

# Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

## 1956 NFC MASSIE'S SASSY BOOTS

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Everything  
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STYLE  
PLUS!  
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NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH the dog that won the 1956 National are far from forgotten. In fact, they can't be missed! At the Duluth Retriever Club, the name of Massie's Sassy Boots breeder, Joe DeLoia, adorns the road and the clubhouse is named after his original owner, Art Massie.

For half a century, Joe DeLoia continued to be a mentor to present-day retriever people. Now, at age 93, Joe still co-owns his namesake kennel 'JOLOR,' a combination of the names JOe DeLoia and his wife LORraine.

JOLOR co-owner Margo Penke, and her husband Alan, are among Joe DeLoia's greatest fans. "I would like to say thank-you to Mr. Joe DeLoia, our altruistic expert, who has kept us well under wing. Alan and I are grateful for the friendship we have with Mr. and Mrs. Joe DeLoia, with no monetary connection. We are also

grateful for these beautiful Labradors who literally own us, all of whom came into our home through Joe's expertise."

Margo operates the kennel in Ely, MN under the AKC Registered Kennel Name JOLOR, and the operational name Boundary Waters. All the dogs she presently owns are from the DeLoia lines, which continues to produce exceptional Labradors. In recent years, the kennel has sold pups to such notables in the retriever world as Dave Rorem, winner of the 2008 National, Pete Hayes, sired by the 2010 NAFC 'Buster,' and Vickie Lamb, Retriever News columnist/reporter.

### In The Beginning...

Born in May 1948, Boots was sold to Arthur Massie of Duluth, MN for only \$100. Breeder Joe and Boots' new owner worked together as

his initial trainers. In the fall 1949 Duluth trial, their 15-month-old prodigy won the Derby, the Qualifying and was the top dog going into the final series of the Open All-Age. Of the twenty-stakes in which he was entered by the duo, Boots earned fourteen blue ribbons, and finished all but one.

Boots moved on to his second owner in August of 1949. William T. Cline of Chicago purchased him for \$3,100. The following August, Boots returned to Duluth where he won his first Open. That win was followed by three 1sts and a 2nd in 1950 and 1951.

In early 1954, Boots was teamed with pro trainer Roy Gonia on the West Coast. A succession of wins and placements followed, culminating with the National Championship in November 1956.

"The Winner, FC Massie's Sassy

Boots, the eight and a half year old son of Shadow II ex Penney Of Wingan, surely belied his age,” it was stated in the Field Trial News write-up. “Under the most capable handling of Roy Gonia, Boots had the fire of a Derby, coupled with the wisdom of an experienced Open All-Age campaigner – a combination difficult to beat. Boots is also the Top Point winning All-Age dog for the year 1956. It was a popular win for a fine sportsman, ‘Bill’ Cline.”

### Trial Tidbits...

The 16th running of the National Retriever Championship was held in Weldon Springs, Missouri. Some things remain the same. Some things not...

This National drew a record 57 qualifiers and 45 starters. The judges’ assignment, it was reported, “was by no means a simple one, considering the large number of starters. Naturally, in a trial of this duration, dogs are bound to separate themselves, nevertheless, due credit must be given the Judges for completing the ten required tests before 2:00 pm on the fourth day. The elimination of the dogs was orderly and for good reason and the final result was unquestionably correct.”

All the starters but two made it into the 2nd Series, and it was because both broke. In an extra bitter twist, they belonged to the same owner. “It is pretty rough for one owner to lose two dogs in the very first test,” the reporter opined, adding that “a flying duck shot right in front of them” was the cause of their unraveling.

The sentimental favorite, as pegged by the reporter, was Major VI, the 1954 National Champion, who started his first test “only a day after his master, Fraser Horn, had been laid to rest. Many owners might have scratched their dog under similar circumstances -- but not Betty (Mrs. Fraser M.) Horn. The dog was entitled to his chance,” he noted.

Boots’ handler, Roy Gonia, was one of seven handlers of previous National Champions. Nothing much is ever said of the ‘Pros,’ wrote the reporter, before attempting to rectify that issue. “Pros are just sort of taken for granted,” he continued. “The rivalry amongst them is intense and this is only natural. They are in the game to win – it is their chosen profession – yet, they are as congenial a group as any one could hope to meet. They help one another and they will help you. It is seldom you hear a ‘squawk.’”

It was a big deal at the time that there was going to be a motion picture of the National, and that it was going to be in color. Details were revealed in a Field Trial News article entitled: “1956 National Retriever Trial will be Produced in Color and Sound.” The film was the result of the generosity of John J. Olin in cooperation with the Cornell University Veterinary Virus Research Institute, and the willingness of the officers of the National Field Trial Club, Inc., the trial chairman and his committee to permit the production.

This was “a picture which all retriever men and women have long awaited,” the reporter stated. “Mr. Olin donated to Cor-

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Opposite page, 1956 NFC Massie's Sassy Boots, photo by Evelyn Shafer; this page, Scene at 2nd Test of the 1956 National Retriever Championship with Massie's Sassy Boots, Roy Gonia, Judges and a portion of the gallery.

## Retrievers of the Past

nell the funds necessary for producing the picture. Cornell in turn made these funds available to the movie producer – the result – a picture which should prove enlightening and educational from the Institute standpoint and of untold interest to retriever fanciers showing, as it will, the performances of the top retrievers in the United States. Made by Walter Meives, “himself an experienced retriever man in addition to being the winner of many national awards for motion picture production,” it was predicted to be a “masterpiece of dog photography.”

A masterpiece in his own right is Joe DeLoia. Margo vividly can picture Joe training at a pond – while in his late 80’s – and legally blind. “He still had the ability to train the dog and its trainer,” she recalls, reverently. The current JOLOR dogs’ lines go back through the generations to Joe’s personal dogs. Joe had eight hunting dogs, all male black Labs, who all lived to the age of 14, he told Margo.

One of the more colorful stories about this legendary, much-adored breeder is about a female littermate of Sassy Boots who was sold to a milkman. This dog ultimately was returned to Joe because, after her owner left on his milk route, she kept breaking out of confinement and retrieving the milk bottles. Not limited to retriever expertise, Joe once used his bloodhound to rescue a man who became lost in the woods picking blueberries. He also trained several ‘war dogs’ during World War II.

### In The End...

Boots won one more trial after the 1956 National, and was retired in the Fall of 1957. He ended his career with a total of 148.5 points, the second highest retriever point total at the time. Known as exceptionally hard-charging, “everything he did was style plus,” it once was said of him.



Boots sired many excellent offspring, including FC Beau of Zenith, FC Shoremeadow Tidewater, FC Techacko’s Ranger, FC-AFC Jet of Zenith, and FC Boocindys Renegade.

Married since 1941, an honorary picnic in appreciation of Joe and Lorraine DeLoia was held at the Duluth Retriever Club in 2000. Joe and Lorraine still live in Minnesota; but, sadly, their days of public appearances are over.

In a recent phone conversation, Joe, who resides in a care home, told Margo that he had to get off the phone because he needed to get going to a trial. It was clear his mind was back in time where he most would like to be.

*May we all be so lucky. ■*





Opposite page, Joe and Lorraine DeLoia, photo by Thomas Leonard Photography; above, Joe DeLoia with the dam (Penney of Wingan) of Massie's Sassy Boots. Penney of Wingan is the second from the left; below, Art Massie with Boots.