

Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

1977 NFC-AFC Euroclydon

“
The girl
named
‘ROCKY’
”



Don Strait with NFC-AFC Euroclydon “Rocky”

PERHAPS SHE DIDN'T RECEIVE the most appropriate of names; but, she sure did receive one that has tripped up many a retriever person's tongue for nearly forty years. Likewise, the 1977 National Field Champion Euroclydon, whose name means 'tempest wind' in Greek, had a style that didn't quite match the hardness of her callname.

“Rocky proved to have remarkable natural ability, an eagerness to please and an uncanny willingness to learn without pressure,” pointed out noted field retriever historian Richard Halstead. “Tractable’ seems to be a currently over-used word;” he wrote in 1977, “but, in this case, accurately describes her personality.” And, yes, somehow most people assume a dog with a name like ‘Euroclydon’ most certainly is a male.

Rocky's early upbringing was about as far from standard as her AKC and callnames. There was a dearth of early training. Born in June 1973, Rocky arrived at her owner, Don Strait's Georgia home, at seven weeks. She then got to spend the next seven months freely exploring, eating table scraps, sleeping under the house and receiving lavish love and socialization.

Her owner was as inexperienced in the retriever game as Rocky. With this dog, he would become a very devoted amateur trainer. The pair traveled weekly to train with the well-known pro-trainer Joe Riser in Madison, Georgia. The pup's potential was quickly noted by Joe, who provided Don with constant encouragement as well as his training expertise.

It was Joe who told Don to deal with problems encountered in training indirectly, rather than with force, as one might deal with a tougher, harder-headed dog. “Rocky never had an electric collar around

her neck,” emphasizes fellow handler Don Wolf.

Progress with Rocky was attained so rapidly that Don felt she was ready to run trials by her first birthday. His inexperience may have led to embarrassment had his youngster not proven herself. Rocky was sent to California to run the summer trial circuit with Beth and Ed Minoggie. She earned her first placement in August 1974 and won her first licensed derby in McCall, Idaho two weeks later. Rocky eventually accumulated 70 Derby points and finished second on the 1975 Top Derby List.

Greatly enthused by his young dog's success, Don launched into advanced training – Don Strait-style. Rocky was known not just for her natural abilities, but also for her voracious appetite, something Don incorporated into his training regimen. Rocky was rewarded for handling drills and good lines with food treats. And, she garnered an entire bowl of food at the end of her final line of the day.

Unconventional though they were, Don's techniques were successful. Rocky placed in a Wisconsin Amateur just two months after her Derby campaign ended. She then won an Open in Mobile, Alabama in October,





before she was two-and-a-half. Moving right along, Rocky earned her AFC in the Spring of 1976, before her third birthday. Her FC was earned in August 1976, followed one month later by a Double Header win in South Jersey. Rocky qualified for and ran in the 1976 National at Socorro, New Mexico, completing the eleven-series trial among eight finalists.

1977 would be the most stellar year for Rocky. She not only won the National, held at William Johnson Farm in Weldon, North Carolina, she did so by unanimous decision, with virtually no consultation by the judges. According to Halstead, Rocky was the spectator's selection, and he told a funny story about how she was affected by the cheering and applause. As Don Strait walked toward the trophy table to shake hands with Announcer Randy Winbum of the Field Trial Committee, Rocky darted from behind someone's legs to greet her owner. "Brilliant and flashy in the field, she sat demurely amidst the trophies while photographers took her picture and well-wishes congratulated Don."

Rocky had four Outstanding Campaigns, which requires 20 or more points in a year, as referenced in Retriever Field Trial Performances, 1973-1978. She earned 22.5 Open points in 1977 and even more, 24.5, in 1978. Her top amateur years were 1976, with 28 Amateur points, and 1978, with 30. Rocky had five Double-Header wins, her first, in 1976, three in 1978, and one in 1981. Rocky ended her career with 289 All-Age Points, 143 Open and 146 Amateur.

Essentially, Rocky was an amateur-trained dog, all the more remarkable for her owner's lack of prior experience. Don Strait stresses the importance, though, of the professional help he received. He gives most of the credit to Joe Riser and the Minoggie's for launching Rocky's incredible trial career. He also credits Billy and Diane Voight; Billy ran her in some of her trials. Comparing two six year periods, 1967-1972 and 1973-1978, "it is significant that in the earlier period, 67% of the starters were handled by professionals, while in the last six years, 54% were so handled," according to the Performance Book.

"Don never saw a Lab until 1970 when he went hunting with Joe Riser and his Lab," Don Wolf has written. "He also made the 'mistake' of going to a local field trial a couple years later in 1972." Don's interest in the field trial sport began in 1972 with that visit near his Georgia home, said Halstead. After buying his first Labrador puppy, Don read an article in Retriever Field Trial News about NFC-2xNAFC Super Chief and decided he wanted 'Soupy' to be the sire of his next puppy.

The dam of the litter was Gahonk's Rebel Queen. Rocky's AKC name was chosen by Don's wife who had heard it in a church sermon known as Paul's Shipwreck.

Around the time Rocky earned her FC, Rocky, Don and his wife "narrowly escaped death when the small engine airplane that Don was piloting lost both engines," Don Wolf wrote. "They crash landed at a small landing strip in Hastings, Michigan. The plane sustained an estimated \$10,000 in damage. It was surprising there were no injuries, fire or explosion since the fuel tanks were loaded with 150 gallons of gasoline for their flight to Atlanta. The harrowing experience didn't seem to bother Rocky, as she won a Doubleheader a month later. Don continued to fly all over the country to field trials. They went to Idaho, Wisconsin, New Jersey, California, Oregon, Wyoming, Texas, New York, North Dakota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio and New Mexico to name a few."

"Rocky would sit in the front seat next to me and look out the window," Don Strait used to comment, Don Wolf recollected.

Following a time-out to produce a litter, Rocky resumed her field trial career, ultimately qualifying for seven consecutive National Opens and eight National Amateur Championships. She was inducted into the Field Trial Hall of Fame in 1993.

Rocky was part of the rising trend in the 1970s of highly competitive bitches. She was one of eight females who won National titles during that decade, which was more than double all who had claimed a National title before: NFC-NAFC Wanapum Dart's Dandy, NFC-AFC Creole Sister, NFC-AFC Happy Playboy's Pearl, NFC-AFC Risky Business Ruby, NFC-AFC Wanapum's Lucyanna Girl, NFC-AFC Yankee Independence and NAFC-FC Kannonball Kate.

Rocky's progeny includes 1981 NFC-AFC Orion's Sky.

"Rocky died in 1983 after suffering through pancreatic cancer," wrote Don Wolf. "Don (Strait) gave her insulin to keep her going. She would have insulin fits and Don would have to give her something sweet to snap her out of it. Eventually, it got to be a losing battle and Don had to put her to sleep at 10 years of age."

Despite her unconventional name and training regimens, Euroclydon, the Tempest Wind, most certainly proved how a soft-natured female retriever could breeze her way to the top echelon of the retriever world. ■

Tenacular Dogs – Joule Charney

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1977 NFC-AFC EUROCLYDON

OPEN	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	TOTAL:
Starts	6	24	25	15	14	16	17	17	134
First	1	3	2	4	4	2	3	2	21
Second	0	1	3	1	1	2	1	0	9
Third	0	0	3	1	0	0	2	1	7
Fourth	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	8
Places	0	6	9	7	6	5	8	3	45
Jams	1	3	7	3	0	6	3	2	24
# Finished	1	9	16	10	6	11	11	5	69
% Finished	17%	38%	64%	67%	43%	69%	65%	27%	51%
Open Points	5.0	19.0	22.5	24.5	23.5	16.5	21.0	11.0	143.0
Cumulative Pts	5	5.0	24.0	46.5	71.0	94.5	111.0	132.0	143.0
AMATEUR	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	TOTAL:
Starts	6	18	16	14	11	13	16	16	110
First	0	4	1	5	2	1	4	2	19
Second	0	2	2	1	1	0	2	2	10
Third	1	1	4	1	2	2	2	3	16
Fourth	0	2	3	2	0	3	0	0	10
Places	1	9	10	9	5	6	8	7	55
Jams	1	1	3	1	0	2	1	3	12
# Finished	2	10	13	10	5	8	9	10	67
% Finished	33%	56%	81%	71%	45%	62%	56%	63%	61%
Amateur Points	1.0	28.0	16.5	30.0	15.0	8.5	28.0	19.0	146.0
Cumulative Pts	1.0	29.0	45.5	75.5	90.5	99.0	127.0	146.0	146.0
ALL-AGE	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	TOTAL:
All Age By Year	6.0	47.0	39.0	54.5	38.5	25.0	49.0	30.0	289.0
Cumulative Total	6.0	53.0	92.0	146.5	185.0	210.0	259.0	289.0	289.0

Owner: Don Strait
 Birthdate: 6/18/73
 70 Derby Points

Avg. Open Points per year: 18
 Avg. Amateur pts per year: 18
 Avg. All-Age pts per year: 36

From "Retriever Field Trial Statistics 1941-1995," by Sue Reynolds.