

## Poodles and Hunting?

By Fran Seagren, Cynthia Stratton, and Sue Orlicky



If you talk to Cynthia Stratton about hunting with a retrieving dog, the conversation tends to be your typical hunting talk. There is one significant difference, however. Most hunters talk about their Labs or Chesapeakes – Cindy talks about her Poodle.

Two years ago Cindy was desperate to bring another canine into her life. She had been five years without a dog and it was TIME! She encouraged her husband to get involved with the selection of their next Labrador Retriever, this being her chosen breed. As only a loving husband can do, procrastination became an art form. Finally after months of evasion Cindy took a stand, "Speak now or forever hold your peace! I am coming home TOMORROW with a puppy!!" Her husband spoke, "Don't be mad ... I don't want a Lab." He wanted a poodle!!! Cindy, who's only experience with poodles was living next-door to two untrained, undisciplined small poodles who bark continuously, responded with an almost yell, "I don't want no fluffy, yippy, yappy, prissy dawg!!" Her husband said that a "Standard" was bigger and used to be hunting dogs. Cindy, being extremely in love with her husband, began to investigate the Standard Poodle. Shortly thereafter she was chosen by a cream female standard poodle, "Princesa Carmella of Toulee" (Touley), and her opinions on poodles were changed forever.

### Poodle history

The poodle was originally developed as a hunting dog. The dense, tightly curled fur was developed to be nearly waterproof, and they were used as a retrieving dog. This is where the "show" coat had its foundation. Hunters used a much shorter version of the "foofy" clip. The hair was left longer around the internal organs, joints of the legs and top of the head to protect against the effects of cold weather and cold water. The rest of the body was cut shorter for less drag in the water. Around the middle of the twentieth century the poodle fell out of favor for hunting, mainly due to the difficulty of removing twigs, stickers, and burrs from the coat.

As they fell out of favor for hunting, they became very popular in other areas. Their incredible intelligence made them good at almost anything humans wanted them to do. They were used in circuses and the French aristocracy favored them for the coat, which could be groomed into all sorts of shapes and styles. They are also excellent tracking, herding and rescue dogs.

### **Getting Started**

At six months old Cindy put Touley in a BEDOG obedience class. Dave Lawniczak was the instructor. Following one of the classes Dave inquired if Cindy was interested in hunt training her poodle. Yep, Cindy was! What a coincidence that Dave had a frozen pheasant in his truck that day. Touley was never the same!! She went ballistic for that bird and continues to get birdier the further she gets in training.

The very next Saturday, Dave introduced Cindy to Fran Seagren, and for the rest of the year Cindy showed up nearly every Saturday and field trained with Fran, Dave and Wayne Fugate. Touley had her ups and downs but developed into a great little hunter. By the end of that summer Touley had earned three legs (out of four needed) towards her AKC Junior Hunter (JH) title. In March of the following year she earned the last leg to receive her JH. Pushing a little too fast, Cindy entered her in a few AKC Senior Hunter tests. She did not qualify. She had been swimming less than a year at that point and lacked confidence on long water retrieves.



### **Over the top**

On August 26th and 27th of this year, Cindy and Touley jumped the hurdle! Touley qualified for two UKC/HRC Seasoned legs. Most importantly was that she did it with great style and desire for the birds, and in a test more difficult than any Senior/Seasoned Cindy had seen so far. Fran Seagren, who has been involved with Hunt Tests for three years, has seen many "Senior" Level Hunt Tests and about 8 "Seasoned" Tests, plus has titled several dogs, stated that this test was equal to the toughest Senior AKC test she has seen to this point, and that Touley did better than a majority of the Labs running in the test. Although this was Touley's first attempt at the "Seasoned" level, she didn't look like a novice at all. As a matter of fact, on Saturday, she was



the only dog of the 8 that qualified that didn't need to be handled on any marks. So, you can see why Fran was so impressed. Not only was the gallery in awe, but also the judges were impressed. One of the judges even wanted to get a poodle himself. And, Fran heard at least one lab owner mumble (after their dog didn't do so well), "I'm getting myself one of those poodles!"

Although Touley was awesome for the entire test, the part where she got the "standing ovation" was the water memory mark. The mark was long and in the middle of a huge amount of foliage and stuff just floating on the water. All the dogs were having trouble with it. But Touley has always been an exceptional marker – even in training she usually out marks the labs on a regular basis! So after delivering the "go bird" – which many dogs were not able to complete, Touley lined herself up for the memory bird. When sent, she made a terrific water entry and took a perfectly straight line. Cindy wasn't sure exactly where the bird was herself and was really hoping she wouldn't have to handle Touley. But, she needn't have worried because Touley never changed her initial line, not even a degree. And when she got to the bird, she just opened her mouth like a crocodile and grabbed it! That's when everyone stood up, applauded and cheered. It was so great!

As Cindy puts it :

I was on cloud nine when the "Finished" level judge came over to shake my hand and tell me what a terrific 'poodle retriever' I had there. It has always been a great concern to me that she work because it's natural to her, not because I forced her into it. Touley is my hunting dog because that's her strongest instinct. I have a new breed and I will never be without a standard poodle in my life! She is the best of both worlds, a great hunter and a pampered house pet. I have never owned a smarter, more devoted and loving animal than Touley! I definitely do not miss all that shedding hair either! I never started out to be the "poodle lady".

I never meant to do the unusual or unexpected. In fact I very much dislike the extra attention running a poodle brings. I just wanted a hunting dog and my husband was allergic to dog hair. I bought a poodle and she turned out to be fabulous. I have never looked back. People often ask how far am I going to take her? I simply reply, "As far as she wants to go." When people come to see her run I want them to see her because she loves it, not because I forced her to do it. I have often heard other handlers suggest I get tougher. I just won't do it! If that tail isn't up then I don't want to see her out there. Maybe it is because we are under scrutiny that this has become so important. You can train any dog to do the work but you can't make them LOVE it! If there is one thing I want people to see it's Touley's natural love and desire to retrieve, nothing is forced or faked. Right down to the part where she slinks slowly out of the water because she wants to hold that duck just a few more seconds.