

Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

FC-AFC E-Lynn's Super Strike Lucky

“ The young Labrador known as Lucky was fortunate he ended up with the right owner ... ”

CARL RUFFALO'S INITIAL REACTION to taking time away from training, trialing and the other important aspects of his life to being interviewed about a dog born in 1973 was not an enthusiastic one. "I loved that dog and he was a great dog," but, Carl clearly was not in the frame of mind to reflect back on one of his retrievers of the distant past. However, after a week or so passed, his perspective began to change. As he thought about what he would say during an interview for a *Retrievers of the Past* feature on Lucky, he couldn't help but think about the dog. And, the more he divulged about Lucky, the more Lucky seemed to come back to life.

The challenge with Carl was getting him to the interviewing line. Once he was there, he allowed himself to retrieve nuggets of the Lucky story that he had tucked away in his memory for a very long, long time. "I hadn't talked about Lucky in 25 or 30 years," Carl told me wistfully. "The more we talk, the more I can tell you about that dog," he admitted. Still an active field trialer at age 84, Carl trains daily and is hoping to qualify one of his dogs for this year's National Open.

Carl first became aware of Lucky when he was at a trial in Sioux Falls in 1975. Lucky's owner, Linn Durfey of Bemidji, Minnesota, had decided to sell his seventeen month old derby dog. Tommy Sorenson, a professional trainer from the St. Louis, Missouri area, took Lucky for a few months to look at him for one of his customers. Tommy's customer wanted a younger derby dog; so, Tommy suggested that Carl take the dog home on a trial basis. After checking with Linn, who Carl knew "remotely, not personally," Lucky left the trial with Carl.

Linn was intent on getting a pup out of the litter that included Lucky. "He kept calling the owner of the bitch, Larry Bergmann, for updates. According to Larry, Lucky was lazy and the most listless of his siblings. He was not the star of the litter that he came out of.



Linn said he was kind of a slug. He really came to life toward a year, or a year-and-a-half. A lot of puppies have a slow start."

"I didn't have any idea what Lucky could do. I took Lucky out with an old field trialer and we set up a triple. I tell you what, he was a handful! He went out for last bird down, missed it. Then second, then third. He did a round robin."

In another try-out, Carl took Lucky to a pond. "I put out white bumper. I know, or at least I thought, he saw the white bumper. I said 'Lucky.' He went faster coming back on the return than he did going out, and I tell you what. He was like a comet going out! He was the fastest dog I'd ever seen!"

"I called Linn up that afternoon and asked what he wanted for him. Linn said \$5,000. I

FC-AFC E-LYNN'S SUPER STRIKE LUCKY

OPEN	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	TOTAL:
Starts	23	27	26	31	14	15	13	149
First	1	1	6	1	4	1	0	14
Second	2	2	1	0	2	1	2	10
Third	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	5
Fourth	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
Places	4	4	8	2	9	3	2	32
Jams	1	4	5	8	1	4	0	23
# Finished	5	8	13	10	10	7	2	55
% Finished	22%	30%	50%	32%	71%	47%	15%	37%
Open Points	11.5	12.0	34.0	6.0	28.5	8.5	6.0	106.5
Cumulative Pts	11.5	23.5	57.5	63.5	92.0	100.5	106.5	106.5
AMATEUR	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	TOTAL:
Starts	16	10	13	19	12	14	11	95
First	2	2	3	4	3	2	1	17
Second	1	1	2	3	0	2	0	9
Third	1	3	1	1	0	0	2	8
Fourth	0	0	2	1	0	3	1	7
Places	4	6	8	9	3	6	5	41
Jams	4	0	1	4	1	1	2	13
# Finished	8	6	9	13	4	7	7	54
% Finished	50%	60%	69%	68%	33%	50%	64%	57%
Amateur Points	14.0	15.0	23.0	30.5	15.0	17.5	12.5	127.5
Cumulative Pts	14.0	29.0	52.0	82.5	97.5	115.0	127.5	127.5
ALL AGE	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	TOTAL:
All Age By Year	25.5	27.0	57.0	36.5	43.5	26.0	18.5	234.0
Cumulative Total	25.5	52.5	109.5	146.0	189.5	215.5	234.0	234.0

OWNER: CARL RUFFALO
 BIRTHDATE: 12/16/73
 17 DERBY POINTS

Avg. Open Points per year: 15
 Avg. Amateur Points per year: 18
 Avg. All-Age Points per year: 33

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

said I couldn't afford that. Linn told me more about the dog. He was monorchid. 'He has one testicle. He has another, I don't know where it is.'" Monorchidism is a genetic condition in which one testicle does not descend or does not descend completely. Neutering of monorchid dogs is widely recommended as soon as delayed descension can be ruled out.

Carl told Linn he'd take Lucky to his vet at his own expense. The vet determined that Lucky had an undescended testicle, "one ball in his belly," and recommended removal, as it could cause cancer at a later date. Carl recontacted Linn. "If I buy the dog, he should have the operation before we decide on a price for the dog. I told Linn I would have the prelim on his hips. His hips were good. I didn't want to be responsible for putting the dog under. I offered \$2,500. Linn agreed to take that. He had shopped the dog around." There was a little glitch in that Carl did not have \$2,500 to spend for Lucky. Ultimately, it was arranged that Linn would keep Lucky's papers until the full amount was paid.

"He was the wildest dog I have ever seen in my life. He wasn't steady. He wouldn't stop. At that point, I wasn't sure if \$2,500 was a good deal or not!" Carl admits. "We struggled with that dog. I finally got him paid off. Got some derby points." Lucky ended his derby career with 17

points. "The derby wasn't exactly what he should have been doing. He should have been going through a basic training course."

"Jim Kappes, who bought Reo Raj Kennels, was the trainer who did the basics work and got Lucky under control."

"When he just turned three, he won an Open. Mike Flannery was judging and offered to buy him. I just got the dog. He stayed with Jim about a year. Then he went to Dick Sampson," another professional trainer, "who did a lot of the Open All Age work with him in winter. I trained him in the summertime."

"Lucky was not a collar-conditioned dog," Carl points out. The collar was just coming in. People in this part of the country did not have much education on it. They were using it; but, they were using it wrong."

"People would put too much pressure on the dog and they didn't have a lot of style. Judy Weikel, now Aycok, got into and made some refinements on it, and taught us how to use it properly. This was when Lucky was around five or six. I never started using the collar on him until he went through the yard.

"I think Lucky ran at four years old in first Open National. I think he finished it; but, I'm not positive. When the dog was six years old, I called Kappes up. Asked him to put Lucky through collar conditioning."

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“Are you crazy?” was the trainer’s response. “If anything goes wrong, I’m not going to be held responsible.”

“The two guys doing collar conditioning for Kappes were Wayne Curtis and his brother Bruce. He was half-way through the collar conditioning and I had him entered at a trial in Duluth. I told Jim I was going to run the Amateur and the Open. I had the weekend off. I said, ‘I’m taking Lucky with me.’ They said, ‘Wait a minute now, he’s in the middle of collar conditioning.’ I said, ‘Yeah, I am. I’ll bring him back on my way home on Sunday afternoon.’ They looked at me like I was crazy.” At this point, I knew there was going to be a great punch line. “I won a double header!”

Lucky’s success continued... He earned 234 points during his career, placing him 29th on the Top High-Scoring Dogs of All Time. He had 108.5 Open and 127.5 Amateur points. He was the 1979 High Point Open Dog. Lucky was inducted into the Retriever Hall of Fame in 1994.

“In my estimation, Lucky was the greatest water marking dog I’ve ever seen in my life, and not because he was mine, but because I have a lot of tenure in this sport. I’ve been in this game since 1962. He had more heart than any dog I’ve ever known.”

“Lucky accumulated a lot of points because he could do water marks, no matter how cold the water was,” Carl says. “Lucky once nailed a triple on skim ice. Later that triple was taken out of the trial.”

“We only ran twelve or thirteen times a year, not twenty-five. I worked. Lucky would qualify for the National Amateur early in the year and we would put ‘em on the shelf.” Once handlers qualified for the National Amateur, Carl explains, “They only ran in the Open. It was sportsmanship. Most Amateurs would stop after Qualifying All-Age and give a chance to their friends. In those days, there weren’t as many great dogs. Now-a-days, high point status and Purina awards are big incentives.” Further, Carl believes, “If I had an e-collar sooner, Lucky would have had even more points.”

“He was the dog that was outstanding. He had a lot of problems

though. He had about three whistles in him on any blind. If he didn’t get it in three, you could put the whistle away. He was going to get it on his own. Sometimes he’d give you the bird. Sometimes he wouldn’t. He would stick on birds. I sometimes had to wait for an eternity to get the bird. Some of the old timers said they were going to write a rule putting a time limit on getting the bird. Sometimes, he broke on the first bird. Sometimes on the second. Sometimes, on the third. If didn’t break, he usually made it through to the last series.”

“Durfey did some training with him. I think he was too much work for Tommy. He was a wild Indian!” In addition to Kappes, Sampson and the Curtis brothers, D. L. Wolters briefly did some work with Lucky. “I had a popping problem,” explains Carl. “We had a drought. We couldn’t get Lucky to stop. It was all running water in all the ponds, lakes and sloughs. Lucky was a long-legged dog. We had a very, very serious popping problem.”

On one long trip driving with his daughter to a National, she suggested ‘Dad’s Got the Popping Blues,’ as a song title. “It would have been a hit!” quips Carl. “We ran water blinds all the way across the country and Lucky popped through the whole National!”

“So, I took Lucky to D. L. the next spring. He said, ‘I’ll call you when he’s ready.’ About a month-and-a-half later, he called. When I met up with him, D. L. said, ‘Let’s run a blind.’ Lucky went through the first piece of water. Then the second piece of water. Then, he went through the fence!”

“I think there’s a freeway about two miles down. We better stop him,” D. L. told me. I can imagine how he got Lucky over that; but, I won’t tell ya.”

“After five or six years, we kept him home.” There were no more trainers.

“I didn’t pheasant hunt Lucky very much. You’d be in the vet’s office the next morning. I took him duck hunting. He was no prize there either! He was too rambunctious. He ran and ran and ran. Nobody used a collar hunting. You yelled.”

In his later years, we brought him into the house. He’d sit in front of me, thinking he was going to get a bumper or a bird. He never laid flat except in his kennel. He never laid down. He was always ready to go.”

“He loved it in his kennel. I didn’t have to close the door to it. And, he was clean.”

“Lucky’s career was cut short by cancer. He qualified for a National Amateur when he was eight-and-a-half or nine years old. He developed a bad shoulder and was limping. It was in McCall, Idaho. The 1st series looked like a mountain. It looked to me like it was two miles across that valley. I knew Lucky wasn’t going to get a callback after the first series. I knew it was his last trial.”

“A judge said I could take him off the Honor and sit in the shade. Then, a second judge came up and suggested, ‘Why don’t you go in the shade with him?’”

As Carl was telling me this part of the story, I was stunned to hear, from a man who initially didn’t want to be interviewed, “I’m starting to cry now.” His emotions suddenly had been resurrected along with the memories of Lucky’s life that he had liberated from the vault of his memory bank.

Then Carl immediately continued, “The third judge said, ‘Go in the shade.’ I said, ‘It’s his last National.’

Lucky succumbed to cancer, at age eleven, in February 1985. “He was the greatest dog I’ve had, and probably the greatest dog I’ll ever have.”

Lucky on down the line.....

Lucky was born in December 1973. His sire was FC Shamrock Acres Super Value, a Hall of Famer whose sire was NFC 2xNAFC Super Chief.

FC-AFC E-Lynn’s Super Strike Lucky

National Open – Qualified for 5; Finalist in 3

1977	
1978	Finalist
1979	
1981	Finalist
1982	Finalist

National Amateur – Qualified for 7; Finalist in 1

1978	Qualified but did not run; Carl Judged
1979	
1980	
1981	Finalist
1982	
1983	
1984	Qualified but did not run

His dam was Jezebel's Suzie Que. Although she was untitled, her sire was FC Anzac of Zenith, another Hall of Famer.

"I never advertised Lucky (as a stud dog) because he was a monorchid. I never put an ad in the newspaper or Retriever Field Trial News. I never promoted him as a stud dog. If someone showed an interest in him, I always told people he was a monorchid. I didn't breed him much. Nowadays, you wouldn't think of breeding him. I never made any money off that dog." Fortunately, monorchidism never showed up again, to Carl's knowledge.

Reports about Lucky's progeny show only one titled dog; but, that dog was quite exceptional: 1988 NFC-AFC PP's Lucky's Super Toby. Carl says that one of his former training partners owed a Lucky son who had 99 points.

Toby was inducted into the Retriever Hall of Fame in the same year as his sire. Toby's dam, River Oaks Geisha girl, was sired by '72 & '75 2xNAFC-3xCNFC FC-River Oaks Corky, who maintains a stranglehold as the highest point earner in all of retriever history, with 505.5 combined points.

"Toby's first owner was moving to Florida. He had one Amateur and one Open win. I bought Toby as a young dog, and had him until he was three-and-a-half," says Carl. "Then, I sold him to Fred Kampe. I had a particularly bad span of business for two of our stores, and I couldn't get any more money from the banks. Charlie Hays later became co-owner. I sold Toby for \$15,000. If I hadn't sold him, I could have won a National! And, I've never won a National."

Owner Carl Ruffalo.....

Carl was inducted into the Retriever Hall of Fame in 2008. "My wife, Muriel, of 53 years and my five children have been a big part of this," Carl wrote for the 2009 Inductions to the Field Trial Hall of Fame program.

"Initially, the training was primarily a result of the love of the outdoors and hunting, which my trial dogs and I continue to enjoy. I have had the good fortune to qualify 13 dogs for the National Open Championship and National Amateur Championship and have trained and handled 4 FC-AFCs and 2 AFCs. FC E-Lynn's Super Strike Lucky has been my crowning achievement."

"I have had the good fortune to be a charter member of the Watopa Retriever Club, the Snowbird Retriever Club, and the Southwest Georgia Retriever Club. I have been an active member in three additional clubs. Nationally, I was the Field Trial Chairman for the National Amateur Retriever Championship



Carl at the 1978 National Open at the August A. Busch Memorial Wildlife Area in Weldon Spring, MO where he was a Finalist.

in 1981 and I am a past president of the National Amateur Retriever Club and the National Open Retriever Club."

"Judging has been a very important part of my retriever experience. I have judged over 110 All-Age stakes. I judged at the 1978 National Amateur, and was voted judge of the year by the Professional Retriever Trainers Association in 1975."

"Since retirement as a Pharmacist and drug store owner, I am making what might be my most important contribution to the sport. I continue to train two dogs and have become a mentor to new retriever trainers and handlers in my training group. I have enjoyed their individual progress and success and know that new people are the lifeblood of our sport."

When he had Lucky, "We were busy with the stores and our children. We never ate

before 9:30 or 10 in the summertime. I'd close and have a relief person. Then, I'd train 'til dark. And start over again the next day."

"I didn't retire 'til I was 71. My knees aren't good any more. My hearing is shot. I have a problem with my eyes. My heart, I guess, is still good. I have no serious health issues. They're all age related. I train every day. I don't have anything else to do. I shoot fliers. I do everything one does in a training group; I just do it a little slower." He no longer goes pheasant hunting because the rough terrain is too hard on his knees. "When I was a pharmacist, we did not sit in front of computers. We stood up all day."

"Muriel and I live in Rochester, MN where we enjoy our children and seven grandchildren." Four of his children live in Rochester. They winter in Georgia, from November to the end of April or May. "Muriel

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is pretty much an indoor girl,” Carl adds. She doesn’t train with Carl and he usually goes to trials by himself. “It’s not a problem for either of us. She’s very content that I do it. She would rather stay home.” Muriel maintains the records on the dogs.

When he’s in Rochester, Carl trains with a small group in Minnesota and Wisconsin and goes to Wayne Curtis’ grounds twice a week. He also utilizes club grounds.

Carl has no plans to get out of the field trial game at any given time. “I’m not ready to retire just yet. The thought has crossed my mind when my knees hurt and it’s not a lot of fun,” he admits.

“I’ve had so many Labs, I can’t remember all their names,” Carl continues. They’re either all black or they’re all yellow and they look pretty much the same. I remember the good ones. I never kept a dog I

didn’t thoroughly enjoy and hunt and who was competitive. His sons were involved with the dogs through college. “We couldn’t keep all that we raised or bought as puppies. We always had a way to find them good homes if we didn’t keep them.”

Carl’s kennel name is Indian Heights, which is derived from the Indian burial grounds near the Ruffalo’s home. He currently has two dogs. FC-AFC Indian Height’s Get Away (George) had five wins last year, has qualified for three National Amateurs and two National Opens. George is eight years old. Indian Height’s Ready to Go (Chief), who has been with him since April, aged out of derby last month. ■

Tenacular Dogs – Joule Charney

Joule resides in Paradise, California. She has been a contributing writer for Retriever News for six years. The *Retrievers of the Past...* feature series is published four times a year: May, July, September and October. Visit Joule online at www.tenacular.com

