

What's in an AKC Pedigree?

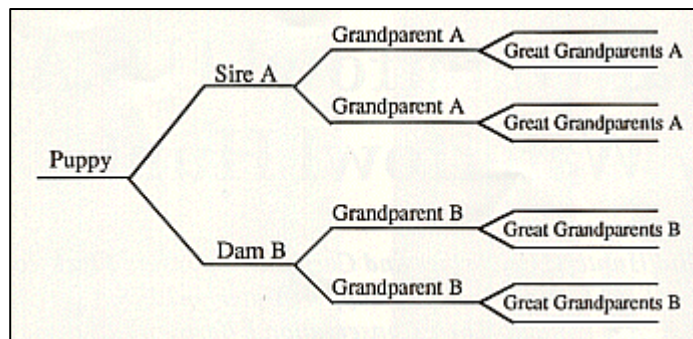


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Most people that come to our kennel to purchase a Labrador puppy can't wait to get out to the whelping kennel and paw through the cute little devils. They're absolutely sure they can pick the most intelligent and aggressive hunting dog out of the bunch just by looking at them. The old saying, "Beauty is only skin deep" is true when looking at a litter of puppies. The worst puppy of a good litter is going to be better than the best puppy out of a poor litter.

The answer to whether a puppy will prospectively be a good hunting dog or not lies in the pedigree. What is a pedigree? A dog's pedigree is it's family tree. It is a chart showing the pup's parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. All American Kennel Club registered dogs have their pedigrees on record at the AKC headquarters in North Carolina. You can obtain a copy of any registered dog's pedigree on line on the American Kennel Club's web site <http://www.akc.org>.



So now we have a pedigree or family tree containing the exotic names of retrievers that are a dog's ancestors. How does this help us determine if a dog is going to be worth a darn as a hunting dog? Included with the dog's names on the pedigree will be the field accomplishments or titles the dog has earned in AKC Field Trials or Hunting Tests. The Field Trial Champion titles are found at the front of the dog's name. These are FCH (Field Champion) and AFCH (Amateur Field Champion or Field Champion competed by an amateur). These dogs are the "creme of the

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crop" in field skills, trainable and intelligence. They have competed against some of the best retrievers in the country and won at least one first place and several other second, third or fourth places necessary, to accumulate the total points needed to make a Field Championship. Few dogs are capable of competing at this level. The field trial dogs can be compared to the pro ball players of the human athletic world.

At the end of the dog's names on the pedigree can be found the AKC Hunting Test Titles. These are JH (Junior hunter), SH (Senior Hunter) and MH (Master Hunter). To earn these titles, retrievers must complete 5 or 6 tests at the particular skill level in which they are trying to earn a title. It is not a competition but rather a matter of completing tests at a certain standard set by the AKC. The dogs are tested in several hunting situations per test. The junior level is very basic consisting of only single retrieves and the difficulty progresses through senior, up to Master which is a fairly complex series, of multiple marks and blind retrieves.

When looking at the pedigree of a prospective puppy, it is the field titles of the dogs in the pedigree, that we are interested in. If a dog in the pedigree has no field title, we cannot assume that dog had any field accomplishments or ability, unless we had known the dog personally. Ideally we like to see field titles spread throughout the pedigree on both the dam and sire's sides. The closer they are to the immediate dam and sire, the better. If both a puppy's parents are field champions, the chances of that pup being an exceptional field dog are very, very good.

One or two field champions, four generations back in a pedigree is not very significant. Unfortunately this is often the case in litters advertised as having field champion lines. If there are several field titled dogs in the sire's lineage but none in the dams' that is an indication that the pup has maybe only 50 % field genes, the rest unknown. When picking out a pup, we want to keep the unknown to a minimum.

Besides considering the pedigree, it is important to look at the temperament, and field abilities, of the immediate, parent dogs. I would rather buy a pup from good hunting parents with mediocre field pedigrees, than one from parents that had never been worked in the field but looked great on paper (on their pedigree).

A good retriever, breeder should be able to send you the pedigree on a prospective litter and answer any questions you may have. If the pedigree appears satisfactory, visit the kennel if possible, and see the parent dogs. Ask about their performance in the field, and why the breeder selected these particular dogs for breeding. If the pedigree is good, the parents are both good hunting dogs, or have been competed in field trials or hunt tests, and the breeder knowledgeable and reputable, go for it. Put a deposit down on a pup. The rest is up to training and a little luck.

Buying a pup without looking at its pedigree is like baking a cake without a recipe. You would have no idea of the end result. You can't completely eliminate the possibility of buying an unsatisfactory hunting retriever pup, but by carefully doing some research on the pedigree, the characteristics of the parent dogs, and the breeder, you can certainly optimize your chances of getting a good one.

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Some titles you might see in a retriever pedigree	
<p>FC - Field Champion</p> <p>AFC - Amateur Field Champion</p> <p>NFC - National Field Champion</p> <p>NAFC - National Amateur Field Champion</p> <p>A letter preceding title indicates place if a foreign title. i.e CFC-Canadian Field Champion</p>	<p>These titles appear as a prefix and are awarded to the retrievers winning a required number of points in competitions against the best field dogs of all the retriever breeds. These titles are difficult and expensive to attain and indicate the dogs are of superior intelligence, athletic ability and have a very high desire to retrieve.</p>
<p>CH - Conformation or Bench Champion</p>	<p>A prefix, this title indicates that the dog has won a required number of points in competition judging conformation, against the best looking dogs in its breed group. The dog is an almost perfect looking specimen and moves correctly according to the breed standard. It gives no verification of field ability.</p>
<p>Dual CH - Dual Champion</p>	<p>A prefix. A most coveted title awarded to retrievers. The dog is both a Field Champion and a Conformation Champion. Hi is among the best looking of the breed and the best performing in the field.</p>
<p>WC - Working Certificate (Labrador & Golden Retrievers)</p> <p>WCX - Working Certificate Excellent (Goldens)</p> <p>WD & WDX - Working Dog titles (Chesapeake)</p> <p>WDC - advanced level</p>	<p>Breed club working awards. Appear as a suffix. The dog has performed a required series of bird retrieving exercises at breed club meets. Level of difficulty is relatively basic. Indicates the dog is trainable and does retrieve birds in the field situation in water and on land. Not AKC titles. Will not appear on AKC pedigree</p>
<p>JH- Junior Hunter</p> <p>SH - Senior Hunter</p> <p>MH - Master Hunter</p>	<p>A suffix. This title is relatively new. It indicates the god has completed and passed a required series of retrieving and hunting exercises in a field situation at AKC regulation meets. Real hunting situations are closely simulated. Although not competitive, the dogs are tested thoroughly on land and water and must do blind retrieves responding to hand signals.</p>
<p>CD - Companion Dog</p> <p>CDX - Companion Dog Excellent</p> <p>UD - Utility dog</p> <p>OTCH - Obedience Trial Champion (prefix)</p> <p>TD - Tracking Dog</p> <p>TDX - Tracking Dog Excellent</p>	<p>Obedience and Tracking titles. Appear as suffixes. Earned by performing and passing a required set of trained exercises at official AKC meets. The indicate the dog is very trainable and somewhat intelligent but not necessarily birdy.</p>