





**Published by the  
Flat-Coated Retriever Society  
of America, Inc. 1999**

Text and comments

© Flat-Coated Retriever Society  
of America, Inc. 1999

Illustrations

© Marcia R. Schlehr 1999

Additional sketches by  
the Hon. Amelia Jessel

Drawings of teeth, p. 8, are from  
*A Study of The Golden Retriever*,  
© by Marcia R. Schlehr 1994

**Illustrated Breed  
Standard Committee**

*Chairmen,*

Sally J. Terroux and Helen K. Szostak

Valerie Bernhardt

Elizabeth Millikin

Barbara Conner

*Alternate:*

Gillian Impey

§ § §

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Flat-Coated Retriever Society of America, Inc. and, for pertinent illustrations, from the artist, Marcia R. Schlehr.

# 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.

## Size

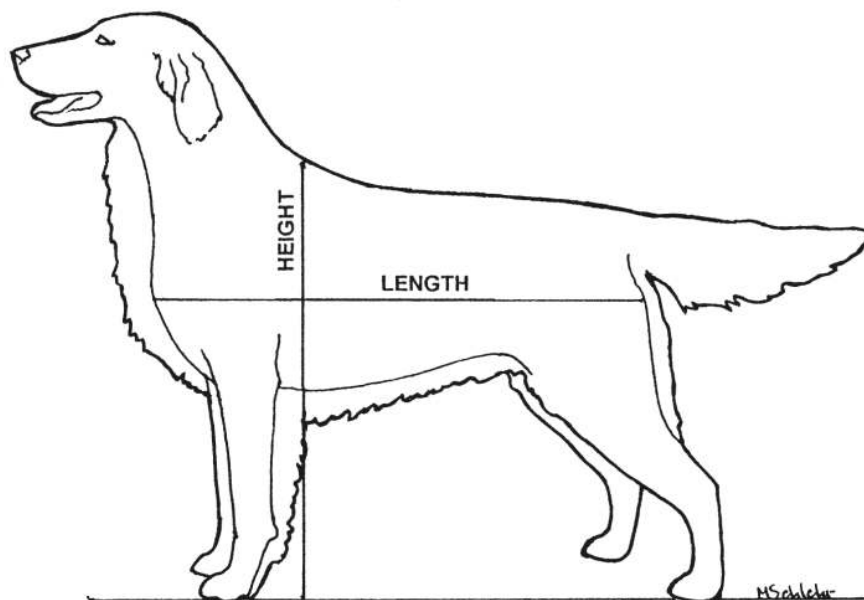
**Size** – Individuals varying more than an inch either way from the preferred height should be considered not practical for the types of work for which the Flat-Coat was developed. Preferred height is 23 to 24-1/2 inches at the withers for dogs, 22 to 23-1/2 inches for bitches. Since the Flat-Coat is 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.

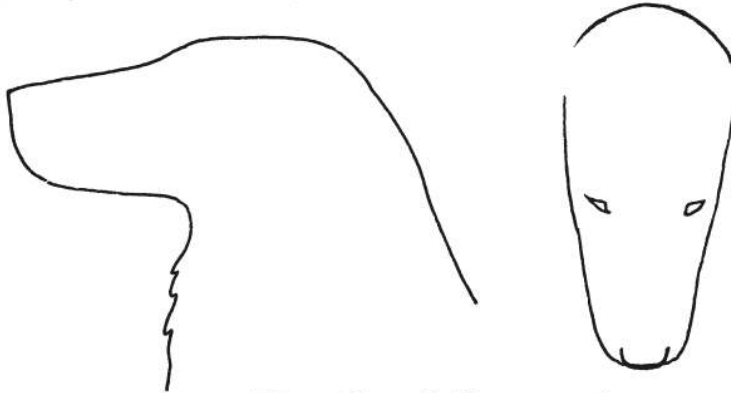


# Head

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

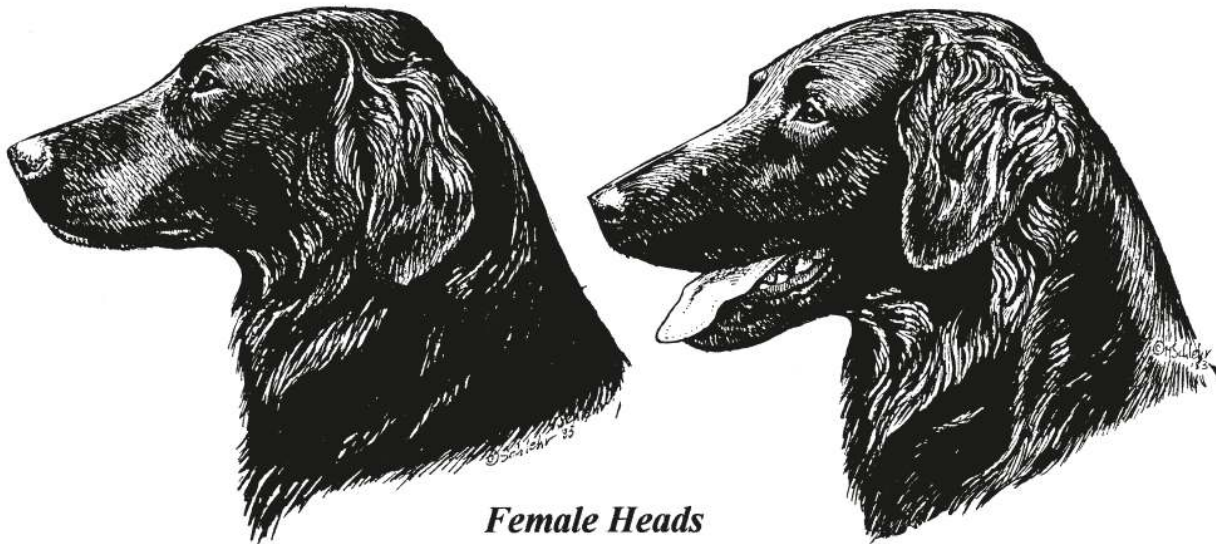
**Skull and Muzzle** – The impression of the skull and muzzle being “cast in one piece” is created by the fairly flat skull of moderate breadth and flat, clean cheeks, combined with the long, strong, deep muzzle which is well filled in before, between and beneath the eyes.

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 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*



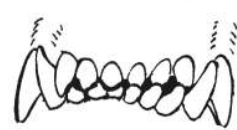
*Level*



*Overshot*



*Undershot*



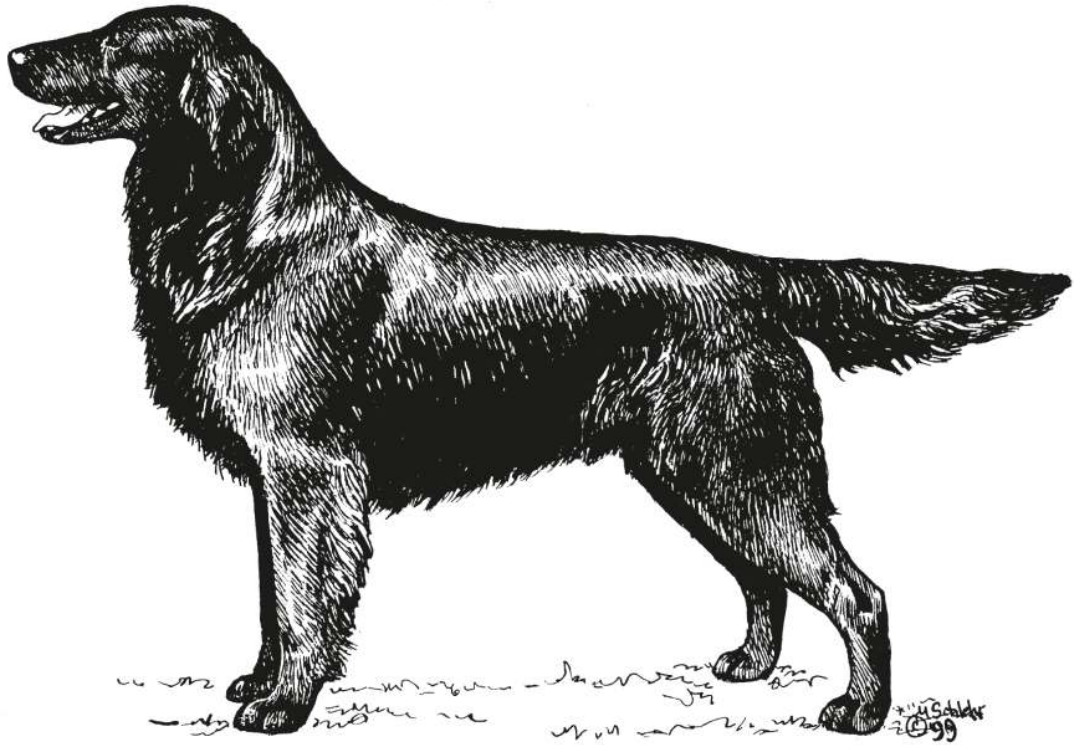
*Wry*

*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”.*

## 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.*



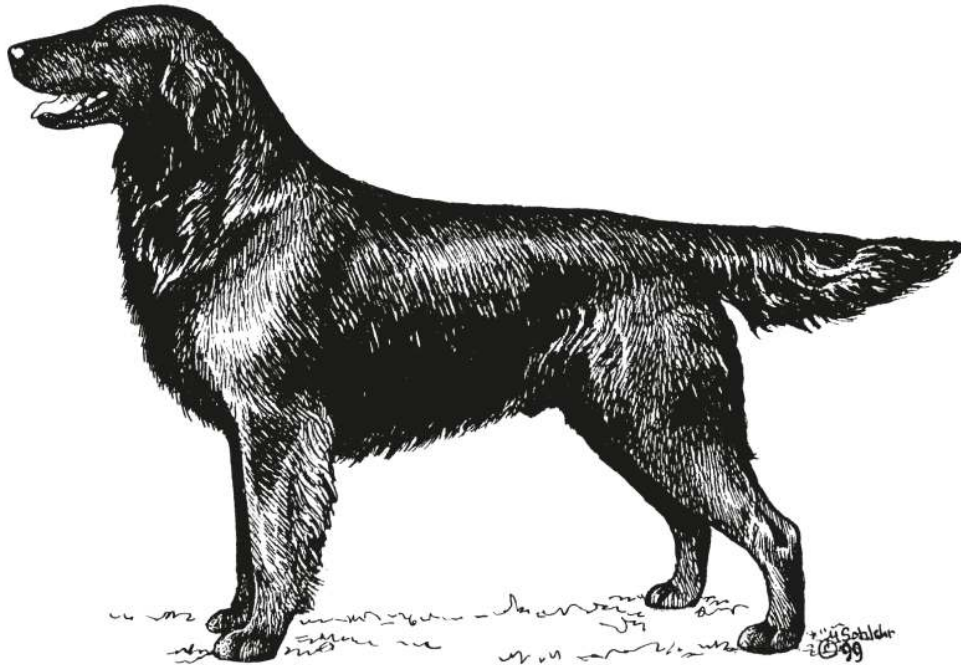
## Coat

**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, woolly, 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.



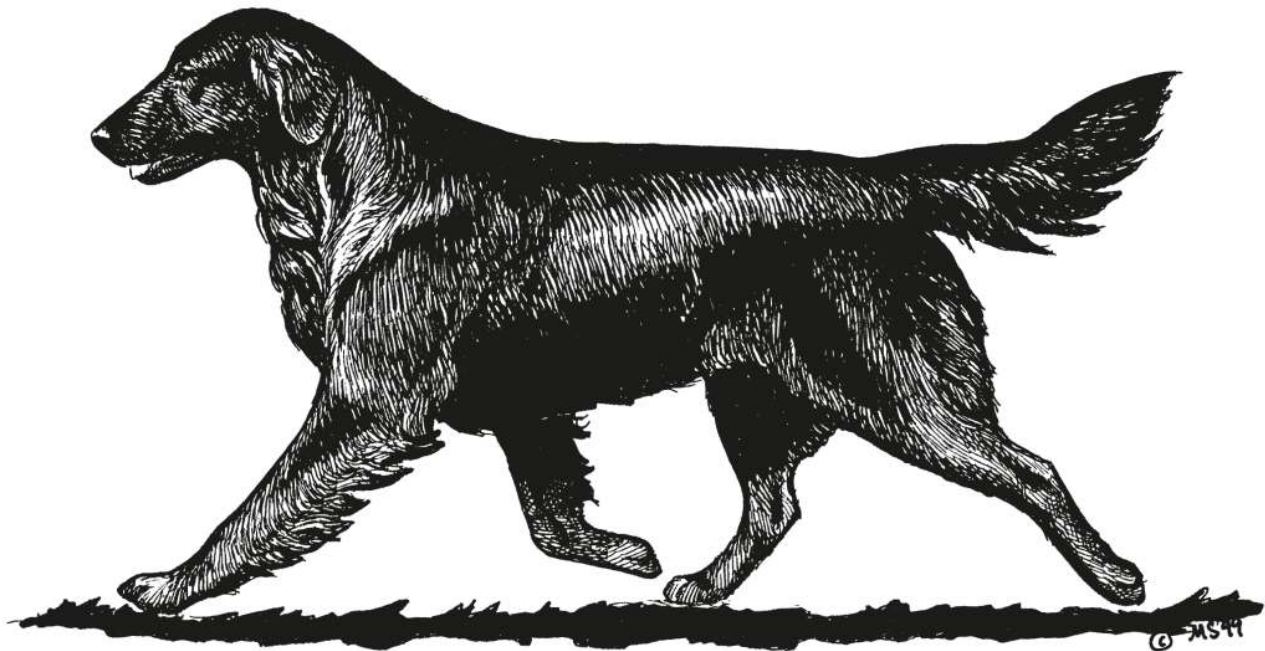
***Push the coat forward, against the lay of the coat, from the middle of the back past the withers, to determine length of coat, fullness and lay. It is normal to see the dog's skin as the hair parts. The hairs should be straight, the coat full, and the coat should fall back into place naturally.***

***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.***



## 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.



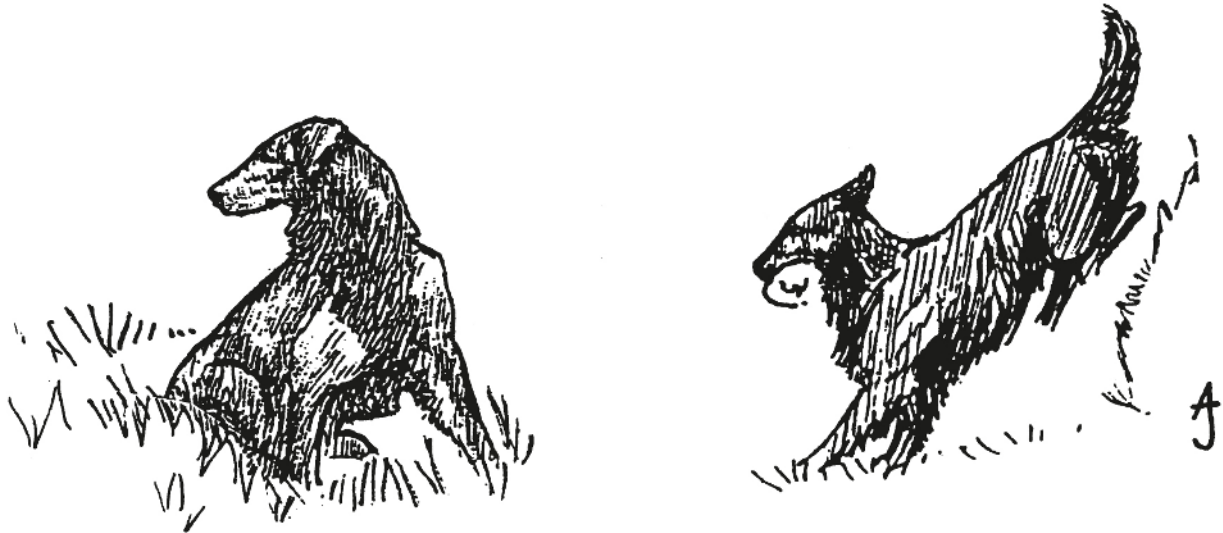
*A true appraisal of gait is best achieved with the dog moving at a working trot on a loose lead. Preferred movement should demonstrate mental, muscular and skeletal coordination with balance and structural integrity. The efficient hunting retriever will cover a maximum amount of ground in the fewest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

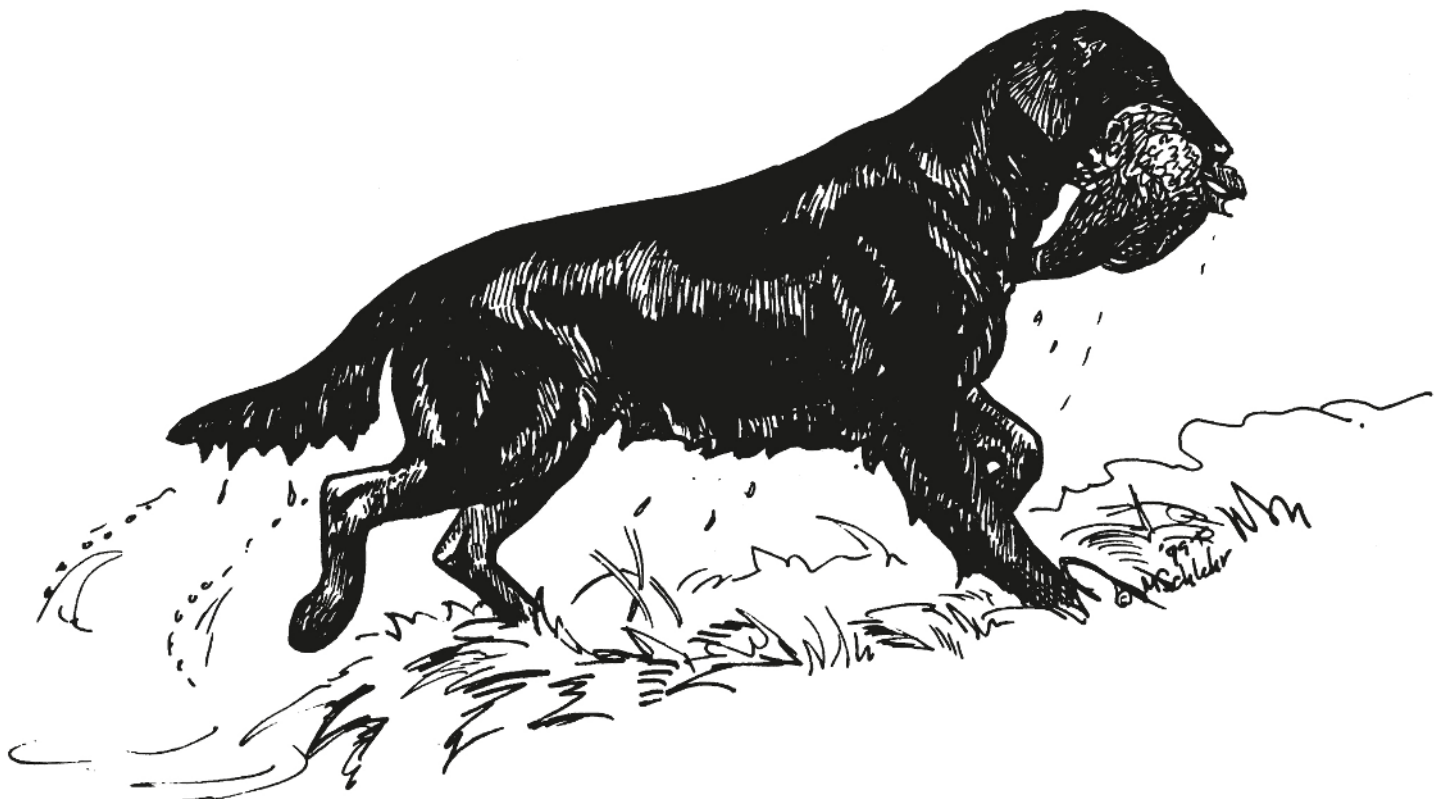
*The dog should move freely and with confidence. The tail should not be tucked or lifeless. When moving, the tail is carried behind the dog, waving but not curled or held much above the level of the topline.*

## 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.

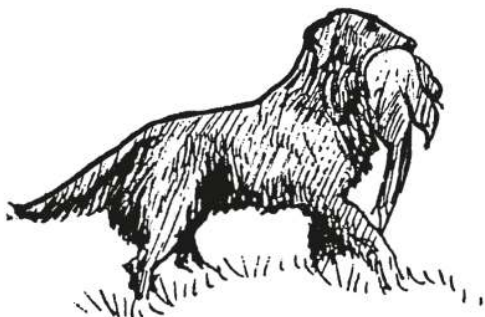


*To fulfill its purpose, the Flat-Coat must be an athletic, free moving, supple dog, able to twist and turn and jump or scramble easily up a bank. He is longer on leg with corresponding length of body to allow for freedom of movement.*



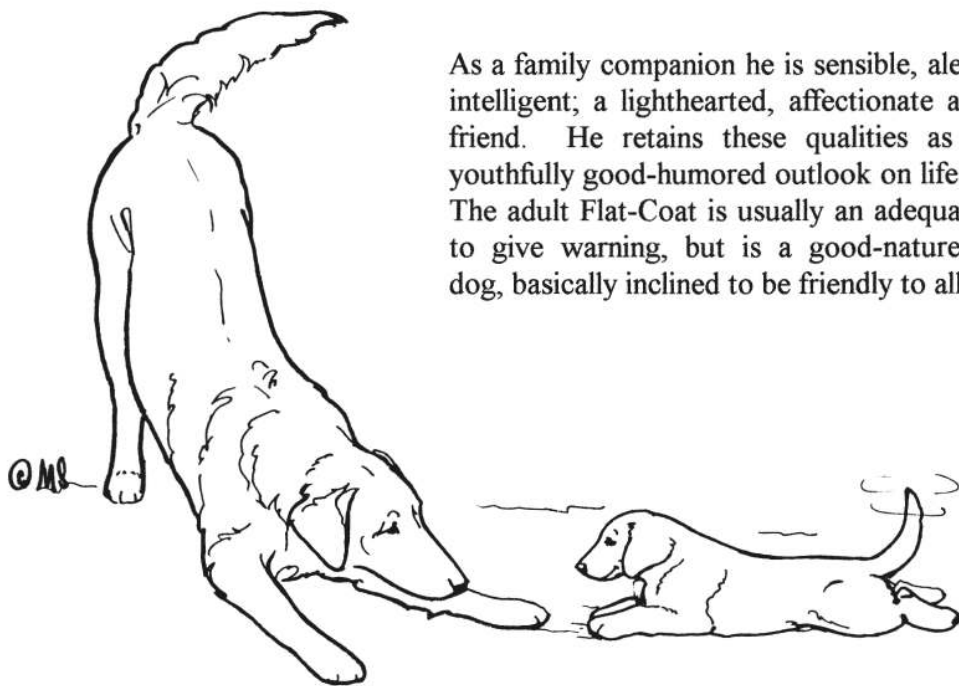
## Character

**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.



## **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.