

## **First Labrador Retriever to Earn the MHU Title**

*By Tom Meyer, Executive Field Representative*

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"Congratulations" are in order for the first Labrador Retriever to obtain a Master Hunter Title in the Spaniel Hunting Test. The Labrador and Golden Retriever's were allowed to participate in the program on July 1st, 2013.

Phyllis Giroux DVM and her Labrador retriever "Sam" were the first to achieve the Master Hunter, and Sam did it in less than four months. I had the pleasure of observing Phyllis and Sam in earning two qualifying legs in both the Senior and Master in Mid-September and could see then it was only a matter of time before the titles were earned. Sam's Performance and hunting abilities were very evident and it was great to see the team work between Phyllis and Sam throughout the weekend, no doubt the culmination of time spent in the field.

I had asked Phyllis to send me some information on what may have motivated her interest in the Spaniel Hunt Test program.

Below in its entirety is that response, read and enjoy!

*Sam and I have had quite a ride!*

*After completing Sam's Retriever Master Hunter and Conformation Championship titles, Sam started making me crazy, asking to do more! So we tried Rally and Obedience at the Novice level. We breezed through both Novices, and, because at the time I was involved with a terrific training group, I was motivated to tackle the CDX and UD titles. Well, Sam just shined, and if he had had a better handler, would have gotten his UD much quicker. After his UD, we both wanted more, but weren't sure where to go.*

*When the AKC opened the Spaniel Hunting Test to Labradors, I thought we should give it a try! Sam has hunted upland birds, and has a couple of passes in other venues that offer upland work.*

*It became clear to me that Spaniel owners and trainers have a very different approach to field work than Retriever people. For Retriever people, everything is about straight lines, control and efficiency. Spaniel tests are more about watching the dog work it out, use their natural abilities, and apply breed specific traits to locate birds and put them before the gun, mark the birds, and find down birds based on their marking and scenting abilities.*

*Once again, if Sam had had a more experienced trainer and handler, I am sure this would have been easier! He always applies himself 110% to every training session and competition, and is the ultimate team player. He is patient with my errors, and tries to play the game of the day. Through the patient advice of judges and other handlers in the Spaniel Program, I have been able to develop the ability to become part of Sam's team, and can enjoy watching him "paint the field with his nose", to locate birds, and develop a "bold flush" that is the hallmark of a finished flushing dog.*

*I am so grateful to Sam's breeders and previous owner, Laura Owens; to Sam's co-owners Jack Jagoda and Sheree Moses; and to the many, many people who helped and supported us along the way. Without the help of others, what we have accomplished would not have been possible. And to my good and forever friend, Kay Livermore, one of Sam's biggest supporters, who lost her battle with breast cancer along the path of our journey, thank you. I know Kay is smiling down at us from across the rainbow bridge.*

*What next? OK, AKC, you tell us.....*

Phyllis Giroux, DVM, is the owner of Deep Run Farm, a Boarding and Health Care Facility in Goldvein, VA. Phyllis is also a certified Canine Chiropractor. Her practice is limited to performance, working and conformation dogs, maximizing health and performance, reproductive issues, and breeding assistance. Deep Run Farm is the culmination of a lifetime devoted to the health and well-being of purebred dogs.

### **Phyllis**

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