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## ASK THE PRO

### it's your journey

By Patti Kiernan

LIVING THE FIELD TRIAL LIFE for half my lifetime (ok, more than half), I've had opportunities that most people can only dream about. I am very fortunate to have the privilege of doing what I love most: living with retrievers (yes, living with retrievers, not just training them or running them, but being with them 24/7) and traveling to some of the most beautiful country in America. Often this is country that only we field trialers get to see: gorgeous terrain, wildlife, and usually lots of adventure (of all types!). The trips to such places are filled with wonderful scenery, restaurants with fabulous food and friendly people. I love hearing the stories, old and new. And

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along the way new friends become part of my field trial family.

Traveling the country is the physical journey of training and trialing. But there's a metaphorical journey we all take as well. It's a journey that eventually leads us to discover what about "the life" is most important to us. For example, most people running field trials who know me probably think I'm a very competitive person. And they're right: being competitive is part of my job. But over the years as a professional retriever trainer my own journey has led me to understand that winning is not always defined by a blue ribbon in my hand.

I was an Amateur in the sport for ten

years before I became a professional, and I've had the opportunity to see this game from all angles and experience all the ups and downs. Now, let me be clear: getting a ribbon in a trial is always a thrill and gives me a sense of accomplishment. But over time collecting ribbons is no longer the end all. I've always found that as soon as a trial was over the memories of the event quickly faded, and I was already hell bent getting ready for the next trial. But the memories of dogs past and present, and training them, and experiencing their growth and progress, those do not fade.

For example, soon after I turned professional I was training a derby dog named

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Oscar. When Oscar first came to me, he didn't much enjoy the training (understatement). I worked hard with Oscar and slowly but surely he turned a corner and was ready to run a trial. When Oscar found the last bird of the Derby late on a Sunday night in Spokane, WA, I will never forget my tears of joy. Not simply because Oscar found the bird, but because he had grown and progressed as a trial dog. Since then I have qualified for eight Nationals, but still that memory of Oscar (who I couldn't even catch when he first came to me) finishing that Derby rates right up there with the best trial moments of my life. It is those memories that comprise my own journey. Sometimes the journey begins with my telling a client that I am not certain "little Max" is going to become the greatest dog ever known to the sport (that was putting it kindly). But my client, clearly in love with Max, doesn't worry about that FC just yet, he just wants Max to continue in training and to do the best that he possibly can. And to that client I say "It's Your Journey." And together we continue on with Max to see what lies ahead.

For me, training the dogs is what it is truly all about. Think about how much time we spend training, and how little time we spend on the line. If the training isn't an important part of our journey, we're not going to last long or enjoy ourselves. Heading out in a field with gear and dog, ready to teach this beautiful animal, is such a wonderful part of the journey. To train these amazing animals to play our game is a privilege I hope none of us takes for granted. The training of a dog is a journey all in itself.

I will never forget a client of mine who wanted to train over a Cinco de Mayo weekend. His co-workers had planned a big party and wanted him to attend. When he told them he could not because he chose to train his Labrador instead, they said, "What? Isn't your dog trained yet? It's been three years and you're still training the same dog?" I understand their comments. That's the way people on the outside see it, and who can blame them? But those of us on the inside know that the training is never finished. And neither is the journey.

I hope all of us "dog people" truly appreciate the wonderful opportunities that we have each and every day with our animals, training partners, lifelong friends and family on our own journeys. Whether you are competing in hunt stakes or field trials or just want a better hunting dog. It's your journey.

Winning is better than not winning, no doubt. But beyond winning (and losing), we can appreciate all that we have in this sport. Next trial, enjoy the entire experience. And if that blue ribbon lands in your hands, so much the better. ■

## Justin Time Retrievers

### Patti Kiernan

Patti is an accomplished AKC Field Trial retriever trainer. Her program customizes the training to the particular dog so that they all learn how to succeed. Patti knows each dog through and through so there are no mixed signals to the dog from previous training. She has a vested interest in each and every dog she trains, and will make sure they receive the best training and handling possible. Patti is the one standing "on the line" with your dog every day.