

Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

FC-AFC Dust Devil's Shoot The Moon

Close, But No Cigar... Well, Yes, And No!

A retriever obviously has to be pretty darn good to make it into the Hall of Fame. Shooter already had many accomplishments to his credit, including a record *four* Purina Outstanding Open Retriever Awards. As they were heading into the 2005 Retriever Hall of Fame Ceremony, Shooter's trainer, Bill Totten, and owner, Steve Bechtel, thought he was a point or two shy of becoming the #1 High Point Open Dog of All Time. They were told, somewhat to their dismay, that Shooter was only *one-half point* away from 2xNAFC-FC-3xCNFC River Oaks Corky's 306.5 Open Points, a total reached in 1977 that still stands to this day.

Coming as close as he did to Corky's astronomical record shows just how spectacular Shooter was. Corky is the highest scoring dog of all time in combined Open and Amateur All-Age points, with 505.5. Shooter holds the #5 place on that list, with 375 combined points.

How the one-half point issue arose is somewhat of a mystery. Our records show that Shooter ended his career with 295.0 Open points, which still puts him just behind Corky in that category. Steve Bechtel, who kept "meticulous records," according to Bill Totten, believes that Shooter had 295.5 points, which is 11.5 points away from Corky's 306.5 Open points.

No matter who did the math back in 2005, nor how one theorizes about it now, there is no question that Corky and Shooter are the #1 and #2 top Open point generators of all time – thus far. The 3rd and 4th ranking dogs on the Open points list are NAFC-FC Trumarc's Zip Code, "Cody," with 250.5, and FC-AFC Creek Robber, "Auggie," who has 220.5. They also are in the #2 and #3 positions on the combined points list, with 444 and 421.5, respectively. NAFC-FC Kannonball Kate is in 4th place on the combined points list; however, she had only 173.0 Open points. The 5th highest Open points holder is FC-AFC Code Blue, with 178.5.

So, in all of retriever history, there are only *four* dogs whose Open points are in the 200s or above.

Born in 1993, Shooter's Purina High Point Open Awards were earned in 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2002. Only one dog has received three Purina Open Awards – Auggie, in 2003, 2004 and 2007. Four dogs have each received two such awards – Cody in 1984 and 1987, FC-AFC-CNAFC-CFC Aces High III, "Willie" in 1989 and 1992, FC Hawkeye's Red White And Blue, "Banner" in 2006 and 2009, and NFC-AFC Robbers' Stray Bullet, "Bullet," in 2014 and 2015.

Steve Bechtel, Jr. with FC-AFC Dust Devil's Shoot The Moon's Retriever Hall of Fame Painting. Photo by Joule Charney



FC-AFC DUST DEVIL'S SHOOT THE MOON

1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 & 2002 High Point Open Dog

OPEN	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	TOTAL:
Starts	12	25	27	28	29	26	28	28	28	12	243
First	0	1	6	2	8	6	4	4	6	0	37
Second	0	1	4	8	3	5	2	4	1	1	29
Third	1	0	0	0	3	2	0	2	1	0	9
Fourth	0	3	6	5	3	1	2	5	2	1	28
Places	1	5	16	15	17	14	8	15	10	2	103
Jams	2	4	3	5	6	3	10	5	8	4	50
# Finished	3	9	19	20	23	17	18	20	18	6	153
% Finished	25%	36%	70%	71%	79%	65%	64%	71%	64%	50%	63%
Open Points	1.0	9.5	45.0	36.5	53.5	47.5	27.0	36.5	35.0	3.5	295.0
Cumulative Pts	1.0	10.5	55.5	92.0	145.5	193.0	220.0	256.5	291.5	295.0	295.0
AMATEUR	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	TOTAL:
Starts	6	19	17	15	18	12	17	7	4	?	115
First	0	1	2	0	3	2	1	1	0	0	10
Second	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	7
Third	0	1	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	8
Fourth	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Places	0	3	6	2	4	4	4	3	1	0	27
Jams	?	5	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	?	14
# Finished	?	8	7	3	7	5	5	4	2	?	41
% Finished	?	42%	41%	20%	39%	42%	29%	57%	50%	?	36%
Amateur Points	0.0	9.0	15.5	2.0	16.0	14.0	9.5	11.0	3.0	0.0	80.0
Cumulative Points	0.0	9.0	24.5	26.5	42.5	56.5	66.0	77.0	80.0	80.0	80.0
ALL AGE	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	TOTAL:
All Age By Year	1.0	18.5	60.5	38.5	69.5	61.5	36.5	47.5	38.0	3.5	375.0
Cumulative Total	1.0	19.5	80.0	118.5	188.0	249.5	286.0	333.5	371.5	375.0	375.0

Owner: S. Bechtel, Jr.
 Birthdate: 5/13/93
 Not on Derby List

Avg. Open pts per year: 30
 Avg. Amateur pts per year: 9
 Avg. All-Age pts per year: 38

Chart provided by Sue Reynolds, compiled using data from Retriever News Performance Books and Retriever News Annual Summary issues

Shooter was High Point Open Dog four times, which also is a record, in the same years as his Purina Awards. Since Retriever News magazine began listing the High Point Open dogs on its website in 1979, there have been only two dogs to achieve High Point status three times, one before and one after Shooter – Cody, in 1982, 1984 and 1987, and Augie, in 2003, 2004 and 2007. Bullet was High Point Open Dog twice, in 2014 and 2015. No other High Point Open Dogs since 1979 have achieved that status in multiple years.

Shooter's career spanned ten years, 1995 through 2004. In Steve's view, Shooter's other top accomplishments included winning back-to-back Qualifying stakes before age three, becoming an FC-AFC on his 3rd birthday, qualifying for his first National on his 3rd birthday, qualifying for eight National Opens and becoming a Finalist in five, and qualifying for seven National Amateurs, and becoming a Finalist in two. The National qualifying was in consecutive years in both instances: Open in 1996 through 2003 and Amateur in 1997 through 2003. Shooter was a National Open Finalist in 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2003, and a National Amateur Finalist in 1999 and 2001.

Further, Shooter joined the Double Header Club in 1999. He had Outstanding Open Campaigns, defined as 20 or More points in a year,



Steve Bechtel, Jr. pictured with "Shooter," September 1997, Amateur win at Spokane in Espanola, WA. Photo supplied by Steve Bechtel, Jr.

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in seven of those years, 1997 through 2003. He had Most Open Wins in a Year with six in 1997, eight in 1999, six in 2000, four in 2002 (as did two other dogs), and six in 2003 (as did Auggie). He had the Most Open Places in a Year in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2002.

In the Beginning

Shooter, bred by M. J. Mowinckle, was out of 2xNAFC-FC-2xC-NAFC Ebonstar Lean Mac and Candlewoods High Dollar Dana. His first owner was professional trainer Don Remien. Shooter won two Qualifyings when Don still owned him. “Neither was spectacular,” says Bill. “He came from the bottom of the pack. But, he was the only dog to do the last series in both of them.”

Shooter was two weeks under age two when he was offered for sale to Steve Bechtel. “Shooter had seven US and seven Canadian Derby points. I got the Derby points in Canada. There were others with opportunities to buy him.” One was Sherwin Scott, who owned Shooter’s sire; but, “he and the dog just didn’t hit,” according to Bill.

It took a while to figure out whether Shooter’s early wins were due to luck or talent, explains Bill. “He was not ready to run the Open or Amateur All-Age, at all.”

One issue that was evident really was just a deficit in training and experience. “He was such a good marker, he didn’t know how to hunt for a bird if he missed it. He’d check down. He just didn’t know how to hunt up a bird. He had trained in the desert around Niland, [CA], where there’s not a lot of cover. When he was in partially grown hay fields, he had a problem. We questioned whether he won the two Qualifyings as a fluke. After about two weeks, we figured out he really was a good marker. Although he always checked

down, he’d have a big hunt. We had to overcome that.”

A second issue was that “he was a little active at the line. Like any young dog who is pushed to run the Open, line manners affected his ability to place.”

After running the Junior in Canada, which is the equivalent of the Derby in the US, he placed in two Quals. That’s when Steve decided to purchase him. “The plan was to run him in the San Jose trial the next February. We ran him in late September 1995 in Billings, MT in the Open to see how he would do. He placed 4th. That was the only Open he ran in 1995. The next trial was San Jose, CA in the Spring. On his third birthday, he got his Field Championship and qualified for his first National. That fall, he completed the National in Ardmore, Oklahoma.”

“The next December or January, at Steve’s ranch in California training, we were talking about the next year. Shooter had got twelve points that previous year. I looked at Steve and said, ‘Shooter probably can be High Point Open Dog.’ That’s probably one of the dumbest things I’ve ever said, predicting a dog would become High Point Open Dog. But, he was! He bailed me out!”

By age four, it was clear Shooter’s success was far more than a fluke. “At that point, it became clear we had an exceptionally intelligent dog. We figured that out as a process of elimination. You were looking at a brilliant dog. He could stick his head into the trap and get himself out of the trap.”

“He had an on and off switch,” Bill continues. “The on switch came on when you got to the Line. He would lay down in the holding blind. When he got to the line, he was all ready to go, like he saved it all for then.”

“He retrieved all the birds like they were equally important. It didn’t matter if they were an out-of-order flyer, dead, even the blind.” As Steve Parker said, ‘Shooter doesn’t care any more about the flyers than any of the other birds. He can do my test in any order.’” Parker was a long



Steve Bechtel, Jr.’s composite art of all his favorite dogs he has owned over the years. Photo supplied by Steve Bechtel, Jr.

time Chesapeake guy and field trial judge who judged Nationals. He's still running dogs; but, not to the extent that he was during Shooter's years, says Bill.

"Shooter was just a stable dog. Most (dogs), you can't keep running" with the same level of success. "Usually, the wheels come off."

"He never took high correction, or a lot of corrections. I could usually run him for a month without using the collar." Then, he'd start to see something slide, and he'd determine a correction was needed. "One correction and you'd be back to where he was. Then, we'd go another month, maybe one-and-a-half months."

"He could think on his own because that's what you had to do on marks. He was the best dog I've ever had on blinds, bar none. He ran really straight lines and he handled equally as well."

"He didn't have a weakness. His top strength was his ability to think on his feet. We were at a National in South Carolina at a big water Triple or Quad. On one bird, instead of cutting the last piece of water, dogs would turn and run up the store. Every dog that did that had to be handled on that bird. Don Remien said, 'I'll bet you one hundred bucks that dog [Shooter] will not do the same thing. Shooter started up the store, then cut across the piece of water and picked up the bird!'"

"When Shooter made a mistake, he could recognize the mistake, and fix it! His other strength was biddability, the training factor that I think is #1 that I look for in a puppy. 'What does the trainer want?' The ability to care what the handler and trainer want. To get that, they have to like you. They have to respect you, and they have to like you. The more they like you and care about what you want, the more you can do with them."

"Shooter was a phenomenal dog. He was quiet and personable when out and about. He was a pleasure to be around, as well as intelligent."

"One of the things I'm most proud of is that I ran Shooter in every time zone in the country." Further, says Bill, "Anyone could run him and he'd be successful." If Steve couldn't make it to a trial, Bill would pick another Amateur to run Shooter. The ability to run with anyone handling is "probably the distinguishing factor between him and all the other high point dogs."

In contrast, "Corky would run only for Mike Flannery. Jim Gonia didn't even like him [Auggie] because he wouldn't run for him. Another was Judy Aycoc's 'Cody.' Shooter was 'unusual in that he would run for me and for Steve pretty much equally well,' in the Open and Amateur. His versatility and flexibility were 'pretty spectacular.' Bill can't attribute this to anything in particular in Shooter's upbringing nor training. "That's how he came out."

"I have no doubt he would have become the All Time High Point Dog," if not for extenuating factors. "I had eleven, I think, FCs on the truck. Most were Steve's," which Bill admits was hard to believe. "It was hard to believe that one person could accumulate that many dogs in that short a period of time. Steve wanted all of his dogs to go to the National. After Shooter qualified, Steve had me stop running him because he'd win and move the other dogs down in placement." Shooter was not entirely kept out of trials between qualifying for and running in a National Amateur. "A couple of trials before, I would insist that Steve run him to get a feel for how he was running before he stepped up to the Line."

"We had started a bunch of pups at the same time. The puppies all panned out. They all became good dogs. We ended up with a pretty tough dog truck."

"I didn't keep track of this; but, one year, someone asked me, 'Did you realize that since the first of the year, you ran eighteen trials and got a 1st, 2nd, or both in all of them?' I knew we'd been doing well; but, no, I didn't realize that. This was probably 1996 or 1997."

"Shooter was a huge phenomenon at age six or seven. I heard that



Composite Sketch of Steve Bechtel, Jr. and Bill Totten with Shooter.
Photo supplied by Steve Bechtel, Jr.

someone once asked Don Remien, 'Don't you wish you had kept that dog?' Don reportedly responded, 'I don't think that dog would be what he is if Bill didn't have him.'

Ingredients of Success

Starting out in the retriever business, "my original intention was to work only with gundogs and young (prospective field trial) dogs," says Bill.

"I always hunted. Back in those days, most guys wanted a gundog retriever." I paid \$10 for my first dog. \$50 for my second. And, about \$200 for my third. My third was out of a field trial breeding. That was in 1980 or '81. There were no hunt tests. A lot of field trialers would not sell you a puppy unless you agreed to field trial it. I'm pretty competitive. I was on an undefeated swim team in high school. When I saw my first field trial, I thought I'd like to do it." So, Bill ran his third dog in the Derby and Qual. "I left him with a friend when fishing in Montana. He got out of the yard and was killed."

Eventually, Bill continues, "I was working with a pro named Bert Carlson. Bert was the head trainer and I was the assistant." Bill describes Bert as 'old style' and himself as subscribing to the 'modern era.'

Bill didn't like the way dogs looked who were trained with a heavy finger on the transmitter. "There was only one penalty – death. Most people thought if you were going to correct them, you want full bore for as long as the collar would go." The development of the e-collar was a "huge advantage over the 'tennis shoe method.' It also was not well understood. I don't think that's the case at all now," although, Bill asserts, "some dogs look like that because some trainers haven't figured out how to use the collar (wisely)."

"I had another business, custom fly tying. My wife said, 'you need to stop.' She didn't work with the dogs but went to competitions. She was very observant. She would watch me and watch the others. She said my dogs didn't look the way theirs did."

"In August 1987, I turned pro and was living in Utah. I was only

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taking young dogs. Bert was in Issaquah, Washington and needed a young dog trainer. There was no official relationship;” but, the men had somewhat of a partnership. “I trained the young dogs until they were running Derby and then sent them back to Bert. I got a salary and percentage of the profit from the business for one-and-a-half years.”

“Already, several of Steve’s young pups were starting to run All-Age. Bert was an older guy by then. I was the assistant; but, I was doing most of the training. We decided to split in 1991. Bert continued on. Steve came with me. Steve’s daughter and his grandson Brady went with Bert. It was a fairly amicable split up. We had some differences. Collars were advancing. There were changes in how things were being done.”

“I definitely think that Mike Lardy is the father of modern training practices,” Bill believes. But, he also takes a lot of the credit. “The collar doesn’t teach the dog. You have to teach the dog first and then correct the dog for not doing what you have taught.”

“The less flexible or old school trainers are not sure what you’re correcting about. They apply more pressure than you want to use. It takes a certain type of dog to be able to deal with that. It limits the success of some dogs, and it limits the type of retrievers that can be successful in their program. They have ‘the dog either fits my program or you’re out’ attitude.” Conversely, says Bill, “I get into their heads and thinking the way they think. We treat the dogs as individuals, rather than having a cookie cutter program.”

“Shooter is the only dog to win the Purina Outstanding Retriever top open dog four times,” points out Bill. “We did not feed Purina,” and, to an extent, he regrets it. “Purina does so much for all breeds of dogs, not just retrievers. At the time, he fed Eagle Pack, the same food fed to Iditarod dogs, because he knew a distributor. He switched to Purina shortly after Shooter retired and still feeds it. “What Purina does for all field sports should be acknowledged by everyone in field dog sports. Purina developed the outstanding campaign plaque; so, the high point open dogs have something to show for it. I commend Purina for that.



Shooter's Purina Awards
Photos supplied by
Steve Bechtel, Jr.

Shooting into the Future

“At first, Steve said he’d only breed Shooter to [Field] Champions. There aren’t as many females as male FCs; so, his breedings were very, very selective. He was only bred to All-Age Qualified females. There was not a lot of breeding. Steve didn’t care about that. He cared about running field trials and being competitive. In retrospect, we should have done more [breedings]. There’s the expression, ‘If you don’t use it, you lose it.’ Shooter’s sperm count went down. After a couple of breedings, there were no pups.”

“Shooter had nine litters and it is my recollection that there was at least one FC or AFC from each. There are three to five straws left. I was told it would take all to do one breeding, and it is in my control.

Shooter progeny that stand-out in Bill’s mind include FC-AFC Dinwiddie and FC Zoe Of Diamond Ridge, owned by Steve’s son Gary. “She qualified for her first National Open at about the same age as Shooter.”

The decision was made to retire Shooter at age ten “even though, we thought we were within a point or two” of equaling or exceeding Corky’s Open point record, so they thought. Was this frustrating for Bill? “As a professional trainer, you have to get solid with the fact you don’t own the dog. I would now run him in another four or five trials. Steve was a good client.” It was not Bill’s manner to try to beg nor otherwise cajole Steve into retiring Shooter later. “That was not me. If you tell me that’s what I want to do, I’m probably going to do it. This might qualify as one of those times I wish I hadn’t. That just was not the relationship that I had. Steve, at that time, ran one of the largest companies in the world! Steve wanted Shooter to retire at a high point. He was adamant about not running him into the ground.”

“Shooter never got sick and never got hurt.” This rarity gave him an edge. “He was such an intelligent dog. So many got hurt because they don’t look at the terrain. They try to jump ditches they can’t jump across and run into a wall on the other side. Shooter would run down one side and up the other.”

After he retired, Shooter lived with Gary. Sadly, Shooter contracted cancer at age 11. “They only go five or six months, no matter what, and no matter what you do.”

“We could have run him longer. I wish he’d been the #1 Open All Age Retriever.” But, that was an extreme challenge, “given the sheer number of dogs he ran against.”

Will Bill ever see another dog as intelligent as Shooter? He says he doubts it; then, adds, “never say ‘never.’” He points out that, nowadays, “the average number of dogs, day in and day out, is eighty dogs in the Open. When River Oaks Corky ran, it was maybe twenty-five to thirty. “I don’t anticipate seeing another dog like that [Shooter].”

To what does he most attribute Shooter’s greatness? “He wouldn’t give up, and, training techniques. Modern techniques and tools, for sure.” He pointed out that, “Corky ran against fewer dogs. In modern times, a lot of weekends, there are over 100 dogs, and only four placements. That made it really, really, really tough.”

“Now there are less than fifty dogs running in the western trials. The average number of dogs entered in the west is now fifty to sixty dogs. In the east and southwest, and states such as Texas, they still have 100 dog Opens. There are some places in the country with numbers issues. 2008 took care of that. We just don’t have that many people with disposable income.”

Stephen Bechtel, Jr., Owner

Money was not an issue; but, time was a limiting factor for Steve. The family company, Bechtel Corporation, is one of the largest construction companies in the world. Steve is a grandson of founder Warren Bechtel. “I started working for the company as a ‘stake puncher’

pounding wooden survey stakes into the ground with a sledge hammer,” says Steve.

“In less than two decades, he doubled the size of an organization that his forbearers had taken sixty years to build,” according to the Bechtel website.

“The largest US contractor has worked on such high-profile projects as the Hoover Dam completed back in 1936, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline system in the ‘70s and more recently the ‘Big Dig’ Central Artery project finished in 2007,” Constructionglobal.com notes. “The company employs more than 53,000 people around the world.”

“I’m real proud of the company and what we’ve accomplished. I was privileged to work,” says Steve. “Business my main interest and activity and took most of my time. I had to work extracurricular activities around my work. I planned time for trials. I could peel off to get to a get to a trial.” His company had planes available, which he took “once in a while; but, most of the trials were here in the west.”

“I have had dozens of dogs; but, none of them were in Shooter’s class,” Steve reflects. “Shooter was unique. He seemed like he wanted to do what he was supposed to do. We didn’t have too many arguments. I went out and trained with Bill Totten. I had him run in the trials early on because I couldn’t get away too much. I really appreciated him. He taught me a lot. He did a great job of handling and training. Shooter’s record of accomplishments is really something!”

“It gave a great deal of satisfaction to me to handle Shooter. He did a great job in competition. He also did a great job just shagging ducks for me. It is hard to think of Shooter without remembering all of his great performances; but, we will remember him for the great hunts we shared and the tremendous affection that he bestowed on everyone. We don’t think Shooter ever met a person or dog he didn’t like.”

“My oldest uncle was a great duck hunter. He got me interested in duck hunting when I was about seven years old, going to Butte Lodge in Colusa.” This eventually led Steve into the field trial world.

He says he hunted ducks and pheasants with Shooter during his competitive career. He was a member of a duck club and his family owns property in northern California, including the Mead Ranch, in Morgan Hill, CA, site of the 2006 Master National and 2007 National Open. His five children and grandchildren also like to hunt.

“I’ve had a wonderful life, got educated, working and extracurricular activities.” Ten



Stephen Bechtel, Jr., owner, in his office. Photo by Joule Charney

of Steve’s retrievers earned their FC titles, and six also are AFCs. He is the founder of California Retriever Training Association (CRTA), which has three properties in California available for training, trials, hunt tests and other retriever events.

Philanthropic recipients of Steve’s include California Waterfowl Association. His foundation’s primary investments are directed toward STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). “In 2009, his foundation donated \$50 million to the Boy Scouts of America to help create a 10,600-acre reserve in West Virginia,” according to Forbes.

“I made Eagle!” the almost-centurion adds proudly.

Steve hunted until he was 89, and plans to resume the pastime soon. “I had bypass surgery one year ago. I’ve had no problems since.” Now age 91, Steve and his wife Betty, “my high school sweetheart,” live in San Francisco, “with a great view of the Golden Gate (Bridge). I have a framed picture of all the good Labs that I’ve had. Just drawings of the dogs’ heads. About a dozen of them. In the right hand corner is Shooter.”

Steve does not recall how close Shooter came to becoming the top Open dog in retriever history, which, actually might be a good thing... “If I did, I’d be kicking myself if I knew it was that close!”

Bill Totten, Professional Trainer

Bill trained the 1994 National Amateur Champion, NAFC-FC Lady Andrel’s Night-hawk Lady. “Her owner, Gordon Kurz, is

the first prominent amateur person that I trained,” Bill notes.

Bill refers to himself now as semi-retired, taking only “people and dogs that I want to take.” His workload consists of four to six dogs, teaching handlers, and offering seminars on Basics through Advanced Handling and Line Management through his company, Nightwind Training and Consulting.

Bill’s wife Tammy died six years ago. He moved to 80 acres in Dillon, Montana at the end of 2015 and winters at Denver, a CRTA property in northern California. ■

Tenacular Dogs – Joule Charney



Joule Charney & Steve Bechtel at the interview.

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