

DON'T WORRY BE HAPPY

At Home with Your Flat-Coated Retriever

By Claire Koshar

If my Flat-Coated Retrievers could choose a theme song, surely it would be the 1980's hit "Don't Worry Be Happy". At home, the Flat-Coat is a happy and loving member of his family. His sweetness is part of his intrinsic charm.

In her authoritative book on the breed, *A Review of the Flat-Coated Retriever*, Dr. Nancy Laughton

described the Flat-Coat as "a canine Peter Pan". He is the dog who never wants to grow up, an optimist who remains young at heart to his last days. These are active, energetic dogs and they mature very slowly. This can be frustrating for someone who expects to accomplish the complete training of one at a young age. The Flat-Coat will learn whatever you are smart enough to teach him. Quiet, firm and upbeat

training works the best. Flat-Coats need to know that they are pleasing you. They respond to warm praise and, of course, a cookie. If there is too much repetition or pressure they seem to think, "Well, if you weren't happy with the other five times let me show you something more creative."

In the house, our dogs want to stay close. Bess can be fast asleep at my feet but if I get up from my computer she



**“THERE IS A JOYOUSNESS
ABOUT THESE DOGS,
AS CHARACTERISTIC AS
*their distinctive heads, soft
expression and shining coats.*”**



is instantly awake and following me. I would describe the Flat-Coat far more a “guardian dog” than, in any way, a “guard dog”. We generally say that they might lick you to death. A devoted family dog, he really knows no strangers. He is gentle with children but in his adolescence, his sheer size and enthusiasm can be overwhelming. In our family there were rules for both children and dogs. For the children there was no running, no screaming and no rough play with puppies. And to be fair, the puppies learned that jumping and nipping were off-limits. As with all breeds, early training is the most effective.

First and foremost, the Flat-Coat is a retriever. He will carry anything

in his mouth that he can lift. If you don't want your underclothing proudly delivered to the company, it would be a good idea to keep it out of reach. The characteristics of trainability and kindness that makes him a good retriever are just as valued in the family dog. It is not uncommon for the dog who was Best of Breed on Sunday to be training for a hunt title on Monday and trekking with his family on the next weekend. The Flat-Coat is an adaptable dog and he can be happy in a wide range of activities as long as he has adequate exercise and the companionship of his people.

From a naughty twinkle in a puppy's eye to the final thump of his tail, the



Flat-Coat sees life as a happy adventure. Every day my dogs remind me to see life as they do. Hey, life's good. Don't Worry. Be Happy. ■

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About the Author:

Claire Kosbar, FCRSA member for 40 years, its past Secretary and Parliamentarian and a Life Member of the Society, is the author of A Guide to Dog Sports: From Beginners to Winners. Her Flat-Coated Retrievers have held titles in conformation, field and obedience. She has judged Sweepstakes at National Specialties in the U.S. and Canada.