

# THE LABRADOR RETRIEVER CLUB, INC.



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**Robin Anderson, Editor**

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# Getting To Know You

**Bart West, MD.**

*submitted by Elizabeth Wenner, Ph.D*



*One feature of the LRC Inc. newsletter is highlighting members. Bart West MD is a member of LRC Inc. and has agreed to share his interesting journey with Labradors, especially his GCH/MH "Hatch."*



**Hatch**

My interest in training developed over my years of owning labs. With my first Labs, I took classes in basic obedience. When I went to school in the Midwest, I started upland bird hunting which led to basic retriever training. At that time I was not involved in hunt tests, and my training was to have success when hunting.

When choosing the Labs I owned for hunting, I looked for proven lines with hunting titles. When we wanted to start a line under our farm name, I looked for lines that produced Labrador Retrievers that were correct to the conformational standard and the "performance" or hunting component. I wanted the looks and the ability to hunt/performance. It is nice to see labs in person at both hunting tests and the show ring to evaluate what we need to improve in our breeding program.

Our training schedule is usually daily doing drills, marks, and blinds. I meet with my training group (*shout out to fellow LRC members, Sarah Cunningham and Rhonda Miller who have multi-titled dogs*) usually once a week to do test-type scenarios. I periodically reach out to some professional trainer friends for specific training concepts. Attending a week of concentrated group training once a year (MS Misfits) has been invaluable. It takes a village.

GCH CH Byeu Watching Them Rise of West Wood CD MH CGCU CGCA TKN "Hatch" is a once-in-a-lifetime Labrador. We would like to get the DFAR at the LRC National. I also would like to do therapy work with Veterans. Having a wilderness first responder certification I have even considered doing some SAR work.

Since I have a GCH/MH my goals remain the same which is to be a preservation breeder. We want multi-titled labs that show and perform to the written standard. We mostly like to start obedience and socialization titles on young dogs then move into retrieving and conformation. I have been introduced to dock diving and have also done some Fast CAT. In addition, we have done some tracking work and need to learn more.

It takes substantial time and financial commitment to do both hunt tests and conformation. My retirement from my medical practice has allowed more time for dogs. I have been in the conformation ring, but prefer using competent handlers for that venue. I might get some training myself so I can show our dogs proficiently; however, I prefer hunt tests, obedience, and other performance tests.

If someone aspires to obtain a GCH/MH, I would say be patient and win the lottery. Just kidding about the lottery, but it is costly. I think if you want to do it yourself, it is obtainable. But you would need to train yourself before or while you train your dog. It will probably be better to do a little of both.

If you like the show side, then handle your dog in conformation and take classes to learn all the techniques of that venue. Then find a trainer that has experience with conformation dogs doing retriever hunt tests. Field-bred Labs can be trained differently and many pro trainers do not have the experience working with bench or conformation-bred Labs that need more “finesse” in retriever training.

Likewise, if you want to do the retriever/ hunt tests training, then find a group. Go to some tests to observe and ask questions. A myriad of good training programs and books are available. Then you can attend a conformation show, watch pro and owner handlers with their Labradors, and find someone that would be willing to title your dog. Of course, you have to start with good breeding, and not all Labs will be able to become show champions and/or master hunters.

I chose to use Professional Handlers for the conformation titles because I am not proficient in that venue. I determined that I would spend less by paying handlers to show my Labrador versus my handling and not knowing the nuances of the show ring. Initially, I did the basic retriever work, but hit a “wall” so I reached out to Brandon Smith (Blackbelt Retrievers) for a few months. He laid some groundwork for me to continue doing the training myself. I have become a better field trainer by being in a group and watching more skilled handlers with their Labs. I have read several training books and watched videos of techniques that I needed in my training regimen. I feel that having first obtained a CD title gave me a strong foundation for earning both the GCH and the MH.

As far as the future of our breed, I am hopeful. Even though many owners of companion Labradors think there are two different Labrador Retrievers, the “English” Labrador Retriever and the “American”, there are still preservation or dual-purpose breeders. The latter see the need to prove that “The Labrador Retriever is...a dog possessing a sound, athletic, well-balanced conformation that enables it to function as a retrieving gun dog...quality to win in the show ring; and the temperament to be a family companion.”

