

Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

NFC Marvadel Black Gum

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WHEN THE BEST are better than the rest, it's simply marvelous... And, so it was with the winner of the 1949 National Open – Marvadel Black Gum, callname 'Blackie.'

Born in May 1945, Blackie distinguished himself early as the high point Derby Dog in 1946. He won the Open at the Wisconsin Amateur trial in September 1946 and earned his FC the following year at 18 months, the youngest retriever to earn that title. The young dog continued to marvel, eventually qualifying for eight consecutive National Opens from 1946 through 1953. This feat has been surpassed by only four dogs in all of retriever history: FC-AFC Trumarc's Zip Code holds the ultimate record of ten, followed by NFC-AFC Otus Of Redfern, FC-AFC Tarblood Of Absaraka and FC-AFC-CNAFC-CFC Aces High III with nine, each. Blackie's record of eight consecutives is shared with only ten other dogs.

Blackie also won the Field and Stream Challenge Trophy, which was offered by Field and Stream magazine, from 1935 to 1953, to the dog who accumulated the highest number of points annually in the Open All-Age Stakes. Five points were awarded for 1st, three for 2nd, two for 3rd, and one for 4th place. Winning the trophy was the top accolade for retrievers prior to the inception of the National Championship in 1941. Winners were dubbed Outstanding Retriever of the Year. In marked contrast, Blackie did not amass a high number of points during his career: only 63 Open and 41 Amateur. This was not unusual, explains Fred Kampo, owner of 1988 NFC-AFC PP's Lucky's Super Toby and vice-president of the Labrador Retriever Club, Inc. "Back then, dogs didn't run that much."

Blackie was instrumental in ensconcing his owner, Paul Bakewell III, as a marvel in his own right. In the 1930s and 40s, most of the training and handling was conducted by professionals. Bakewell

not only was the first amateur to compete successfully against professionals, he utterly dominated both amateur and professional trainer-handlers for a decade. The wealthy sportsman and avid duck hunters' foray into field trials began with a golden retriever pup he bought to be trained to retrieve his downed waterfowl. Bakewell established his kennel, Deer Creek of St. Louis, Missouri, in 1937. From 1939 through 1949, Bakewell dogs received top National honors seven times: 1939 – Field and Stream trophy with Golden Retriever, FC Rip. 1941 – Field and Stream trophy with FC Tar Of Arden. 1942 – Bakewell became the first owner-handler to win the National Championship Stake, with Dual Ch. Shed Of Arden. 1943 and 1946 – Shed became a 2x and 3x National winner. 1949 – It was Blackie's turn.

Blackie's Field and Stream trophy was Bakewell's seventh. Bakewell was the trainer behind all of these dogs, and he was the handler except in one instance when he was away during World War II. There also is a report that T.W. 'Cotton' Pershall handled Blackie to one Open Win. Pershall, who came to work for Bakewell as a groomer, was discovered to have so much talent working with dogs that he became a protégé of Bakewell's until he was recruited to train dogs for the K-9 Corps in World War II. He later became the trainer at John Olin's Nilo kennel and achieved three National wins.

Prior to the advent of the amateur age, trials were by invitation and held on private estates. The dogs were trained by people hired by their wealthy and influential owners. Some of the trainers doubled as gamekeepers on their estates, such as the one owned by Marshall Fields. A class system was in existence that segregated owners and trainers. During the Bakewell era, top professional trainers included Charles Morgan, Frank Hogan, Orin Benson, Dave Elliott,

Above, Blackie shows off long water jump at National Championship Retriever Stake; Right, Paul Bakewell III kneeling with his prize Labrador retriever, Blackie, and holding trophies of his dog's victories. Frank Scherschel/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images.



M. 'Snuffy' Beliveau, James Cowie, Ray Staudinger and William Wunderlich.

The National Amateur Retriever Club wasn't established until 1956 and the first National Amateur wasn't held until 1957. The Double Header Club was formed to give special recognition to amateurs who handled their dog to wins in both the Open and the Amateur stakes of the same trial.

Blackie was co-owned by Mrs. Bakewell. He was out of Mint Of Barrington and Marvadel Cinders, bred by Mrs. J. Gould Remick. The Marvadel name in Blackie's history goes back only one more generation, to his maternal granddam, Marvadel Topsey.

Blackie produced four titled offspring. It is perhaps of more significance to retriever history, however, that he sired the dam of CNFC-FC-AFC Yankee Clipper Of Reo-Raj. Clipper was the paternal grandsire of the 8th highest scoring retriever of all time, Glengarven's Mik, who was featured in the September 2012 Retrievers of the Past. Blackie appears twice, four generations back, in the lineage of 1968 NFC, 1967 and 1968 NAFC Super Chief. His name appears in countless other pedigrees.

Blackie was a National Finalist in 1948, the year before he won. His other accomplishments included winning the Blind of Arden trophy for the best finish of an American bred dog in the Open stake. He won the Country Life trophy as high point Derby Dog. Now defunct, "it was very, very prestigious in those days," notes Kampo, adding that he has seen the retired trophy on display in the Retriever Hall of Fame. Blackie was admitted to the Hall of Fame in 1995.

Sources for this article include: 1941-1995 Retriever Field Trial Statistics and unpublished updates by Sue Reynolds, chapters by Marianne Foote and Mary Knapp in *The Official Book of the Labrador Retriever*, published by the LRC, and the late Richard Halstead.

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Retriever Royalty

Recognized by LIFE Magazine and the New York Times

In a far different realm of retrieverdom, and a vastly different era of mainstream media, two iconic publications did a marvelous job of following Marvadel Black Gum's and Paul Bakewell's stellar success.

Blackie, Bakewell, and his other dogs earned themselves a place on a whopping five page spread in the September 26, 1946 issue of LIFE magazine, with the emphasis on photography by renowned staff photographer, Frank Scherschel. The feature began with full page color photo of Bakewell, with at least seven black Labs, walking through a field, bordered by trees, illuminated by diffused rays of sun. Its caption appeared on the adjacent page, along with the article and two black and white captioned photos. Eight more black and whites and their pictures followed on three subsequent pages.

LIFE devoted a half page to 'SEQUEL: MARVADEL BLACK GUM COMES THROUGH' in its December 19, 1949 issue. "A few months ago, LIFE visited St. Louis' famed Deer Creek Kennels, and in describing its aristocratic black Labradors referred to them as 'the world's finest retrievers.' This judgment was vindicated triumphantly at Westhampton Beach, N.Y. on Dec. 2, 3 and 4," it was written. "There, in the National Championship Retriever Stake, Deer Creek's Marvadel Black Gum finally edged out another Labrador and a golden retriever for the championship. In winning, Blackie, a relative of the famed Shed of Arden, brought the fourth retriever championship in nine years to his proud owner and handler, Paul Bakewell III."

Old LIFE issues are available from, among other sources, Google Books, which refers to the publication as "the treasured photographic magazine that chronicled the 20th Century." The award-winning LIFE photographer Scherschel's work included many scenes depicting World War II, the 1947 wedding of Princess Elizabeth, the 1956 Democratic National Convention, Sir Winston Churchill, art collector Peggy Guggenheim, road racing at Le Mans and many other people and events.

The New York Times headline about the 1949 National was a long, very descriptive one: "National Retriever Title Taken By Labrador Marvadel Black Gum; Bakewell Dog Triumphs in an Extra Series With Two Other Midwestern Entries in the Meet at Westhampton Beach." The article, which appeared in the Sports Section on December 5, included a lengthy, detailed account of the three-day event and was not accompanied by any photos.

According reporter John Rendel, "a gallery of more than 1,000 that trailed along like one at a major golf tournament saw the Bakewell top-notch come through the five last-day series, the final one an extra test called by the judges, Mrs. J. Gould Remick, W.W. McCain and Chapin Henry, to establish the national winner beyond question."

The winner of the 1948 National, Bringnall's Gingo, was owned by a resident of Long Beach, California. Per Rendel, "Bakewell decided to invade Gringo's home grounds for his 1949 qualifying place, flew the dog to Los Angeles, won the stake there and subsequently made sure of qualifying with a third place in Seattle. He did not work the dog much after that, waiting for the nationals." Gringo was dropped after the morning's land test. "He, like some of the others, hesitated before crossing a hedgerow behind which a bird had been shot. Black Gum hesitated momentarily there, too, but made a good retrieve and was alert to the handler's gestures on a planted pheasant."

Ten out of 18 starters went into the 'overtime' series, with Blackie running first. "It was slightly on the tricky side, involving one shot pheasant for a short retrieve, one bird that was shot at, but deliberately missed, and one long blind retrieve. The missed bird was supposed to confuse the dogs, but they were not the kind that fooled easily," Rendel observed.

"Black Gum won here with superb land and water work. He had to be good, since the dogs were the pick of the country and choosing one winner from the final three presented an unenviable job to the judges." Blackie earned "the greatest distinction a field trial retriever can win."