of membership fees, some do not. For group training over 1-2 hours the cost should be no more than £20 each, less for larger groups. The costs for 1:1 training vary enormously but can be £40-£50 per session. Training involving game is normally the most expensive; a walked up training day may cost over £100 per handler and dog and you may get just 6-8 retrieves, but many consider that this form of training is essential if you plan to enter field trials.

If you are attending training that we haven't identified then please let us have details and your comments, either directly or via Facebook.

For Members new to training, most of the lessons will be for you and not your dog. Whatever your objectives you need to get the basics right first; teaching your dog to walk to heel on and then off a lead, sitting and staying and recalling your dog. For most dogs a good standard can be achieved by training just 10-15 minutes each day. We will cover the basics in more detail in the future.

TESTS:

In addition to the gundog working tests (GWT) organised by the Area GWT Organisers and listed on the Society website, the Field Trial Sub-Committee runs 2 national competitions each year. The first of these, the Shirley Radburn Nationals will take place at Rickneys Training Ground, near Ware, Hertfordshire on Saturday 1st July 2017. This competition, named after the late Mrs Shirley Radburn who gifted a significant legacy to the Society to be used for the benefit of the breed, is the highlight of the Flatcoat working test calendar.

The second event is the Inter-Area Team Challenge. This event was run last year at Hatton Country World, near Warwick. We have decided to return to the same venue for 2017 because of the central location, excellent facilities and the quality of the ground. The competition is based on teams of four from defined areas; each team comprises one Puppy or Novice Dog & Novice handler, two Novice Dogs and one Open dog, or dog of Open standard. Nine teams competed last year and we obviously hope that we will get a good entry for the next event, which will be held on Saturday 19th August 2017.



The first Society working test took place on Saturday 25th March 2017; the Midland Area Gundog Working Tests for Novice and Open Flatcoated Retrievers and was held at Byrds Retreat, Church Lench, Worcestershire, by kind permission of Mr R and Mrs S Byrd.



A total of 35 competitors completed 5 tests each, including single and double marks, single and double blinds, a hunting test and a 2-Dog walk-up. The full results will be published elsewhere but the Novice Test was won by Mr A Sweeney and his 4-year old bitch Norfolk Rosie's Thorn of Wolfthistle, and the Open Test was won by Mrs N Brown and her 5-year old bitch Percuil Taruiffio at Meadowshaw.

All of these events are open to members and the public and provide a great opportunity to see what other Flatcoat owners are achieving with their dogs. We hope to see some of you at future events and you can be sure of a warm welcome.

TRIALS:

The FT Sub-Committee recognises that only small numbers of the membership will want to work their dogs at Field Trials but we are keen to ensure that the Society remains able to offer this level of competition to its members. The Society is privileged to be authorised by the Kennel Club to run Field Trials, including an Open Trial that can provide part of the qualification to the prestigious International Gundog League annual Retriever Trials Championship.

We will therefore be working hard to encourage more members to compete in field trials; we will provide opportunities to participate in field trial training days, mock field trials, and cold-game tests that simulate trialling but without the competitive pressures and in the hope that some of you "catch the bug".

We are planning to run three field trials during the 2017/18 season; two Novice and one Open standard. We will be able to confirm the dates and venues for these trials in a few weeks time. We will also be putting together some training events to assist you in your preparations!

FINAL THOUGHTS:

You will find that whatever training you embark upon, be it obedience, agility, working tests or trials, your Flatcoats are intelligent dogs and will really benefit from both a physical and mental workout.

We hope that you will find something of interest in this newsletter and that if you have not previously worked a Flatcoat we hope that we have moved you a little way towards giving it a try. If we haven't yet then feel free to let us know what else we should consider to persuade you?

USEFUL LINKS :

Flatcoated Retriever Society:

www.flatcoated-retriever-society.org

FCRS Working:

<http://www.flatcoated-retriever-society.org/working>

FCRS Area Representatives:

<http://www.flatcoated-retriever-society.org/about/area-representatives>

Flatcoated Retriever Society Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=flatcoated%20retriever%20society%20uk>

Flatcoat Training, Tests and Trials Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/588936481317611/>

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