

DUAL DREAMS

By Vicki (Westphal) Rittner

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When I got my first Brittany puppy in October 1991, I knew absolutely nothing about the breed, dog shows, or field trials. My soon-to-be ex-husband had decided he wanted a hunting dog, and came home one day with four-month old Fergie. She was the first liver & white Brittany I had ever seen, and oh, could she run.

The following summer I went to my first dog show just to see what the other Brittany's looked like, and saw only one – in the parking lot. The owner was a member of the Minnesota Brittany Club, and encouraged me to join. A few months later Fergie and I were competing in dog shows all over Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas. I devoured the monthly ABC magazine and the AKC Events Calendar. Although we had lots of fun, I soon learned that Fergie wasn't show quality. She "retired" from the ring at age two, with zero show points.

Fergie wasn't going to be bred, but I had her hips x-rayed anyway, and was quite dismayed to learn she had hip dysplasia. (That's a whole 'nother subject.) But just before that unfortunate discovery, I happened to meet Diana Kubitz at a Nebraska Brittany Club Specialty Show. She insisted that I go out to the field trial the next day, so I did. (How do you say no to the owner/ handler of the 1993 National Amateur Field Champion?) Thanks to Bob Burchett and a wonderfully smooth Tennessee Walker, my introduction to field trialing was more fun than I'd ever had at a dog show!

As an active member of the Minnesota Brittany Club, I enjoyed helping out with the club's specialty shows and field trials. Then I went to Booneville for the 1994 National Specialty Show, and rode the first three braces of the Open Championship. The people were wonderful and the dogs I saw (show and field) were the top dogs from all over the country.

Living in a small condo in a large city and being newly single, I never imagined myself participating in field trials. All I wanted was a dog good enough to finish in the show ring, but then along came the puppy who changed everything. "Willey's PDQ Renegade Riley", out of NAFC/DC/AFC Renegade's Kansas Kid and FC Willey's Famous Flirt, was born August 2, 1995 – the first litter I'd ever whelped. Eight weeks later I had homes lined up for all six puppies, but the breeder kept insisting I take the pick of the litter. Dogs were not allowed by my

condo association but I knew this was an incredible puppy, so I decided that I would do whatever it takes to give Riley the opportunity to become a Dual Champion.



RILEY AS A DERBY DOG - APRIL 1997

At 14 months of age, Riley is off to a good start with eight show points and several Best of Winners ribbons. The majors are going to be hard to find in this area, and he's missed a lot of shows while he's off field trialing. He's still a puppy, but he moves like a dream and loves the spotlight of the show ring. I'm confident that he'll be a Show Champion before he finishes in the field, but he's off to a solid start with an Open Puppy win, and several other Puppy and Derby placements. The first juvenile field win was sweeter than any show win, and now I can see how people get hooked on field trials. We'll be doing this for a long time, and having fun all the way.

The hardest thing for me has been saying good-bye when it's time for Riley to go away for the trial seasons. The schedule is three months with Bob Burchett in the Spring, and three months again in the Fall. I try to get to one or two trials each season, and I'm amazed at how well Riley covers the ground, and finds birds almost every single time he runs. This is what Brittany's are supposed to do, and although he's always happy to see me, I'm almost sure his first love is running and finding birds. Don't get me wrong however, when he's home with me and Fergie, he quickly adjusts to living the "Life of Riley" – sleeping on the bed, and having the run of the house.

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I get questions every once in a while from people who don't understand why I want to do this. The answer is simple – I'm committed to the Brittany as a dual dog because I feel a sense of obligation. As I broadened my circle of friends within the American Brittany Club, and read the magazines month after month, I saw an incredible opportunity to participate in both show and field events, with a heightened awareness of how important this is to the future of the breed.

Yes, it takes money to compete in the field trial aspects of this sport, but probably less than you might think if you start with a puppy from proven bloodlines. It also takes planning, commitment, and probably a few sacrifices in some other areas. When people say that their show dog could be a Dual Champion, but they just don't have the time or the money for field trialing, it hurts all of us. Time invested is no guarantee of success. Nor is spending the money and sending the dog off with a pro; the dog has to have great breeding, natural ability, and desire – in addition to extensive training and trialing.

I've handled Riley myself in the show ring after a few weeks of conformation handling classes, and found most Brittanyes are owner handled. It's really not that hard to stack a dog and gait around the ring, and the judges are usually patient and helpful. But most of the dogs in the show ring aren't the same dogs you'll see at a field trial. If you're an avid field trialer and think your dog might have what it takes to be a Champion, or you don't know much about the breed standard but want to learn, the show ring welcomes you. Yes, this also takes money, planning, and commitment. Once again, if you start with a puppy from proven bloodlines, results can come quickly.

I've had lots of support and encouragement at both shows and field trials, and I've made some good friends all across the country. I've come a long way in my knowledge and appreciation for the breed and the sport of dogs, and my best teachers are Brittany club members who lead by positive example. I started out as a new puppy owner who didn't even have a fenced yard (would you have sold me a puppy?) and if all goes well, Riley will someday be a Dual Champion.

My hope is that as a club and as individuals, we can reach out and welcome new Brittany enthusiasts, and provide the support and encouragement for anyone to pursue "Dual Dreams". But first and foremost, it takes a commitment from responsible Brittany breeders to strive to produce puppies with dual prospects, not just top field or show winners.

For the sake of the future of the Brittany as a dual dog, please accept the challenge to consider conformation *and* proven field performance when planning your next litter. Your next puppy buyer may have the time and the desire to pursue the dream of a Dual Champion. We owe it to this marvelous breed to do everything we can to support the breeders and owners who are dedicated to preserving the Brittany as a true dual dog.



Riley earned his CH title a few months after this article was published, at the age of just 22 months. Handled by me, he was Reserve Winner's Dog at the 1997 California Brittany Club Specialty Show, and Winner's Dog the next day for a 3-point major, under long time Brittany enthusiast Dorothy Macdonald at the Kennel Club of Pasadena show. Still in Iowa with Bob after the 1999 Fall field trial season and hunting almost every day, tragedy struck and Riley became very ill. He died before a diagnosis or any treatment could be given.

An autopsy showed a massive anaerobic bacterial infection in his thoracic cavity, either *Nocardia* or *Actinomyces*. He was 4 years, 3 months, and 14 days old. He had juvenile field points and a four-point Open Gun Dog win, and needed just one more win to be a Field and Dual Champion.

May 2005 Update from Vicki –

Since I wrote this article in October 1996, my thoughts on the responsibilities of breeding have changed a bit. I'm still an ardent admirer and staunch supporter of the Dual Champion Brittany. But I've also concluded that breeding just for "show" hurts the dual Brittany a lot more than breeding "field to field" hoping for a future National Field Champion. Without the "extreme expressors" (the best of the best All-Age Field Champions) we'd never have many of today's (and tomorrow's) Dual Champions, Field Champions, and top quality hunting dogs.

Through Riley and my association with the American Brittany Club, I met Marc Rittner; a life-long Californian and amateur Brittany field trialer. I was living in Minneapolis and had deep roots with family and friends throughout Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska, but moved to California in 1997 to be with Marc, and to more actively participate in field trials and dog shows. We got married on March 29, 2001 – the 13th birthday of his first Brittany (now deceased) AFC Lit'l Buddy Chip, MH.

We currently have six Brittany's including 14 year-old Fergie, 12 1/2 year-old FC Missfit's Radikewell Krista, 7 year-old 2x American Field Champion, FC/AFC Shiloh's Blazin Tri'd N Tru ("Bernie"), 5 year-old Simply Irresistible ("Kandy", out of NFC/DC/AFC Tequila's Joker and our Krista), Kandy's 11 month-old son "Speedy" (Tru's Magic Bullet, sired by FC/AFC Strong's Rum Runner Barney), and 4 month-old "Lucy" – a Bernie daughter. Two more Bernie puppies are on the way.



FC/AFC SHILOH'S BLAZIN TRI'D N TRU

Bernie is the #1 All Pointing Breed dog as ranked by the AKC for 2004 Open Gun Dog stakes, and was the #1 Brittany in 2003 and 2004. Both of his parents were Dual Champions; DC Booker Cooker and DC Shiloh's Blazin Shadie Sadie. Disqualified from the show ring by size and markings, Bernie excels in the field. OFA Excellent - stud service available.

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"SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE" WITH JUDGE CARL ANDERSON & HANDLER JENELLE LARSON, KC OF PASADENA, JUNE 2003.

Kandy is "dual pointed" with six field and seven show points, including a 3-point major. We hope to finish a CH title on her this summer, but decided last year to retire her from field competition and bring her home. Even with her stellar field pedigree and outstanding juvenile record, she just didn't have the enthusiasm for the field that warranted further investment in training and trialing. Happily, she's a great house dog.

Lucy gives us renewed hope for the future – stay tuned.

