

A Guide To
The Flat-Coated Retriever

By The Flat-Coated Retriever Society of America, Inc.





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Text and comments

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Illustrations

© Marcia R. Schlehr 1999

Additional sketches by
the Hon. Amelia Jessel

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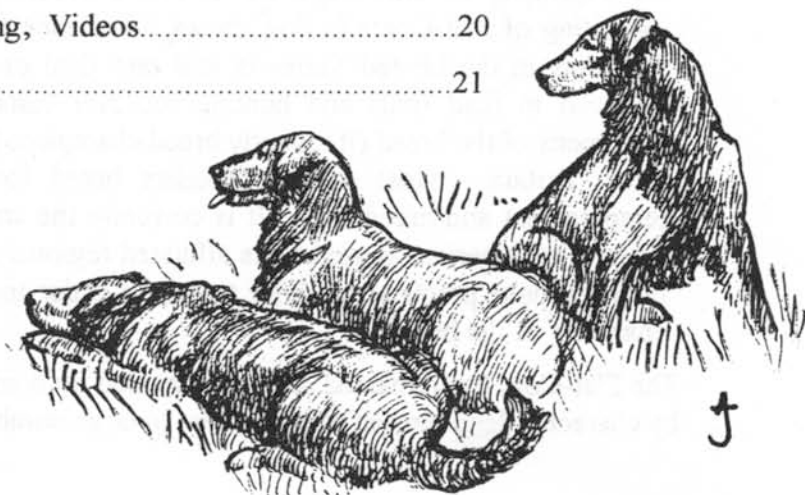
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Illustrations for the Breed Standard by Marcia R. Schlehr

with additional sketches by the Hon. Amelia Jessel

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History of the Breed



In Great Britain the Flat-Coated Retriever was one of the first retriever breeds developed. During the early 1800's improvements in the shotgun allowed large numbers of flying upland game and waterfowl to be shot, creating the need for this specialized gun dog. In addition to locating and delivering shot game tenderly to hand, sportsmen and market hunters required a controllable dog who would locate live game within range of the guns. Dogs used to develop the Flat-Coat, in addition to various water dogs including the St. John's Newfoundland, were spaniels and setters (for game-finding ability), and herding dogs (to improve trainability), all available on the estates of the British landed gentry.

By the mid to late 1800's the breed had developed into a resourceful, birdy gamefinder and a determined, soft-mouthed retriever from land and water. As a direct result of continued development afield, the Flat-Coat today is a bright, enthusiastic, durable dog, whose character and temperament are well suited to being a responsive, versatile and devoted companion.

History - United States - the Flat-Coated Retriever was first admitted to the American Kennel Club in 1915. A few specimens were occasionally imported but no breeding programs were established until Homer Downing of Cleveland, Ohio, with the help of Stanley L. O'Neill and Dr. Nancy Laughton, imported an unrelated dog and bitch in the 1950's. Flat-Coats from Homer's first litter were highly successful in the field, the show ring and obedience trial competition.

THE FLAT-COATED RETRIEVER SOCIETY OF AMERICA was organized in 1960 by the Downing, Moroff and Terroux families. It was the stated purpose of the FCRSA from the beginning to encourage the selective breeding of Flat-Coated Retrievers and the exhibiting of Flat-Coats in dog shows, obedience trials and field trials. The Flat-Coated Retriever in the United States is still *one* dual or multiple purpose breed. Enthusiasts involved in field trials and hunting retriever tests have, so far, usually bred excellent specimens of the breed (frequently breed champions) in the tradition of the gamekeepers of Great Britain. Most serious breeders breed for field ability as well as soundness, temperament and breed type. It is currently the stated goal of the Flat-Coated Retriever Society of America, as well as its affiliated regional clubs, to breed for the dual-purpose or multi-purpose practical working animal in order to preserve the hardiness, longevity and character of the breed.

The Flat-Coat has remained largely unspoiled by commercial breeding because he does not, by character, lend himself to being kept in large numbers or bred on a large scale.

General Appearance

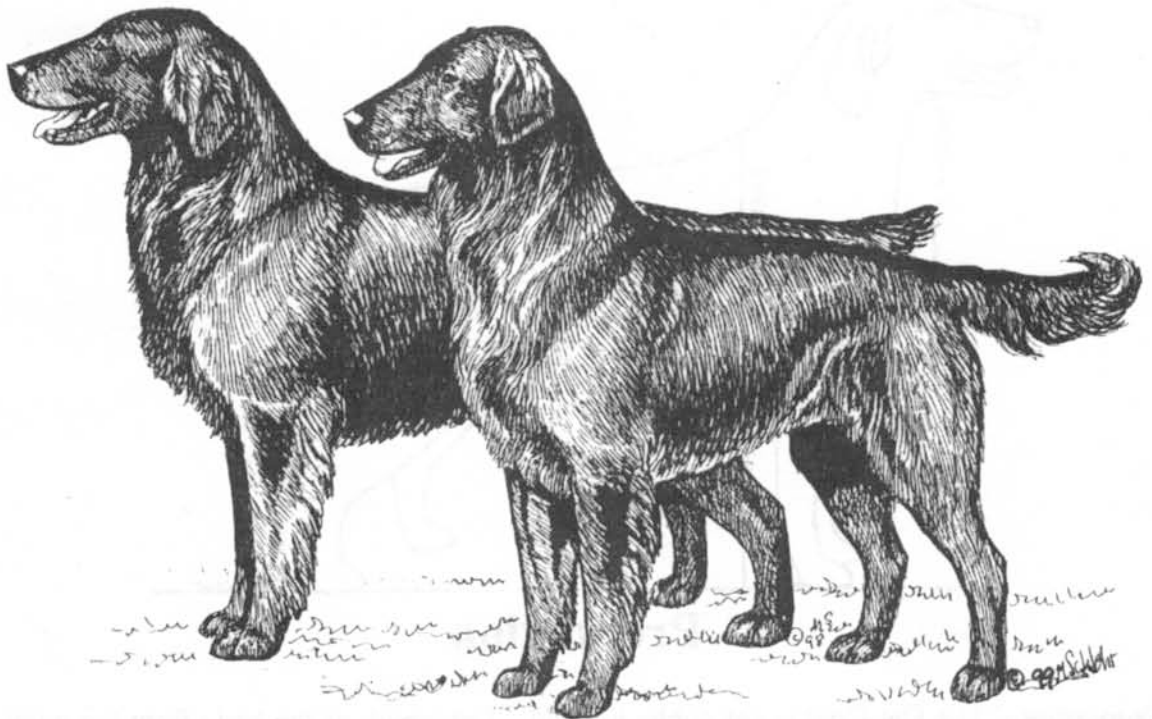
The Flat-Coated Retriever is a versatile family companion hunting retriever with a happy and active demeanor, intelligent expression, and clean lines. The Flat-Coat has been traditionally described as showing *“power without lumber and raciness without weediness”*.

The distinctive and most important features of the Flat-Coat are the silhouette (both moving and standing), smooth effortless movement, head type, coat and character.

In silhouette the Flat-Coat has a long, strong, clean, “one piece” head, which is unique to the breed. Free from exaggeration of stop or cheek, the head is set well into a moderately long neck which flows smoothly into well laid back shoulders. A level topline combined with a deep long rib cage tapering to a moderate tuck-up create the impression of a blunted triangle. The brisket is well developed and the forechest forms a prominent prow.

This utilitarian retriever is well balanced, strong, but elegant; never cobby, short legged or rangy. The coat is thick and flat lying, and the legs and tail are well feathered. A proud carriage, responsive attitude, waving tail and overall look of functional strength, quality, style and symmetry complete the picture of the typical Flat-Coat.

Judging the Flat-Coat moving freely on a loose lead and standing naturally is more important than judging him posed. Honorable scars should not count against the dog.



The Flat-Coat is not a long-haired Labrador Retriever or a black Golden Retriever. The Flat-Coat has a racier build throughout with a unique head and coat, silhouette, movement and character.

Size

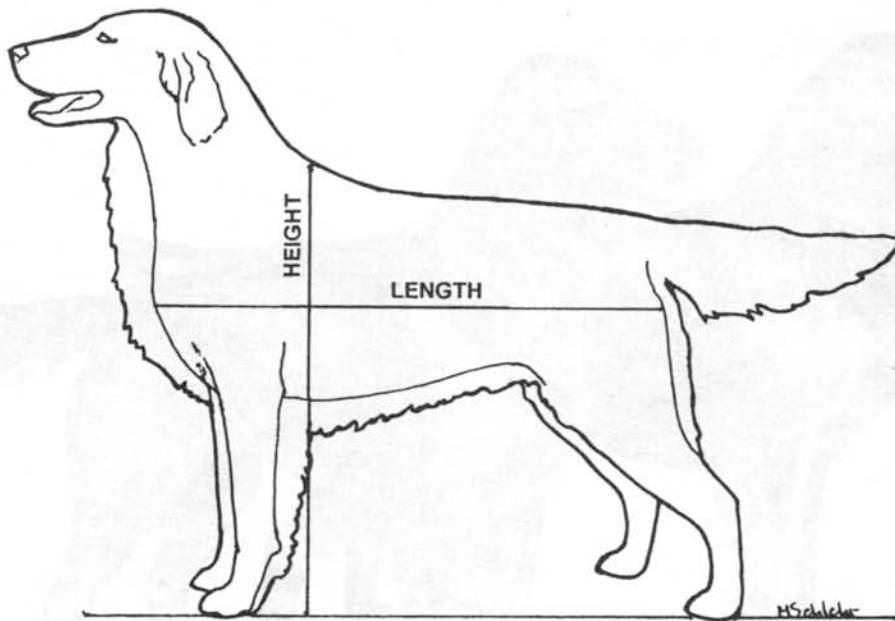
Size – Individuals varying more than an inch either way from the preferred height should be considered not practical for the types of work for which the Flat-Coat was developed. Preferred height is 23 to 24-1/2 inches at the withers for dogs, 22 to 23-1/2 inches for bitches. Since the Flat-Coat is a working hunting retriever he should be shown in lean, hard condition, free of excess weight.

The breed standard allows for a wide range of sizes to accommodate the needs of different types of hunting and terrain. The original breed standard in Great Britain called for a dog of from 60 to 70 pounds in lean, hard working condition. A medium sized dog is preferred.

Substance

Substance – Moderate. Medium bone is flat or oval rather than round; strong but never massive, coarse, weedy or fine. This applies throughout the dog.

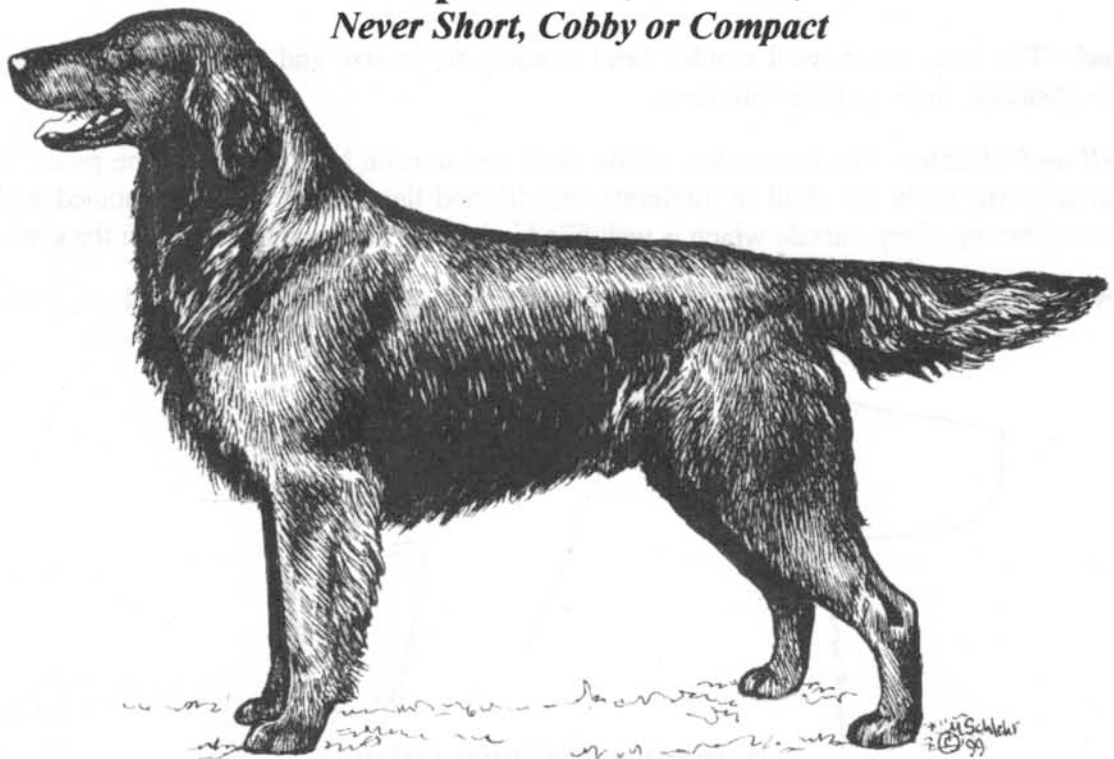
Coat can affect the appearance of substance. A judge should feel the bone of the foreleg to evaluate substance. A profuse coat should never be confused with substance. Coat should be taken into consideration before labeling a dog cloddy or lumbering.



Proportion

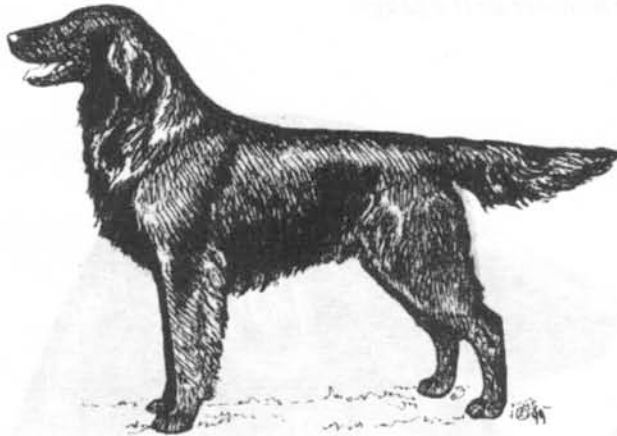
Proportion – The Flat-Coat is not cobby in build. The length of the body from the point of the shoulder to the rearmost projection of the upper thigh is slightly more than the height at the withers. The female may be slightly longer to better accommodate the carrying of puppies.

Proportion (Continued)
Never Short, Cobby or Compact

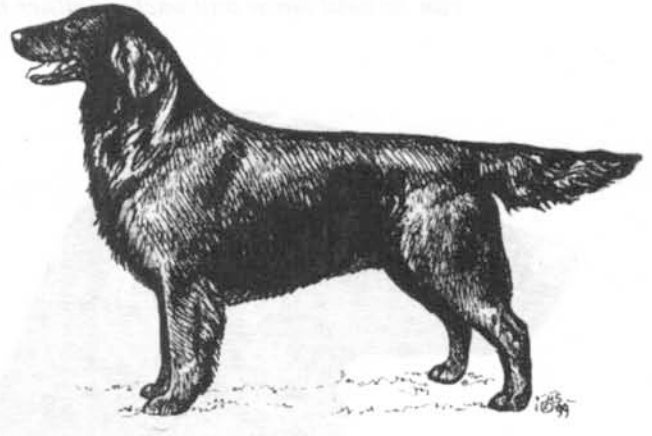


Correct

Hold back hair under chest to determine depth of chest and length of leg.



Body too short, legs too long



Body too long, legs too short

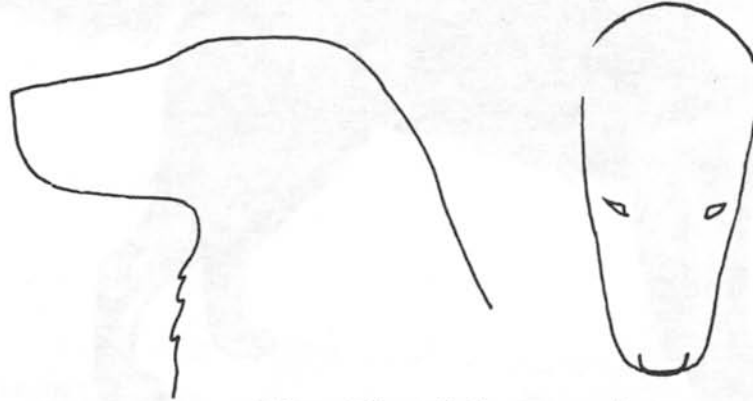
The length of the body of the Flat-Coat is in the rib cage. The loin (distance between the last rib and the pelvic girdle, also known as the coupling) must be strong. The Flat-Coat is not a square dog but is slightly longer than tall. When a Flat-Coat with a short rib cage is bred, it is difficult to recover adequate length of rib cage with subsequent breeding.

Head

Head – The long, clean, well molded head is adequate in size and strength to retrieve a large pheasant, duck or hare with ease.

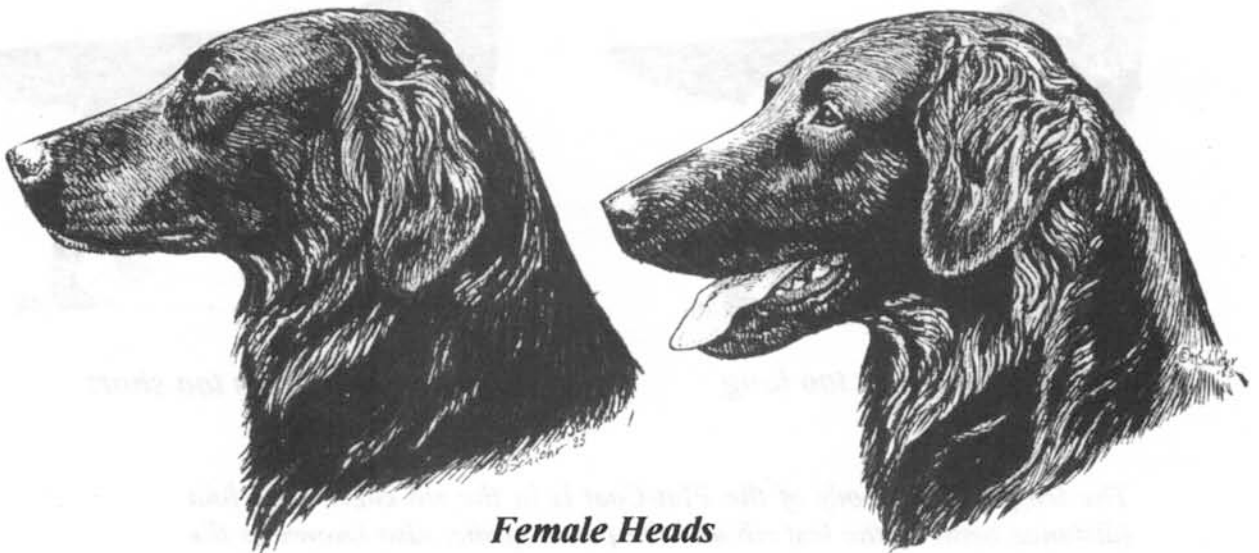
Skull and Muzzle – The impression of the skull and muzzle being “cast in one piece” is created by the fairly flat skull of moderate breadth and flat, clean cheeks, combined with the long, strong, deep muzzle which is well filled in before, between and beneath the eyes.

Viewed from above, the muzzle is nearly equal in length and breadth to the skull.



“One Piece” Construction

The outlines of the head are shown without the ear because the ears should be relaxed and blend into the hair of the neck when the head is evaluated. The ears can be held down and back by either the handler or the judge.



Female Heads

Stop - There is a gradual, slight, barely perceptible stop, avoiding a down- or dish-faced appearance. Brows are slightly raised and mobile, giving life to the expression. Stop must be evaluated in profile so that it will not be confused with the raised brow.

Head (Continued)

Occiput - not accentuated, the skull forming a gentle curve where it fits well into the neck.

Expression - alert, intelligent and kind.

Eyes - are set widely apart. Medium sized, almond shaped, dark brown or hazel; not large, round or yellow. Eye rims are self-colored and tight.

Ears - relatively small, well set on, lying close to the side of the head and thickly feathered. Not low set (houndlike or setterish).

Nose - Large open nostrils. Black on black dogs, brown on liver dogs.

Lips - fairly tight, firm, clean and dry to minimize the retention of feathers.

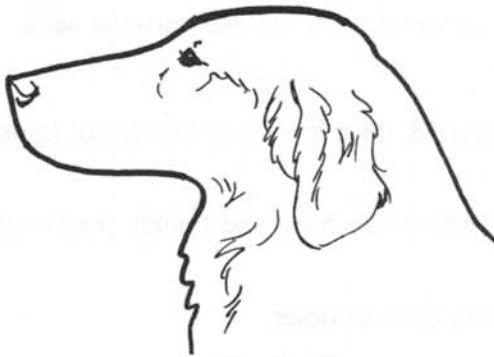
Jaws - long and strong, capable of carrying a hare or a pheasant.



Male Heads

A determined hunting dog with a small head and mouth can retrieve a large bird, but will not be able to hold it as gently and securely and retrieve repetitively with as much stamina and longevity as the dog with the long head, long muzzle and large, strong jaws.

Head Profile



Correct



Short muzzle, excess stop, dish faced



Downfaced



Weak; snipey muzzle

Bite

Bite – Scissors bite preferred, level bite acceptable. Broken teeth should not count against the dog.

Severe Faults – Wry and undershot or overshot bites with a noticeable gap must be severely penalized.



Scissors



Level



Overshot



Undershot



Wry

The Flat-Coated Retriever is a long-headed dog, and the upper and lower jaws do not grow equally. A 6 to 12 month old puppy may be allowed a “roomy” scissors bite (top over bottom). A puppy of this age with a level bite could possibly become undershot at full maturity, but should be judged as it appears “on the day”.

Head (Continued)



Correct Eye & Ear



*Large, Round
Loose Lower Lid*



*Yellow
(Light)*

Eye Faults



Set Too Low



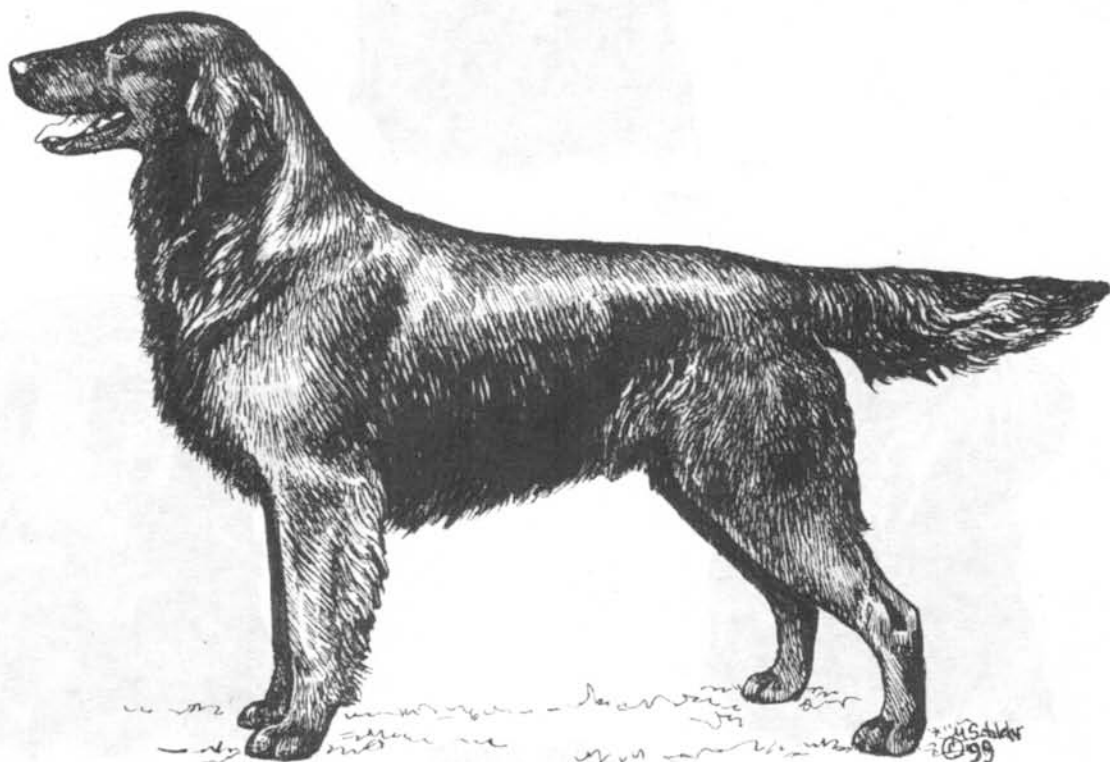
Set Too High

Ear Faults

Neck – Topline – Body

Neck - strong and slightly arched for retrieving strength. Moderately long to allow for easy seeking of the trail. Free from throatiness. Coat on neck is untrimmed.

A long thin neck is too weak to pick up and carry large birds with stamina and longevity. A short neck makes it more difficult for the retriever to follow a trail and pick up birds off the ground. The Flat-Coat has a strong neck that is moderately long.



Topline - strong and level.

Body - Chest (Brisket) – Deep, reaching to the elbow and only moderately broad.

Forechest - Prow prominent and well developed.

Rib cage - deep, showing good length from forechest to last rib (to allow ample space for all body organs), and only moderately broad. The foreribs fairly flat showing a gradual spring, well arched in the center of the body but rather lighter towards the loin.

Underline - Deep chest tapering to a moderate tuck up.

Loin - strong, well muscled and long enough to allow for agility, freedom of movement and length of stride, but never weak or loosely coupled.

Croup - slopes very slightly; rump moderately broad and well muscled.

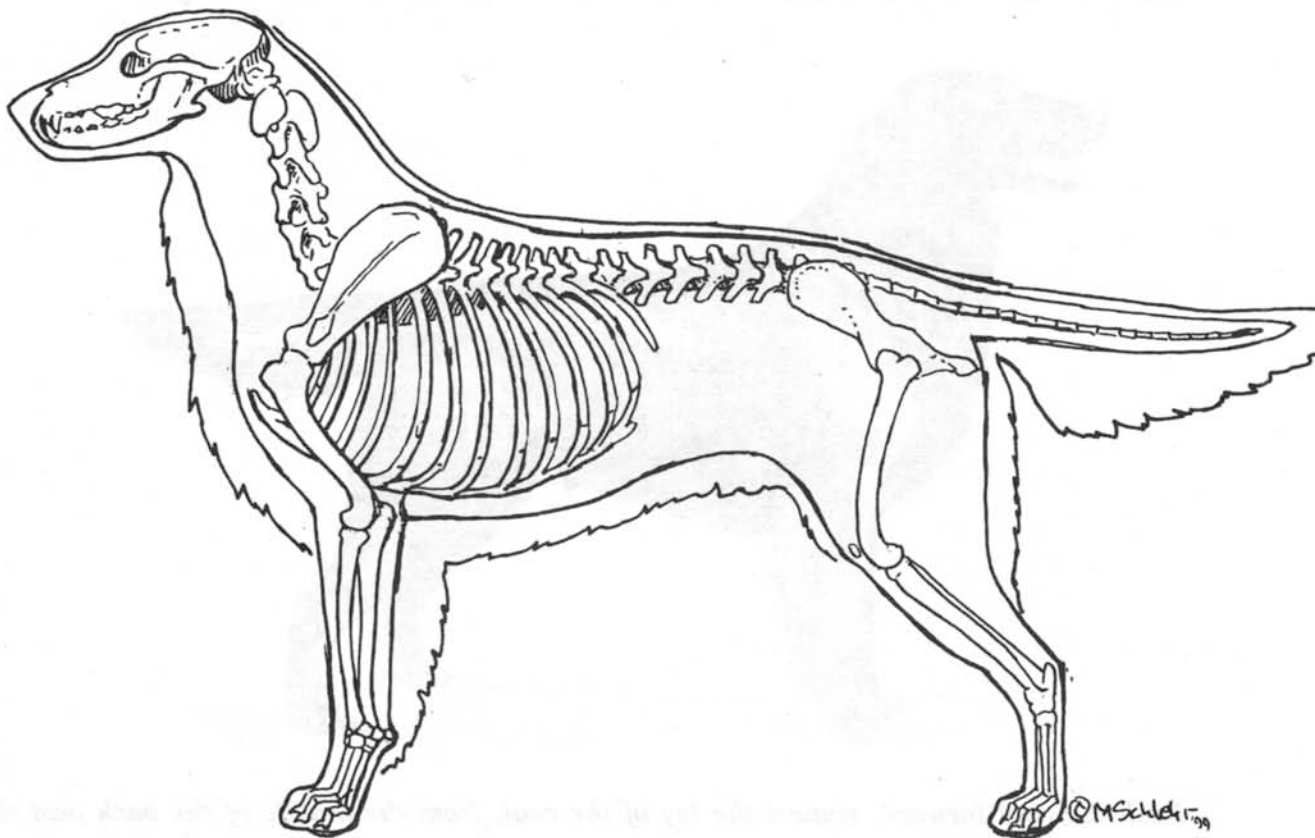
Tail - fairly straight, well set on, with bone reaching approximately to the hock joint. When the dog is in motion, the tail is carried happily but without curl as a smooth extension of the topline, never much above the level of the back.

The prominent prow is an indication of a well laid-back shoulder and a well developed chest cavity. This also contributes to the Flat-Coat's unique silhouette.

Forequarters - Hindquarters

Forequarters - *Shoulders* long, well laid back shoulder blade with *upper arm* of approximately equal length to allow for efficient reach. Musculature wiry rather than bulky. *Elbows* clean, close to the body and set well back under the withers. *Forelegs* straight and strong with medium bone of good quality. *Pasterns* slightly sloping and strong. *Dewclaws* - removal of dewclaws is optional. *Feet* oval or round. Medium sized and tight with well arched toes and thick pads.

Hindquarters - Powerful with angulation in balance with the front assembly. *Upper thighs* powerful and well muscled. *Stifle* - good turn of stifle with sound, strong joint. *Second thighs* (stifle to hock joint) - second or lower thigh as long as or only slightly longer than upper thigh. *Hock* - hock joint strong, well let down. *Dewclaws* - there are no hind dewclaws. *Feet* - oval or round. Medium sized and tight with well arched toes and thick pads.



Viewed from above, the Flat-Coated Retriever is approximately the same width at the chest, the broadest point of rib spring and the hindquarters. The chest should not be broader or narrower than the hindquarters.

Hindquarters must be powerful to enable the dog to push off or to jump. Straight stifled or over-angulated rear quarters should be severely penalized

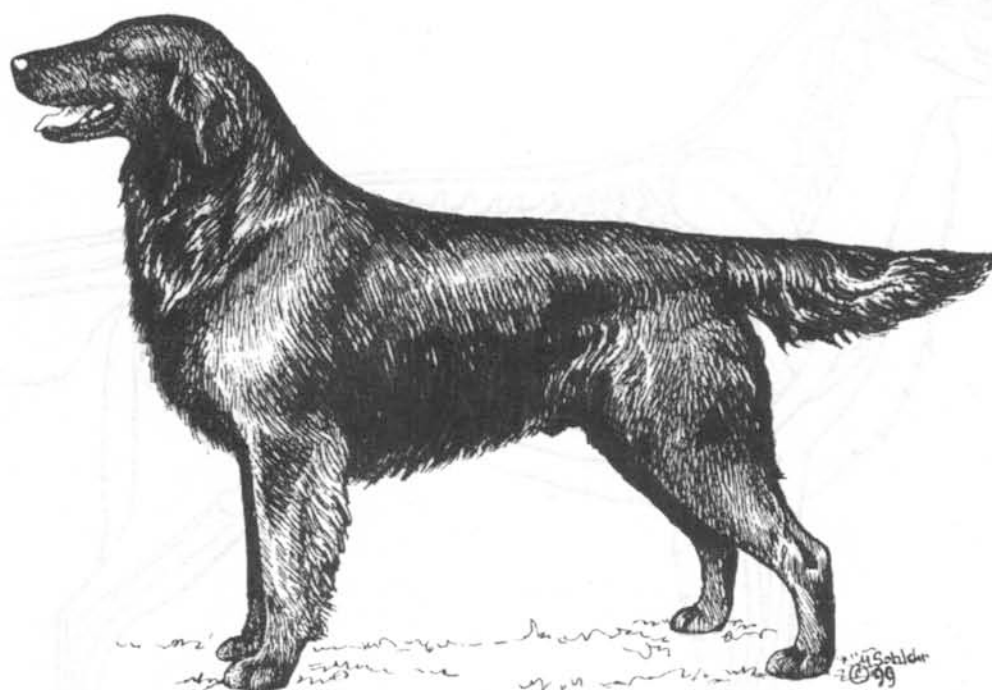
Coat

Coat - Coat is of moderate length, density and fullness, with a high luster. The ideal coat is straight and flat lying. A slight waviness is permissible but the coat is not curly, wooly, short, silky or fluffy.

The Flat-Coat is a working retriever and the coat must provide protection from all types of weather, water and ground cover. This requires a coat of sufficient texture, length and fullness to allow for adequate insulation.

When the dog is in full coat the ears, front, chest, back of forelegs, thighs and underside of tail are thickly feathered without being bushy, stringy or silky. Mane of longer heavier coat on the neck extending over the withers and shoulders is considered typical, especially in the male dog, and can cause the neck to appear thicker and the withers higher, sometimes causing the appearance of a dip behind the withers.

Since the Flat-Coat is a hunting retriever, the feathering is not excessively long.



Push the coat forward, against the lay of the coat, from the middle of the back past the withers, to determine length of coat, fullness and lay. It is normal to see the dog's skin as the hair parts. The hairs should be straight, the coat full, and the coat should fall back into place naturally.

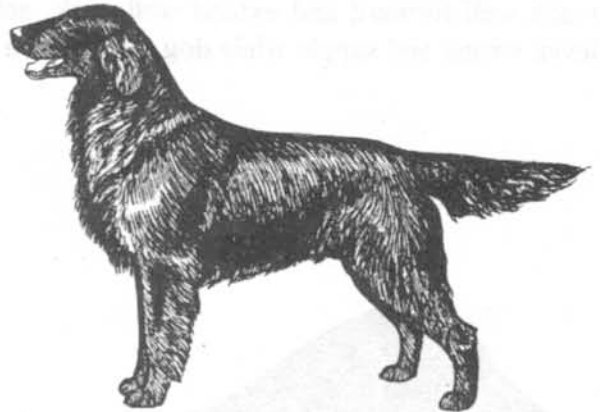
Checking the length of coat on the sides of the body, the hair may not be as long as on the withers, but should be much longer than it is on the fronts of the legs. The coat on the neck of the bitch might not be as full as on the dog.

Trimming

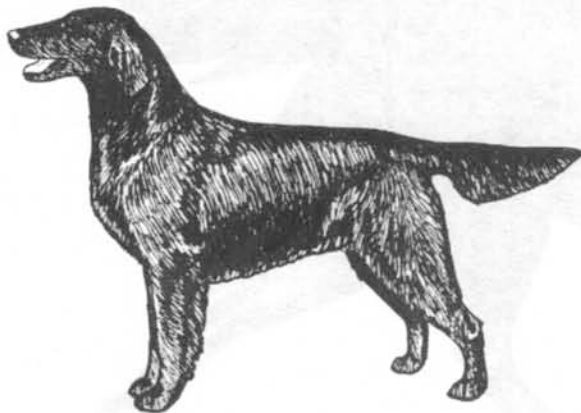
Trimming – The Flat-Coat is shown with as natural a coat as possible and must not be penalized for lack of trimming, as long as the coat is clean and well brushed. Tidying of ears, feet, underline and tip of tail is acceptable. Whiskers serve a specific function and it is preferred that they not be trimmed. Shaving or barbering of the head, neck or body coat must be severely penalized.



Untrimmed - Correct

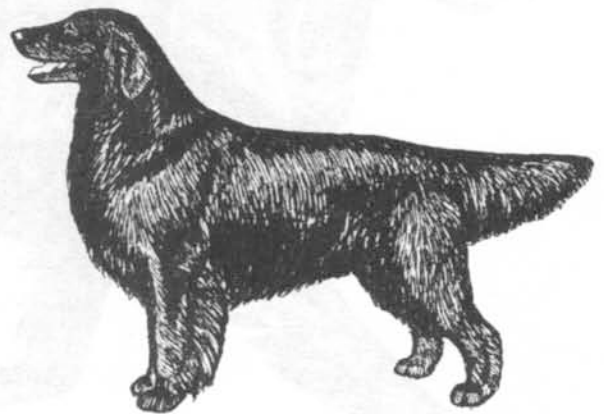


Tidied - Correct



Over-Trimmed

Front and Sides of Neck and Prow



Over-Trimmed

Also Showing Excessive Coat and Feathering

If a judge feels that the only worthy animal present in the ring is over-trimmed, he should award a second place ribbon. If an over-trimmed Flat-Coat Retriever is presented to a judge in the Sporting Group, that dog should not receive either serious consideration or group placement. If the judge only suspects the dog is over-trimmed, and the dog does not have heavy coat on the neck and shoulders, the dog should be considered to not have adequate coat and not be worthy of consideration anyway.

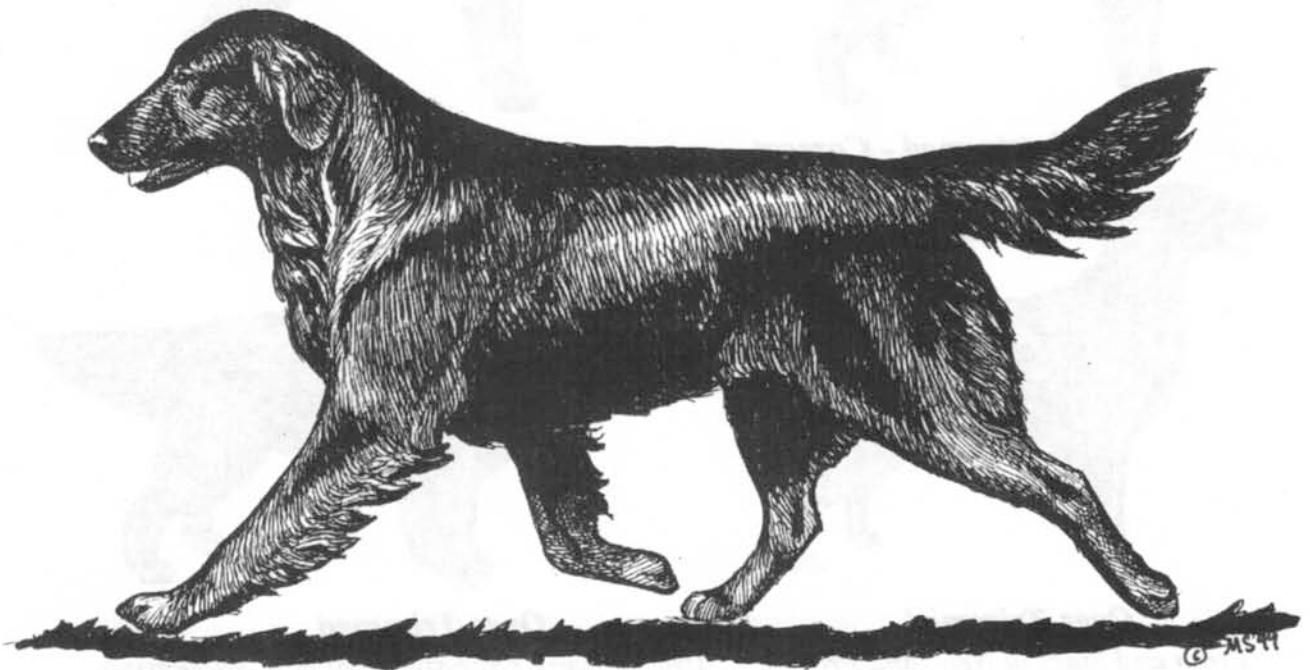
Color

Color – Solid black or solid liver. **Disqualification** – Yellow, cream or any color other than black or liver.

The yellow color in the Flat-Coated Retriever is a similar color to that seen in the Labrador Retriever.

Gait

Gait – Sound, efficient movement is of critical importance to a hunting retriever. The Flat-Coat viewed from the side covers ground efficiently and movement appears balanced, free flowing and well coordinated, never choppy, mincing or ponderous. Front and rear legs reach well forward and extend well back, achieving long clean strides. Topline appears level, strong and supple while dog is in motion.



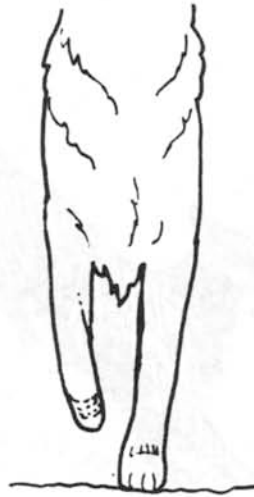
A true appraisal of gait is best achieved with the dog moving at a working trot on a loose lead. Preferred movement should demonstrate mental, muscular and skeletal coordination with balance and structural integrity. The efficient hunting retriever will cover a maximum amount of ground in the fewest strides with the least effort.

“Supple” means that the topline of the Flat-Coat is strong but flexible, not rigid and never soft or weak.

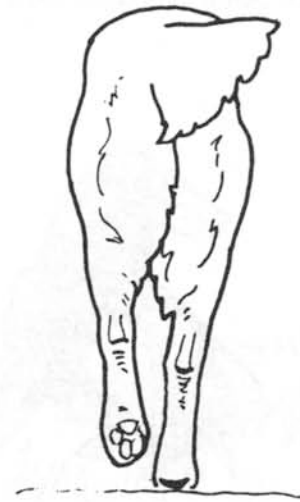
The dog should move freely and with confidence. The tail should not be tucked or lifeless. When moving, the tail is carried behind the dog, waving but not curled or held much above the level of the topline.

Front and Rear Movement

"Sound, efficient movement... clean strides."



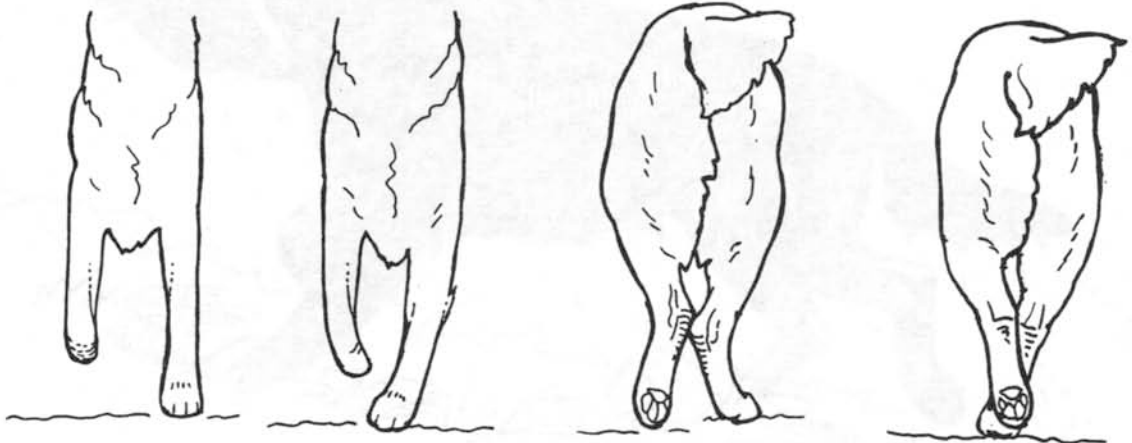
Correct Front Movement



Correct Rear Movement

Viewed from front and rear, the column of bones from shoulder joint to foot and from hip joint to foot remains in a straight line, converging toward a center line under the body as speed increases. There is no unsteadiness or twisting of joints as the dog trots.

Faults Commonly Seen in Flat-Coats



Wide Front

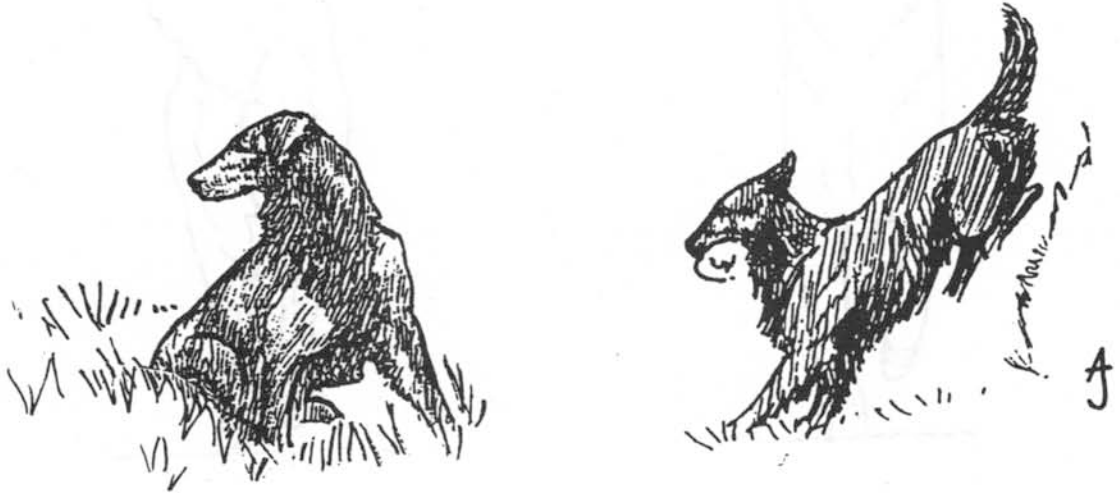
Toeing In

Cow Hocks

Crossing Over

Summary

The Flat-Coat is a strong but elegant, cheerful hunting retriever. Quality of structure, balance and harmony of all parts both standing and in motion are essential. As a breed whose purpose is of a utilitarian nature – structure, condition and attitude should give every indication of being suited for hard work.



To fulfill its purpose, the Flat-Coat must be an athletic, free moving, supple dog, able to twist and turn and jump or scramble easily up a bank. He is longer on leg with corresponding length of body to allow for freedom of movement.



Temperament

Temperament - Character is a primary and outstanding asset of the Flat-Coat. He is a responsive, loving member of the family, a versatile working dog, multi-talented, sensible, bright and tractable. In competition the Flat-Coat demonstrates *stability* and a desire to please with a confident, happy and outgoing attitude characterized by a wagging tail. Nervous, hyperactive, apathetic, shy or obstinate behavior is undesirable.

Severe Fault - Unprovoked aggressive behavior toward people or animals is *totally* unacceptable.



Dogs which attack or threaten to attack a person in the show ring must be disqualified. Dogs which will not allow the usual examination by the judge, or which attack or threaten another dog in the show ring, should be excused and not judged. The judge has the right to withhold any award from dogs demonstrating any sort of unacceptable behavior. Judges should consult a current copy of the Rules and Regulations Applying to Dog Shows for up-to-date information.

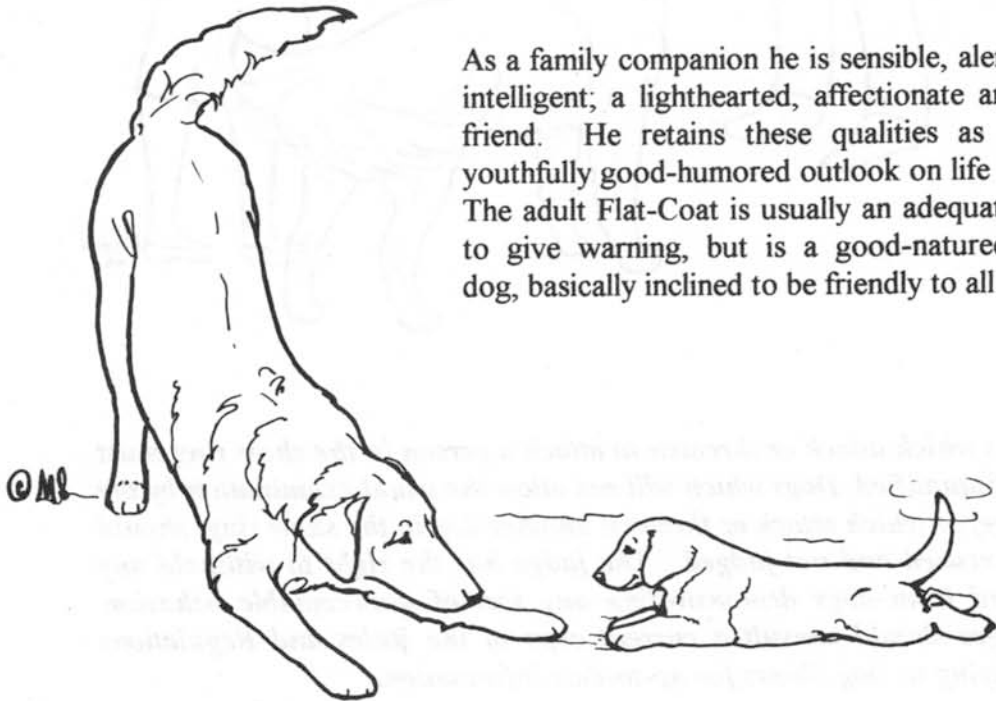
Character

Temperament – Character is as important to the evaluation of stock by a potential breeder as any other aspect of the breed standard. The Flat-Coat is primarily a family companion hunting retriever. He is keen and birdy, flushing within gun range, as well as a determined, resourceful retriever on land and water. He has a great desire to hunt with self-reliance and an uncanny ability to adapt to changing circumstances on a variety of upland game and waterfowl.



The Flat-Coat excels as a companion for the individual hunter, more than for the stylized sphere of field trials, where his natural hunting ability and bird sense are constrained to rigid guidelines. In the United States Flat-Coats have performed well in Hunting Retriever Tests and Derby and Qualifying levels of field trials. At this time, one Flat-Coat has earned an Amateur Field Trial Championship.

The Flat-Coat is bred to hunt within gun range, flush and retrieve from land and water. Without adequate training, and confinement when not supervised, the Flat-Coat will develop a habit of hunting for himself, running and chasing. Their extreme birdiness, love of the hunt and love of the run can then cause them to "forget where the gun is" when hunting for the owner.



As a family companion he is sensible, alert and highly intelligent; a lighthearted, affectionate and adaptable friend. He retains these qualities as well as his youthfully good-humored outlook on life into old age. The adult Flat-Coat is usually an adequate alarm dog to give warning, but is a good-natured, optimistic dog, basically inclined to be friendly to all.

Character (Continued)

The Flat-Coat is a cheerful, devoted companion who requires and appreciates living with and interacting as a member of his family. To reach full potential in any endeavor he absolutely must have a strong personal bond and affectionate individual attention.



The Flat-Coat's personality does not lend itself to being kenneled, crated excessively (all day and all night), or to being a backyard dog. A Flat-Coat must be a member of the family and participate in family activities.

DISQUALIFICATION - *Yellow, cream or any color other than black or liver.*

Breed Standard - Copyright © 1990 by The American Kennel Club
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Effective October 30, 1990

Additional Research

Books

A Review of the Flat-Coated Retriever by Dr. Nancy Laughton - 2nd Edition, 1980.
Pelham Books, London UK (Available through the FCRSA)

The Complete Flat-Coated Retriever by Paddy Petch - 1988. Boydell Press, UK; Howell Book House, USA (No longer in print)

The Flat-Coated Retriever Today by Joan Mason - 1996. Pub. By Ringpress, UK; Howell Book House, USA

The World of Dogs - Flat-Coated Retrievers by Brenda Phillips - 1996. Kingdom Books, UK; distributed by TFH Publications, USA

The New Dogsteps by Rachel Page Elliott - 2nd Ed. 1993. Howell Book House, USA

Dog Locomotion and Gait Analysis by Curtis M. Brown - 1986. Hoflin Publishing Co., USA

K-9 Structure and Terminology by Edward M. Gilbert, Jr. and Thelma R. Brown - 1995.
Howell Book House, USA

Howell Book House is a division of Simon & Shuster /Macmillan Publishing, New York.

Videos

The Flat-Coated Retriever Breed Standard Video, American Kennel Club

Gait - Observing Dogs in Motion, American Kennel Club

Dogsteps, A Study of Canine Structure and Movement, Rachel Page Elliott,
American Kennel Club

Field Testing Your Retriever - The AKC Hunting Test for Retrievers,
American Kennel Club

With Courage and Style - The Field Trial Retriever, American Kennel Club

All the above videos are available from the American Kennel Club.

