

Dante wins the Flat Coated Retriever Society (FCRS) Open Stake in 2019



– being the first foreign dog ever to win the trial

Photo: Caroline Pettersson

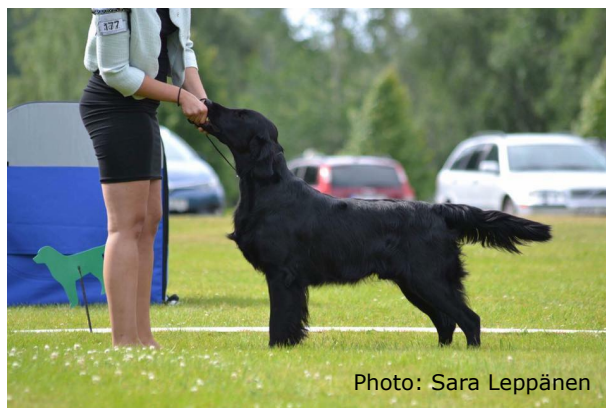
Intro: Ingemar Borelius
Field trial report: Linda Vågberg

Over the last two decades it's been quite obvious that the Flatcoat world is getting closer. Valuable breeding material is shared more frequently between the countries. Nordic dogs with the Swedish Almanza dogs in the forefront, have made their mark at Crufts competing for the very top honours during the last fifteen years. A number of Flatcoats with continental European and Nordic dogs behind have been in the prize list at the FCRS field trials. A Swedish bitch, Coatfloat Marimekko, was third in 2012 and the Norwegian dog, Waternuts High and Mighty, was best dog with a CoM in 2018 at the FCRS Open stake.

This year another Swedish dog, Skeppartorps Enjoy the Freedom, handled by his owner Linda Vågberg, took another big step winning the FCRS Open stake. This dog, being bred from some of the best Swedish dual-purpose lines, is an excellent representative of the "Swedish model", where a large share of all stud dogs is tested in the field, an efficient mean to retain the typical Flat coat characters. It's an interesting fact as well that Hillary Rosser (Mahinda) and some other leading British pro work breeders are turning to Nordic breeders to obtain outcross blood from some of the best working lines. At last we could start to repay what the British Flatcoat breeders have given to the world since this wonderful breed was reborn in Britain after WWII.

Linda Vågberg, the “unintentional participant”, gives this charming personal report from her journey to the trial:

“Could I have your passport and ticket please?” I was at the check in desk at the Gothenburg - Kiel ferry with 15 minutes left until departure. My passport...where is my passport? It should be there somewhere and I diged fiercely through my luggage. I was going to Britain to do some dog training and watch a field trial, with my travel partner Jessica Hagman. But the minutes passed, I didn't find the passport and we missed the boat. The disappointment was painful... We had to re-plan our journey before it even started. The crayfish dinner, the music quiz (that we always wins) and the very much longed for sleep in the cabin on the ferry was replaced by fast food, a night time drive through Denmark and a couple of hours sleep in the car at a parking place in Puttgarden. Did I mention that my friend Jessica, is the most patient friend you can get?



Arriving to Britain we made a quick stop in London and went for a couple of days training with Daniel Higgs (Higgscroft gundogs). Then we headed for the Flatcoated Retriever Society 176:th Field Trial meeting. It was an Open Stake for up to 16 flatcoated retrievers at Bretby Park, Derbyshire with Mr Matt Smith being the Headkeeper. Judges were Mr Dave Brown, Mrs Sarah Comber-Smith, Mr Steve Cullis and Mr John Yarwood. Chief Steward was Roz Bellamy and David Savory, the field trial secretary of the Flatcoated Retriever society, was organising the day.

Our original intention was just to go there and watch the trial. None of us were even ready for a Novice stake. But a couple of weeks before the trial we'd heard there was a lack of dogs and they looked for a few more dogs to fill the card. I had a couple of friends who, after putting me under pressure, convinced me to make an application. I thought it was a good opportunity to get some more experiences of live game on a real shoot, compared to the cold game tests we normally do in Sweden. My biggest fears were that my dog Dante would run in and make some fuzz on his own. But on the other hand, that have happened before so it wouldn't be a new thing for me. And we've got this internal joke saying, “what happens in Britain will stay in Britain”, so it wouldn't be a big deal. My ambition was to get at least a couple of retrieves before I had to put the lead on.

There were twelve dogs in the line. It started with a long drive where the dogs and handlers were standing on the hillside, with a woodland behind and the guns standing down in the valley. The game was driven from another woodland on the other side. The beaters and the guns made a good job and plenty of game was shot. A few dogs ran in directly. I stopped breathing as I thought that Dante would cross the field as a rocket if I moved one millimetre. But he was rock steady. After what seemed like a decade, the drive was over, and I could breathe again.

Now it was time to send the dogs. Dante and I had number one. Dante was on his toes but according to my own assessment he made a strong performance, although his ears were a bit locked up for the day. After the trial my good friend kindly told me that my hunt whistle had a very different sound that day. She said it sounded more like a stop signal in panic, rapidly

turning into a recall signal. That may be true, but it turned out to be very efficient, especially on one of the handled birds. I was asked to hunt through an area where there should be three pheasants. A further 20 meters behind that area one bird was lying fully visible on short



grass. I realised that Dante, most likely, wouldn't listen to my call if he saw that bird, but the right bird came in. In spite of his "hearing impairments" but thanks to his marking, his memory and excellent game finding capabilities, Dante got four pieces of game during the first drive and we were still in the game.

We then went off for a walk-up with four dogs remaining in line. We walked quite rapidly, and game was a bit scarce to start. Dante was in turn for the first retrieve, a partridge was shot and fell about forty meters across the field, to the right of us, in front of the meter-high maize. I sent the dog, stopped him in the area when a pheasant flock went off just around him. But Dante was staunch, I blew the hunt whistle, Dante found the wounded partridge and we had our fifth retrieve. Dante was on the toes when we went on through the maize and I must admit I had to work a bit to keep him under control. Another bird was shot being retrieved by Mahinda Pompoko, handled by Hilary Rosser. A third bird was down but the two remaining handlers, Helen Ford handling Percuil Donner, and Mark Johnson handling Wolfthistle Alfred Unus Est, were unable to get their dogs into the area being unsighted by the tall and dense cover crops. The judges went out, found the bird, concluded that the trial was over, and I could breathe again!

I can assure you that my delight and amazement for getting through the trial was indescribable. When our first prize was announced I almost had a blackout and I must admit that my thanks-speech wasn't the best I've made.

My dog Skeppartorps Enjoy the Freedom (Comics Storm In Blue x Ryegate's Running Wild Running Free) was awarded The Winch Challenge Cup, The Birch Challenge Cup for the highest placed retriever handled by its owner and The Hellingley Retriever Cup (Oliver Trophy) for the highest placed retriever handled by a lady. These trophies can only be held by members resident in the UK. I must admit that there wasn't room for it in the car so I'm quite pleased with that.

I was pleased as well to see that the second dog, Mahinda Pompoko (Conover's Believe in Me x Hwlffordd Blodwyn), being handled by Hillary Rosser, was sired by another dog from northern Sweden.

And what about the missing passport? At the end it turned up in my hand luggage where it was supposed to be...

Linda Vågberg

