



From the Nordic Retriever Championship at Bäckaskog Castle, Kristianstad, Sweden in 2014. Photo: Andreas Fälth

WORKING FLATCOATS IN SWEDEN

BY INGEMAR BORELIUS



From the Nordic Retriever Championship at Bäckaskog Castle, Kristianstad, Sweden in 2014. (But please tell us who it is?) Photo: Andreas Fälth

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Intro

I've tried to tell the story about the Swedish dogs being the most successful ones over the years and which dogs and breeders did have the strongest impact on the work-oriented breeding. I have looked into available statistics on the Swedish Spaniel and Retriever Club site (SSRK.se) and the registration data being published on rasdata.se and flatcoatdata.com. It's impossible to be 100 % fair, many breeders have produced first class dogs over the years and I'm sure I've missed a few that should be mentioned. But I've

done my best to give a picture of the Swedish working Flatcoat world that is as true as possible.

I'm using terms like working Flatcoats, dual purpose Flatcoats and show Flatcoats, I talk about working lines and show lines but for sure there are no exact definitions. In the Labrador and Golden Retriever breeds there are distinct working and show varieties. They were separated more or less in the days when these breeds were born, in the beginning of the twentieth century. Looking at the mainlines for shows and work no crosses are made between those. But that's not the case in the Flatcoat even if the trend is there. If we compare the Nordic and the British stocks there definitely are more distinct British working lines being established during the nineteen eighties by breeders like Nancy Laughton, Joan Marsden and Amelia Jessel and being quite successfully maintained by today's breeders. As it seems several work-oriented British breeders are using dual purpose bloodlines now and then, which must be beneficial at least for the genepool over there. But as far as I've seen it's not that common among the prominent show breeders to make crosses with the working lines. Borderlines between different lines are vaguer in the Nordic countries although it's no doubt that there are bloodlines being bred specialised for work since the seventies.



The Nordic Flatcoated Retriever Championship, Bäckaskog Castle, Kristianstad, Sweden 2014 (Photo Andreas Fälth).

What's a working line or a show line? It's quite easy to explain from a principal viewpoint but maybe not that simple in practice. A working bloodline to me is a line of dogs where the major part of the ancestors has reasonably high working merits, being bred specifically for work over generations. It's about a line of dogs where each generation is proving their capability to retrieve softly and properly to hand without too much training, to watch a shooting situation calmly and quietly, to work with perseverance and drive throughout a shooting day and to easily and willingly take directions by her handler. The corresponding terms goes for the show lines but in practice borderlines are flowing if you go to the Nordic countries. It's no doubt that numerous dual-purpose oriented breeders, primarily choosing top class show dogs for breeding, quite frequently produce dogs exposing good working standards. But in general, it's quite obvious that the major part of the top class working Flatcoats over here have been bred for work over generations.

I strongly believe that is how it must be if we intend to keep a competitive working Flatcoat. Dual-purpose is about diversity. Diversity is a term I strongly like and it's beneficial for the breed if breeders are following their different dreams and focus on the different capabilities they want to find in a Flatcoat. We must realize that the targeted breeding programs that are set up by ambitious breeders to a large extent mean that leading breeders, no matter which individuals they choose, multiply the presence of the individuals that mainly expose the requested qualities. That is why the "W" dogs and their descendants, Tonggreen Sparrow Boy and Shargleam Blackcap, are multiplied up to one to two hundred times in practically all top show Flatcoats, just because these dogs are the ones representing the current conformation ideals better than other dogs. That is why individuals like Black Penny of Yarlaw, Blakeholme Jamie, Downstream Hestia and Downstream Ambleside Jill appears numerous times behind most test/trial winners in the Nordics and Teal of Hawks Nest, the Claverdon F-litter, Tarncourt Noteable and Wemdom Bright Bond of Tarncourt appears unaccountable times in the British working lines. If we succeed to maintain first class working lines and keep in mind that type and a sound workmanlike conformation should be preserved. If show dogs are bred keeping in mind that a Flatcoat should be a medium sized (rather smaller than bigger), racy/athletic and powerful workmanlike dog with basic working capabilities preserved. We could for sure more easily cross these lines and promote the needed genetic variation in the breed. That is how the strong dual-purpose ideals in the breed could be preserved as well as a healthy Flatcoat.

It's obvious that the Swedish Flatcoat has a quite unique position in the sense that such a large share of all Flatcoats are tested for work. This is a consequence of a number of conscious decisions during the eighties, when the Swedish Flatcoat club was established. To be recommended by the breeding advisors, that are used voluntary by a breeder, a dog needs some basic merits from shows as well as the field. To be recommended by the puppy advisor the same requirements must be met by the sire and dam. As a consequence, a large share of all breeders is testing their dogs in the field, prefers a buyer that is willing to

train and test their dog and offer basic retriever training opportunities for all buyers. I remember the few litters we had during the seventies and eighties. We were running weekly training sessions over many years for all litters and we established lifelong friendships with several dog owners that's still lasting. I believe that's how it is for most targeted Swedish Flatcoat breeders and it shows in the amazingly huge share of all Flatcoats being entered at Swedish cold game tests.

Swedish wildlife

Swedish wildlife reflects the varying landscapes in different parts of the country. The northern parts are dominated by the large woods with its big population of Elk, mixed with open areas along the river valleys and coast lines offering seafoal and the grouse along the Scandinavian alps. From the Scania-region in the south to the Stockholm area in the middle of Sweden the big flat, farmed areas are mixed with large woods and numerous lakes. Consequently, the shooting man and woman is going for a mixed bag of game. From tradition the autumn elk-shot is the big shot in the forest regions and the social event, when countrymen gather to meet old friends and to fill up the deepfreeze with their "ration" of good meat. For the ordinary shot the roe deer, the wild boar and the hare are the main targets but there is no doubt that ducks, geese, pigeons etc are highly appreciated parts of the bag as well.

The primary need of the shooting man is a dog that can be used to find the game and present it to the gun. Thus, dogs specialized for driving in, tracking etc. have always been the first choice of the ordinary shooting man (and woman). But in the last half century interest in the working retriever has increased rapidly, mainly for two reasons. The first reason is that shooting men have realized that the retriever is a very useful multipurpose dog. A dog that is easy to keep with the family in the house (where most Swedish dogs live), that can be used as a jack of all trade for driving in and tracking the roe deer, for following the blood scent of a wounded elk and of course for retrieving ducks, pigeons and hares. A dog that is a necessity at the bigger estates in the south and middle of Sweden which offers traditional retriever work on reared pheasants and partridge as well as ducks.

The second reason is the fact that newer laws states that the shooting man must have access to a dog being able to trace and/or retrieve the wounded game. Probably no dog is better than the working retriever for this purpose.

All this asks for a very versatile retriever:

- A dog that combines the ability to watch quietly for the evening ducks and to go for a marked wounded bird 100 meters across a lake, with the courage, perseverance and stamina needed to hunt through areas of heavy reeds or rough woods, unseen with little or no interference from its handler.
- A dog that could be easily directed

across a lake or a streaming river, over riverbanks and reeded areas and to look for and listen to his handler when working in semi-covered areas in a variety of landscapes.

- A dog that is willing to hunt on short distances for driving in gamebirds, roe deer and hare and that is easily called back when the game has started to move.
- A dog that is able to follow the scent of small game off lead at a high speed or a wounded elk slowly on a lead with his handler.



A team of guns honouring the game.

Cold game tests (B-test) and Field trials (A-test)

Although the Swedish (Nordic) retriever test basically is run on traditional Retriever lines they are at the same time shaped by our local shooting conditions. Due to the relative scarcity of reared game Swedish formal tests are primarily run on cold game. The dog is asked to go for marked birds, for handled birds as well as to hunt for unseens with little or no interference from his handler in covered areas on land and in water. The water work is an essential part of the test and all basic retriever qualities are controlled on land and in water at every test. Dogs are in action off lead in all classes, but the young dog/beginner dog is asked to watch another dog at work on a lead at a part of the trial. In open and elite classes, the dog is asked to watch another dog throughout the test and to work closely to it during parts of the free search, controlling steadiness, the ability to keep quiet and the social behaviour.

The dog is asked to retrieve a mixed variety of game, properly and softly. For the ordinary dog owner seagulls, crows, magpies and pigeons are relatively easy to obtain from sanitary guns and to keep in a deep freeze. This kind of game is also used at Cold game tests in combination with geese, ducks, pheasants, hares etc. In Elite Class it's up to the organiser to decide whether cold game or dummies is to be used for a specific trial. The logic behind this is that dogs are thoroughly tested on cold game in the lower classes. A large number of Cold game tests are arranged every year in Sweden. As you can see from the figures below the Working Labrador is strongly dominating in numbers and they are quite far ahead in average quality. As a rule, all entered Labradors and Golden Retrievers

from more or less pure working lines. When it comes to Flatcoats a large share of all born dogs is entered no matter if they're primarily bred for show or work. It's obvious that Flatcoats are representing a quite significant share of all entries although there is a slight downward trend over the last few years.

Dogs are given quality prices (1, 2, 3) in all classes and to be rewarded the Champion title (SE Jakt Champion = SE J CH) three 1:st in the highest class (Elite Class) is required as well as a qualifier, on a duck- or pheasant shot (praktiskt jaktprov). The dog is asked to present a solid performance all through the shot and a significant number of retrieves, being judged by an official judge. A major share of these tests is run on ducks so as a rule a "Jakt" Champion is most probably a strong water dog.

ENTRIES AT SWEDISH B – TESTS (COLD GAME TESTS)							
Year	Labrador	Flatcoat	Golden	Other breeds*	Total dogs	Total entries	Nr of tests
1980	198	64	46	4	312	578	24
1990	509	420	253	33	1215	3026	62
2000	634	464	254	61	1413	3186	74
2010	718	439	237	50	1444	3239	136
2017	762	285	213	20	1280	2366	122

*Chessies, Curlies, Tollers and Irish Water Spaniels

Since 2003 proper Field Trials (A-tests) are arranged along the same lines as the British Field Trials.

There is a qualification class (KKL), being arranged at an ordinary shot with a few dogs being judged by an official judge. The performance has been approved (Godkänd = G) or not approved (Ej godkänd = E). Starting in 2017 dogs in KKL are given quality prices 1, 2, 3, 0. A dog receiving a 1:st is eligible to start in Elite Class.

In Elite Class quality prices 1, 2, 3 or 0 are awarded as well. A Certificate is given to the winner if it's up to the required standard. Dogs performing on an equal level but not winning could be given a Certificate Quality award. The champion title (SE J(A) CH) is given to a dog winning two Certificates or one certificate and two Certificate Quality prices.

You could find the full range of data about Swedish tests and trials on the Spaniel and Retriever Club site, "ssrk.se", click on "Prov och Utställning" and "Retrieverjaktprov" in the top menu and then click "Resultat and statistik för SSRKs jaktprov" in the left-hand menu.

ENTRIES AT SWEDISH A – TESTS (FIELD TRIALS)							
Year	Labrador	Flatcoat	Golden	Other breeds*	Total dogs	Total entries	Nr of tests
2003	70	8	10	1	89	125	19
2010	133	41	12	0	186	234	55
2015	188	31	11	1	231	325	50
2017	148	26	16	2	192	277	36

*Chessies, Curlies, Tollers and Irish Water Spaniels

Flatcoats in particular

If you look at the top workers it might look strange that 167 Flatcoats have gained the "Jakt" Champion title in Sweden over the years, knowing how few there are in most other countries. These merits are from Cold Game tests for sure. You don't have to win a trial like in Britain or Denmark. You need three 1:st quality prices in Elite Class and as a principle an unlimited number of 1: sts could be given to the competing dogs if up to a certain standard. But in most cases, 1: sts are few, in some cases no 1: sts are awarded and no one who have seen a Swedish Cold Game Test (B-test) would question the severity levels especially when it comes to the highest classes.

An Elite Class dog has to work continuously for 30 – 40 minutes on land and in water under one judge. More than ten pieces of game have to be retrieved and of those at least three in water, at least six gunshots are fired for each dog and, as dogs work in pair at least twelve shots are fired. Dogs are worked off lead all through the test, they have to expose an ability to mark and manage handled birds on natural distances, they are asked to work independently for about 5 – 6 pieces of "blinds". During this part of the trial, called the "free search", the dog is asked to work with little or no interference from his handler through a given area, that is approximately 70 to 70 m², but if needed the handler is allowed to redirect the dog occasionally to optimise efficiency and keep it in the right area. In Elite Class, during (parts of) the free search, two dogs under examination are asked to work as a team close to each other to evaluate their social behaviour. All tests are open for any variety retrievers.

The tests are run in a variety of landscapes, the cover is supposed to be rougher and waters more challenging, with more heavily reeded waters and challenging riverbanks, in the higher classes. The designer of the trial is supposed to use his imagination to create a typical ordinary shooting situation. The judge in charge is confirming and adjusting the set up the day before the trial. Each dog is tested continuously on one specific place but marked birds could appear at a simulated drive or a walk up with two or more dogs on a line.

In addition to the three 1:sts at Cold Game tests the dog needs a qualifier from an ordinary shot, primarily on Pheasants or Ducks, to obtain the "Jakt" Champion title. The dog is examined by an official judge, jointly with at least one other dog, and it has to present a first-class job all through the shot. Alternatively, a 2:nd quality price at an A-test, Elite Class, can be used as the qualifier. In most cases dogs are examined during duck shots so it takes no doubt a good water dog to conquer the Swedish "Jakt" Champion title.

It is notable that there are just about 700 - 800 Flatcoats born/registered each year in Sweden, compared to 2 500 Labradors and 1 900 Golden Retrievers in 2016, so no other breed comes close to the Flatcoat when it comes to the share of dogs being tested at trials. The outstanding interest among Flatcoat owners shows every year at the unofficial Flatcoat Championship which gathers around 3 - 400 dogs at a two day Working test. When it comes to average results the Working Labradors are no doubt a bit ahead of the Flatcoat. Yet there are Flatcoats going to the top in all different classes (Young dogs/Beginners, Open and Elite). A number of Flatcoats every year reach "Jakt" Champion status. From the big pool of entered dogs there are not few showing excellent working standards.

Country conditions in Sweden are quite favourable for the working Flatcoat owner. Sweden is a comparatively sparsely populated country. The historical Swedish "All Mans Right" allow you to walk and exercise anywhere in the woods as long as you don't get too close to private houses or disturb other humans or the wildlife. The ordinary dog owner can easily find grounds for training and there are training-classes arranged all over the country. Interest in retrievers among shooting men and women is increasing and numerous Flatcoats are invited for picking up on ducks, pheasants and partridge. Previous statistics from the animal insurance companies indicate that about 35 % of all Flatcoats are used for some kind of shooting/hunting purposes compared to 25 % for Labradors and Golden Retrievers. There is a strong consensus among breeders in general that working qualities must be maintained in the breed.

When the Swedish Flatcoat Club was established in 1977 there was a common understanding that the club should promote a dual-purpose Flatcoat. Stig Olsson (Hovhills), the initiator of the club, must be praised for his strong leadership in those days laying the foundation for the strong ethics that shaped the Swedish Flatcoat. There are rules, set up by the Swedish Flatcoat club during the foundation years, saying that no dog or bitch shall be recommended by the breeding advisors (mainly used by inexperienced breeders) of the club if they haven't shown a basic working standard at Cold game tests, that is at least a second prize in Young dogs or Beginners classes. There are similar rules saying that no litter should be recommended by the club if parents haven't proved the basic working standard as stated above. There are progeny tests available to check basic working qualities in a full litter at 1 - 2 years of age. A large share of the breeders encourages the puppy buyers to participate in training classes, quite often organised by the

breeder herself. There are no doubt numerous breeders successfully producing and competing with dogs of a reasonably good working standard.



Stig and Kerstin Olsson, Hovhills. Stig was the founder of the Swedish Flatcoated Retriever Club and the one who set the targets for the club with its strong dual-purpose orientation.

When it comes to breeding we suffer from the universal Flatcoat problem which is the difficulty to reproduce high working standards from the first-class workers. The traditional ambivalence among Flatcoat breeders between looks and brains is a challenge. The vast majority of breeders most probably prioritize show qualities when it comes to the final choice of a stud dog, it's nothing wrong with that but it's unfavourable for the working Flatcoat. Among show or dual-purpose oriented breeders there is a tendency to breed for a bigger and heavier show type instead of the more athletic (= racy) truly medium sized workmanlike type being originally stated in the breed standard. A majority of show judges have little or no knowledge about the conformation requirements that constitutes a working Retriever and couldn't examine the dogs with a shooting man's eyes. This combined with the scarcity of bloodlines consequently bred for work over generations and the reluctance among many Swedish work-oriented breeders to use the traditional breeding tools (that is selective breeding and a continuous linebreeding on the best workers, from good, even litters, combined with reoccurring outcrossing) counteract the development of a more even gundog.

But stating this it's a definite fact that a majority of the breeders do care about working qualities when a stud dog is chosen, and they accept the breeding policy stated by the club. There are numerous competent breeders successfully producing dual purpose Flatcoats winning at shows and in the Field and there are the occasional Dual Champions. In addition to that there is a smaller group of breeders really determined to produce a competitive working Flatcoat, keeping in mind that good type and a suitable conformation

is essential even in a first-class worker. The options are there to establish first class working lines in Sweden. Only future can tell if we took care of that chance.

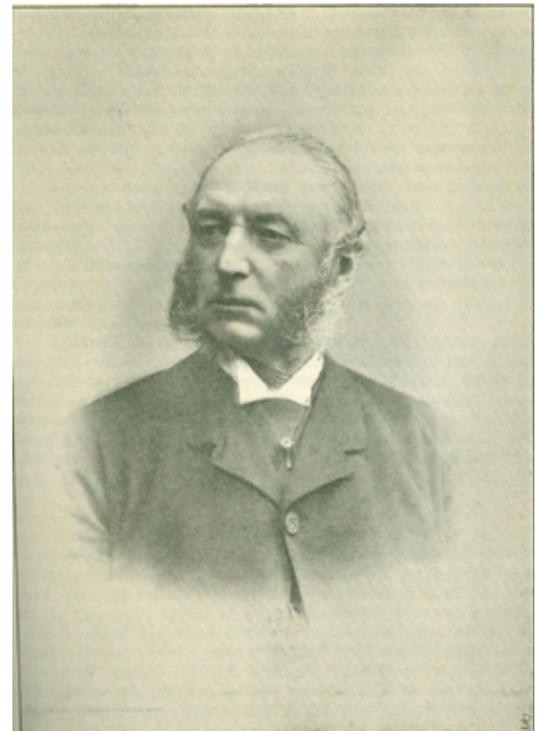
Early history

Wealthy Swedish country landowners imported British retrievers for shooting purposes at the end of the nineteenth century. The main part of those dogs was Flat Coats or Wavy Coats, as the breed was named in the early days.

Oscar Dickson

One of the most (probably the first) noted retriever owners in those days was Mr Oscar Dickson, a famous industrialist, a great philanthropist and one of Sweden's greatest landowners, with numerous shooting grounds around Sweden. He was an active shooting man, a gundog breeder and a judge at the early Swedish Field Trials for pointers and setters. His grandfather was born in Britain and he had close contacts with his grandfather's country. In a short article in the Swedish Guns Association club magazine it's described how Mr Dickson participated in a shooting party with his friend the Prince of Wales, another noted early retriever owner. Dickson was a frequent guest at Sandringham and Balmoral and he saw the Prince of Wales and the Swedish Royal family as shooting guests on his own estates in 1885. He arranged one of the first pheasantries in Sweden on his grounds on Visingsö, in lake Vättern, rearing more than 4000 pheasants a year. He invited British gamekeepers to run his shooting grounds and it sounds likely that they brought their Flatcoated Retrievers to Sweden.

Mr Dickson was one of the founder members of the Swedish Kennelclub. It's not a wild guess that he had continuous contacts with Mr Shirley the man who established the British Kennel Club and created the modern Flatcoat.



Oscar Dickson

Another early Flatcoat owner was Mr Åke Sjögren, a fascinating character who was married into the famous Nobel family. He built up a shot at Mälsåker Castle near Stockholm which was frequented by the Swedish nobility, with the Swedish king as the most noted guest, coming down from Stockholm in chartered trains.

Mr Sjögren established the first Swedish shooting school and he owned and bred a number of Flatcoats to be used at his shot. But he became bankrupt during the nineteenth and he had to abandon his Flatcoat kennel. There were few Retrievers registered in those early days.



Mälsåker Castle the home of Mr Åke Sjögren and some of the first Swedish Flatcoats



The Mälsåker Flatcoats around 1910 – showing a surprisingly good type.

The Flatcoat popularity decreased in England and the only Retrievers registered in Sweden before the nineteen forties were a few odd Labradors and Golden Retrievers during the thirties. Consequently, there are no bloodlines kept from those early Swedish Retrievers.

The restart in 1962

The Flatcoat was re-established in Sweden 1962 when Mrs Mona Lilliehöök, well known Golden breeder of the Apports prefix, bought Black Penny of Yarlaw from the Hutton's in England. Although Penny was primarily bought for show purposes she was well chosen as a base for the Swedish working Flatcoat.

Her sire Woodlark, owned by Mr Colin Wells, won a second at the Flatcoated Retriever Society (FCRS) Novice Stake the previous year. Her grandsire, Waterboy, was probably the greatest working Flatcoat during the fifties being in the awards at every FCRS All Aged stake from 1952 until 1957, being first in 1953 and 1957 and being second in an Any Variety Open stake 1953, thus being very close to become a FT Champion. Penny's dam, Pewcroft Prop of Yarlaw won the FCRS open stake in 1962.



Black Penny of Yarlaw (top left), Downstream Hestia (top right), Puhs Herakles and Puhs Hestia. (Photos: Penny & D. Hestia -Åke Wintzell)

Mrs Lilliehöök imported Blakeholme Jollyon (Rettendon Rook x Blakeholme Joke) and Blakeholme Jamie (Claverdon Scot x Blakeholme Jemima) from Mrs Barbara Hall, bringing in another strong working line, and Ryshot Copper Fire from Mrs Margareth Izzard. At the same time Mrs Brit-Marie (Bat) Brulin, of the noted Puhs Labradors, imported Downstream Hestia (Winkswood x Downstream Pax) a bitch being linebred on Waterboy and his full brother Workman.

Penny and Hestia were mated to Blakeholme Jamie laying the solid foundation of the Swedish working line, still influencing the Nordic working Flatcoat more than any other dogs. In fact, this is quite unique in our domestic dog world for most breeds, where the latest stars from England tend to become the dominating stud forces in every generation.

Looking at the pedigrees of these early imports and knowing about the dominance of these dogs as the backbone of the Swedish/Nordic Flatcoat it's good reasons to believe that the DNA-profile of the Nordic dogs are a bit unlike that of the modern British Flatcoat.

The trainer tells

Eric Eckhardt was one of the first professional trainers in Sweden, establishing the first Working Labrador lines in Sweden and introducing modern British training methods. He trained practically all the first Flat Coats imported by Mona Lilliehöök and Bat Brulin. Penny of Yarlaw was the very first Flatcoat he had ever trained, and Erik described her as "a gentle character, being good in all disciplines. She was extremely easy to train but when it came to the retrieving of varm game some persuasion was needed." Later on, Erik was asked to train Downstream Hestia "being a more active character than Penny but like her lacking the strong will to retrieve warm game spontaneously. Some encouragement was needed in the beginning but when she'd had the experience she retrieved all types of game with a beautiful pickup and delivery. Her tremendous drive, biddability and style was rewarded with the highest price given to any Flatcoat in Sweden at that time."

His next disciple was Blakeholme Jamie. Erik tells that he would be worthy of his own chapter in Flatcoat history. He was a big dog, strong as a bear and unafraid of everything! Quite obviously he was a quite headstrong dog needing a firm hand to respect his handler and other dogs." But he learned quickly and in a short while Eric could trust him fully considering his working capabilities being second to none. He was a highly appreciated companion to Eric at numerous shots.

Eric trained two of Jamie's offspring as well and he consider the bitch Puhs Hestia (x Downstream Hestia) and the dog Apports Mac Fraser (x Black Penny of Yarlaw) to be two of the best Flatcoats he ever trained. They had an excellent retrieving instinct, great drive and perseverance, good noses and an excellent pickup and delivery

It's no doubt that these very first Swedish Flatcoats and their offspring were true dual - purpose retrievers, showing excellent type and conformation. But they were primarily

excellent hard going workers and as it showed the best possible foundation stock for the Swedish working Flatcoat, strongly influencing the local strains until today.

The foundation of the Swedish working lines

The very first Swedish "Jakt Champion" Puhs Frigga (b. 1969) was sired by Ryshot Copper Fire (Ryshot Copper Rambler x Ryshot Swallow) who's pedigree didn't indicate any proven workers. But according to a trustable hearsay, his sire was a strong but somewhat independent picking up dog for his owner Margaret Izzard (Ryshot). If my long-time memory is right the sire, Ryshot Copper Rambler, had a strange habit when retrieving. He didn't deliver to hand but dropped all the game on a pile close to his handler probably fully occupied with the gun. The dam of Frigga was Puhs Hestia (Blakeholme Jamie x Downstream Hestia). Our own bitch Tittie (Puhs Herakles x Apports Penicuk) and Stig and Kerstin Olssons (Hovhills) first dog Twinkle Forest Friend (Jupiter of Chadwell x Puhs Hestia) followed in the footsteps of Frigga, all of these being Dual Champions.



Stig Olssons Twinkle Forest Friend and Tittie

During the nineteen seventies a number of Downstream dogs were imported and of those Downstream Ambleside Jill, imported in whelp to Tonggreen Sparrow Boy (Fenrivers Golden Rod x Tonggreen Swift), produced a litter of utmost importance to the Swedish Working Flatcoat. It's no doubt that this Sparrow Boy/Jill-litter had a stronger influence on the Swedish working Flatcoat than most other dogs. These dogs and their offspring infused a softer and more biddable character compared to dogs from the Jamie/Hestia line and suddenly a most responsive type of dog appeared being well fitted for the new test set up that was introduced in the late seventies. The modernised test rules were inspired

by/copied from the Danish rules and put more emphasis on marking and more complex handled retrieves, keeping the very specific Nordic test key element, the "free search", being a mock up for a cold game picking up situation.

Unlike the quite independent and "hot" characters exposed by the first Flatcoat generations, we suddenly saw placid dogs with a stronger will to please. It is an interesting fact that these dogs, even though they had quite different characters, goes back to the same "W" dogs that figures behind the Jamie / Hestia line. But it's little doubt that Sparrow Boy made the difference (see below under "The Impact of the British working Lines").



Downstream Ambleside Jill retrieving to Peter Johnson

During the same period the two bitches Halstock Romany and Halstock Maida were imported by the O'Flanagan kennel producing O'Flanagan Free-as-air (sired by Gunhills Gus Guy) and his most successful son O'Flanagan Maidas Toblerone. It's notable that these two bitches were "heavily" bred back to Waterboy and his siblings with 16 occurrences behind H. Romany and 28 behind H. Maida, the same pattern that occurred behind the Blakeholme Jamie/Downstream Hestia line as well as behind Downstream Ambleside Jill, proving the importance of the Waterboy line over here.

A similar breeding background appeared behind the other great son of O. Free-as-Air, Lady Doc's Johannes, and his litter mate, Lady Doc's Johanna, becoming one of the most important brood bitches at that time and the one who forwarded the Free-as-Air bloodline

to become a major ingredient in the Swedish working lines. The base was built for the major Swedish working Flatcoat. The vast majority of all FT Champions up to the present day in Sweden have a strong share of blood from the Jamie x Hestia mating, often combined with elements from the Sparrowboy x Jill combination. It might sound like a simplification if I say that the Swedish working Flatcoat is primarily built on the Waterboy line, but there is no other dog appearing to the same extent behind the top dogs over here and if you take the time to count you will find more than 200 occurrences of Waterboy and his siblings in an extended pedigree behind many of these dogs today, for good or bad (watch flatcoatdata.com)!

This might sound dramatic, but this is how targeted breeding programs looks like no matter which breed or what breeding target we talk about. Luckily there were many other dogs imported over these years adding outcross opportunities, broadening the genepool, although few of them had a major impact on the working lines. Two of the most famous ones were no doubt Wood Man (Tonggreen Sparrow Boy x Woodpoppy) and Claverdon Fantasia (Teal of Hawk's Nest x Claverdon Rhapsody), imported as adults during the seventies by the Tryggs kennel. Both dogs had a successful show- respectively working career in Britain before the transfers. Fantasia was imported in whelp to Rungles Jerome, the same combination that appeared behind the outstanding British litter mates Claverdon Ladybird, Lucretia and Lysander in Britain. Four littermates from the Jerome x Fantasia litter; Tryggs Flash, Tryggs Figaro, Tryggs Flat and Tryggs Ferret were used quite actively at stud contributing to a steady and biddable character in the Swedish main lines.



Claverdon Fantasia



Quicksilver Courage (Courtbeck Mercury x Wyndhamian Carmella) had a strong impact on the working lines.

Other British imports of importance, adding valuable working blood during these early years were Celebrity of Ryshot (Wyndhamian Christopher of Exlyst x Shairelf of Ryshot), Wyndhamian Carmella (Heronsflight Tercel x Woodlass) imported in whelp to Courtbeck Mercury, Woodland Wistful (Kenstaff Whipster x Woodland Whinchat), Woodlands Wanderer (Wood Man x Kirloe Cheetah), Woodland Wiseman (Woodland Whipcord x Waltham Jasmine), Heronsflight Tinker (Heronsflight Tercel x Fenrivers Lily), High Leys Scott (Claverdon Lysander x Marlcot Nics Woodchuck) and Yoday Weaverbird (Kenstaff Whipster x Claverdon Flapper). The last one was sold as a trained young bitch by Colin Wells to an estate in southern Sweden, making good PR for the breed in shooting circles. I was a bit involved in that transfer, forwarding the request to Colin, and I remember that Colin became a bit hesitant at the end after having trained her, when he realised what a golden nugget she was!

The heydays of the Swedish working Flatcoat

The very first cold game Retriever Championship in Sweden was arranged in 1972 with the famous working Flatcoat breeder Nancy Laughton being the judge. At that occasion however no Flatcoats were eligible to start.

The bitch Hovhills Gradely Lass (Apports Mac Fraser x Gemini), won the Retriever Championship in 1980 and 1982 and was third dog in 1981, winning the Swedish International Field Trial (with a CACIT) the same year. She exposed the strong capacity of the working Flatcoat and was the frontrunner of the strongest generation in the local working Flatcoat history, being alternatively handled by his owner and his breeder Stig Olsson.



Stig Olsson and Hovhills Gradely Lass

O'Flanagan Free-As-Air (Gunhills Gus Guy x Halstock Romany), being a grandson of the Sparrowboy x Jill combination, was no doubt the greatest name during this period getting 21 first prices in Elite Class (any variety) and of these 11 awards as the best dog at

the trial. In addition to that he won the Swedish Retriever Championship in 1981 and an International Field Trial with a CACIT as well. There's no Swedish Retriever of any breed being able to match these figures.

His halfbrother Gunhills Cheiron (Gunhills Gus Guy x Puhs Freja) was not far from that getting 6 first prices in Elite class and of these 3 awards as the best dog at the trial. He as well won the Retriever Championship in 1983 with Micawber (Celebrity of Ryshot x Hovhills Gradely Lass) being third dog. Waterproof Disproof, a grandson of Puhs Frigga won the International Field Trial the same year with a CACIT.



O'Flanagan Free-as-air and Gunhills Cheiron

The bitch Hovhills Kiss-Me-Quick (Quicksilver Courage x Hovhills Lillefix) was mated to Gunhills Cheiron producing 3 Field Trial Champions and in total (3 litters) 9 dogs winning prices in elite class, making her the strongest brood bitch ever in the Swedish Flatcoat history. If we add the two litters sired by Micawber out of Björkhedens Candlelight (Tryggs Flat x Woodland Wistful), with four dogs getting high prices in Elite class we have covered some of the strongest exponents of this golden Flatcoat generation.

It's no doubt that the great dogs, O'Flanagan Free-As-Air and Hovhills Gradely Lass, raised a strong interest in the shooting community, but a mating between the two turned out to be a bit of a failure. But Gradely Lass proved her worth as a brood bitch when mated to Celebrity of Ryshot producing the dog Micawber for Inger Karlsson (Micawbers) being the starting point for the strongest male working bloodline in Sweden.

The two most highly awarded sons of Free-as-Air; O'Flanagan Maidas Toblerone (x Halstock Maida), got 7 firsts in Elitclass being awarded best dog at three times, and Lady Doc's Johannes (x Arctic Star) got 6 firsts, being awarded best dog at 4 occasions, leaving little or no traces in the working lines. But the working line from Free-As-Air was

successfully forwarded by Lady Doc's Josefina, a sister of Johannes, and a granddaughter, Scarlet O'Hara (Puhs Raven x Tar Miriel), the dam of the great show winner Almanza Larry O'Grady. In both cases a mix of blood appears with multiple lines back to the Jamie/Hestia combination as well as Sparrow Boy.



Bobby was another great dog, during this golden era of the working Flatcoat, winning the Swedish Flatcoat championship for four subsequent years 1983 – 1986. But unfortunately, he left no trace in the working lines.

Prominent working lines

The working line that comes down from Micawbers Ohanes (Micawber x Björkhedens Candelight) bringing in Hovhills Gradely Lass and a strong infusion from the Claverdon F-litter and the W-lines, must be praised for being one of the strongest working lines over here. His son Kecas Fetisof was an outstanding worker during the nineteen nineties as well as his grandson Hinnareds Nitro. Their outstanding qualities have been further exposed by the winning littermates, Duckstream Black Velvet and Duckstream Cragganmore, producing some of the most winning Nordic working Flatcoats during the latest years.

It's well known that Ragnhild Ulin's Almanza Larry O'Grady became one of the greatest show dogs ever in the Swedish dog history, winning Best in Show at the Stockholm International dog show in 1991, being Best in Show at the prestigious Skokloster Castle Spaniel and Retriever Dog show (at that time the biggest Spaniel and Retriever show in the Nordic countries) five times and being runner up and close to the top in the "Dog of the year" competition for several years. But it's no doubt that he produced some first-class workers as well. He came from solid working/dual purpose breeding, being a product of some of the best Downstream dogs over here. The fact that he was quite heavily used at stud doesn't diminish the fact that a quite large share of his offspring had prices at cold game tests, 8 were priced in Elite class and of those 3 became Dual Champions. His two most eminent sons Almanza Emergency Brake, matching his father as top winner on BIS level, and Lady Doc's Humbug reached Dual Champion status. They

were quite actively used by work oriented breeders and Humbug made the strongest mark producing 8 price winners in Elite class of which three became "Jakt" Champions.

Several breeders have successfully used Almanza dogs, mainly from the Larry O'Grady line to produce first class workers, selectively looking for good working qualities. Among those Tina Engström (Engsboda) and Bittan and Bert Börjessons (Bez-Ami's) have been two of the the most prominent ones over the last few years.

Matsbokurvans TT Matchless (x Lady Doc's Nina Kanin) was the most highly merited worker sired by A. Emergency Brake. He won his "Jakt" Champion title getting 4 first and 1 second in Elite class during 6 weeks in 1996. That high and even working standard could probably be explained by the fact that he had three rather close lines back to O'Flanagan Free-As-Air, and multiple lines back to the Jamie/Hestia combination.



Lena Bratsberg-Karlsson and Searover Shanty

Searover Shanty was the most outstanding offspring of Lady Doc's Humbug (x Searover Hawai Fruit). She was linebred along the old Swedish working line with multiple lines back to O'Flanagan Free-As-Air, but behind her dam there were two new strong elements as well in High Leys Scott (Claverdon Lysander x Marlcot Nicks Woodchuck), adding strong working blood from the Claverdon/" W" lines and Chirleys Bell Alonso, bringing in blood from the outstanding Danish trialer Jiggers Tarka Casber.

Searover Shanty conquered 8 firsts in Elite Class and was third at the Swedish Retriever Championship in 1995. She won the Swedish Flatcoat Championship in 1996, the very first time a proper Field Trial was arranged in Sweden, being organised by the Swedish Flatcoat Club. In 1997 the success was repeated when Shanti was placed as number 6 at the Retriever Championship, a grand final for one of the most impressive working careers at a time when massive imports of working Labradors had changed the Swedish competition landscape quite significantly. It's a bit ironic that Lena Bratsberg – Karlsson, the owner of the Searover prefix, has become one of the most successful working Labrador breeders since then, no doubt a great loss for the breed.



Xellent Star (an excellent workmanlike Flatcoat) was another prominent son of L. Humbug with a fair share of his offspring getting high merits in the field.

In 1997 the successful Flatcoat bitch Gitthans Honey Buzzard (Shargleam Sandpiper x Gunhills Czardasfurstinnan) won the Swedish Retriever Championship. Since then no Flatcoat has been at the top and very few Flatcoats have entered the Championship, now being strongly dominated by the Working Labradors.

Outstanding working Flatcoats in recent years

Looking back towards the turn of the millennium there are numerous dogs performing very well in Elite class over these years but of those a few have done exceptionally well. The dog Duckstream Black Velvet reached B-test Elite Class at two years of age with a 2: nd at his first and only start in 2004. The year after he conquered his "Jakt champion" title winning three 1: st prices over 8 days. His father, the great Hinnared's Nitro needed a month to reach the same target but, in his case, he was only two years old being quite unique among the slowly maturing Flatcoats. Straight Flush Velvet Vega, one of Black Velvets most outstanding daughters, needed 34 days to reach the same target at three years of age. In her case she had a long and successful A-test career as well with one 1:st and two 2: nd prices in Sweden and a 1:st with a Certificate at a Danish A-test being close to obtain the very first Swedish A-test Championship title (SE J(A)CH. Her half-sister Straight Flush Yava (mothers being full sisters) needed 29 days to gain her Jaktchampion title followed by a beautiful A-test career with two 1:st prices at

Swedish A-test, at one of these occasions beating nine working Labradors. Another half-sister out of Black Velvet, Hinnareds Fenya, needed 20 days to reach her title in 2016 and less than a month later she conquered a 1:st price and Certificate at an A-test.



Straight Flush Velvet Vega at the Nordic Flatcoated Retriever Championship with his owner/handler Andreas Josefsson (Photo: Andreas Fälth)

Hinnareds Älton-John (Matsbokurvans RC Monark x Hinnareds Rappa) belongs to the same exclusive club conquering his title gaining 3 consecutive 1:st in Elite Class B-test and ending his career getting a 2:nd price at one A-test and being the first Swedish Flatcoat ever to gain a 1:st price and a Certificate at an Any Variety A-test in 2007. His dam was out of Kecas Fetisof and consequently a half-sister to Hinnareds Nitro. To end this cavalcade over the most even top performing working Flatcoats over her the dog Hinnareds Zidane (Hinnareds Nitro x Hinnareds Canasta) needed three consecutive starts over one year to reach his title. Saying this I want to challenge the persistent thought that working Flatcoats are slow maturers. A thoroughbred working Flatcoat with lots of natural talent could flourish as early as a working Labrador or Golden.

It's no doubt that Duckstream Cragganmore, the litter sister of D. Black Velvet and her offspring belongs to this group of top performers as well. As previously mentioned she won the Swedish Cold Game Championship for three consecutive years 2005 – 2007. Being owned by the Norwegian "Waternut" couple Bjarne Holm and Heidi Kvan she was sparsely

started at Swedish B-test and she couldn't match her brothers even line of 1: sts but she excelled at Swedish any variety A-test getting two 1: sts at two entries in 2004 and 2009.



Duckstream Black Velvet and Cragganmore

Her offspring from two litters sired by the Danish top performer Holly Hunter's Woody Guthrie and his half-brother Holly Hunters Jasper have reached a dominant position on the Nordic working scene. Her son Waternuts Man of The Moment gained a 1:st and a Certificate Quality at the Swedish Flatcoat A-test Championship in 2012 when her litter sister Waternuts Sweet Science won the test with a 1:st price and Certificate. From then on, the dog W. Man of the Moment and his siblings, the Swedish bitches Waternuts Caleigh and Waternuts Sweet Science have frequently been in the price lists. At the Nordic Flatcoated Retriever Championship (for teams and individuals) these litter mates have been part of the winning Swedish team from 2010 – 2016. Their halfbrother Waternuts High and Mighty was second best dog in 2015 and 2016 and the winner in 2017 at the individual competition.

Prominent breeders

It could be relevant to reflect around this topic and ask what's a good breeder and it's quite obvious that breeders could play different roles. A few like Nancy Laughton, Claverdon Flatcoats, and June Atkinson, Holway Goldens, are quite unique in the way they have dominated a breed over a life time, being excellent breeders as well as first class handlers and, not to forget, being providers of first class dogs and mentorship to others. In the old days in Britain that role was upheld by wealthy landowners running shooting grounds and being able to keep big kennels and professional staff to manage. In modern

times it's not an easy task not the least if you want to combine a professional life and a family life with longer term dog breeding programs driven by ambitious targets.

When it comes to the great Swedish breeders I believe a vital part of their successes is due to the fact that they've contributed to the successes of other breeders / trainers / puppy buyers with first class bitches, useful stud dogs and not the least with good advice on training and breeding. The successes of some of the greatest working Flatcoat kennels over here, like the Hovhills, the Hinnareds, the Roghöjdens and several others are due to the fact that they've spent most of their time running training classes and individual training sessions for their "puppy buyers" and other working Flatcoat enthusiasts.

Looking at the Nordic Flatcoat breeders in general and the Swedish in particular it's obvious that a quite large share of those are keeping an interest in working qualities although most breeders focus on show features and primarily breed for shows. Saying this it's obvious that several mainly show oriented breeders have succeeded quite well to produce good workers shown via the occasional top performer in Elite class and a few "Jakt champions".

If we go to the determined work-oriented breeders a few of these combines excellent breeder skills, with the analytical eye that is needed to maintain good working lines, and the hands that are needed to transform talent into winners. Others that might not be the very best trainers/handlers are still trying to maintain the good working lines and realise the need to continuously find useful outcross blood. Some breeders focus on the maintenance of the old local bloodlines via linebreeding to well performing but genetically more "unique" individuals and consequently contribute to the soundness of the working gene pool.

It's no doubt that Stig and Kerstin Olsson (Hovhills) played the most prominent roles when the Swedish (working) Flatcoat was established. Their most outstanding litter was sired by Gunhills Cheiron out of Hovhills Kiss Me Quick bringing in several strong lines from the Jamie/Hestia combination giving stamina and perseverance and Sparrow Boy giving steadiness and biddability. This litter, sometimes called the Whisky-litter due to the dog's names, was no doubt the most outstanding one with eight out of ten getting working merits. Five were awarded in Elite Class and three conquered the "Jakt" Champion title. In another litter sired by Hovhills Gambler Man, Hovhills Kiss Me Quick produced three dogs getting first in Elite class of which two gained the "Jakt Champion" title. The two halfbrothers Hovhills Tornadoman and Hovhills Gambler Man, out of their important brood bitch Gunhills Gallant Girl, performed very well with an even list of high merits in Elite Class and a good track record at stud.

There were many other Hovhills dogs going to the top at Trials but, without downgrading their breeding of first class workers the least, I would say for sure that Stig's most important role was as the founder of the Swedish Flatcoated Retriever Club, as a

most creative and driving first chairman and as an inspirer for many other Flatcoat owners getting first class working puppies from them. People travelled from all around Sweden to join his training classes and many of those became successful breeders of high quality working Flatcoats.



*Stig Olsson and Gunhills
Gallant Girl*

Stig had some of his greatest days planning for the very first (Flatcoat) proper Field Trial in Sweden, being the final of the Flatcoated Retriever Championship in 1996, but he sadly passed away just before the Trials. However, very detailed plans were laid out by Stig and the Trial was run to honour the memory of the man who shaped the Swedish Flatcoat club and laid the strong foundation for the working Flatcoat over here.

Hovhills breeding lines continued mainly with the offsprings of Hovhills Strega (Gunhills Cheiron x Hovhills Kiss-Me-Quick). Her most successful offspring were the dogs Hovhills Fixing A Hole (sired by Emanon Invincible of Casuarina) and Hovhills Vänta Ni Bara (sired by Danish Dual Ch Waitformee) with many full and half siblings conquering prizes in the elite class.

Many work-oriented breeders founded their breeding on Hovhills dogs and one of these was Inger Karlsson establishing her Micawbers kennel with the Field Trial winning dog Micawber (Celebrity of Ryshot x Hovhills Gradely Lass). His offspring in two litters when mated to her own bitch Björkhedens Candlelight (Tryggs Flat x Woodland Wistful), brought

a strong working line from the Rungles Jerome x Claverdon Fantasia combination, to Claverdon Gaff and the "W" dogs. Two dogs out of that litter, Micawbers Stilton and Micawbers Ohanes, had an utmost importance for the working lines. Inger states on her homepage that she promotes the dual-purpose ideal prioritising working qualities in her breeding.

Her dog Micawbers Silverground Carpet Flyer, had several lines back to Celebrity of Ryshot, his father Wyndhamian Christopher of Exlyst and the "W" lines, being successfully used by several work-oriented breeders with the Coatfloat kennel in the forefront. In recent years she has imported a number of dogs from the best British working bloodlines to augment her old working line. Among those Hawksthorne Caliph and his son Flatgold's A Son of Alvar at Micawbers, bred by German breeder Inka Heller-Schedel, are the most outstanding ones.

The Inkwells kennel was a Dual Purpose oriented but strongly work focused breeder starting with Hovhills Chartreuse, a dual champion from the successful so called "Whisky-litter". She was mated to her own grandson to produce Inkwells Pair of Purdey. She in her turn produced Inkwells Cherry Herring for the Fågeltorps kennel and the latter was the dam of the successful Danish trialer Fågeltorps Jocke Orrtupp. Inkwells Nora Norlett, a granddaughter of Pair of Purdey, was probably their most successful trailer. She conquered the B-test championship title starting three times in Elite Class and she had a quite successful career at (any variety) A-test with a 2: nd price being the top result. The Dual Champion Inkwells Let It Be being successfully used by a number of work-oriented breeders.



Inkwells Let It Be, a proven worker and a successful dual purpose stud dog.

The Roghöjdens kennel established their successful work-oriented kennel with Hovhills Gambler Man, his daughters Hovhills Future (x Hovhills Kiss-me-Quick and Stormy's La-Bianca A Norwege (x Stormy's Thunderbird) and the bitch Gunsmith Anna Karenina (High Leys Scott x Searover Loffes Randy). They produced successful workers over many generations with Roghöjdens Geyanna, Roghöjdens Norske Ligist, Roghöjdens Norska Lachivas and the latter's daughter Roghöjdens Omega A'la Chivas in the forefront.

Hinnareds

Tom and Annika Rölander (Hinnared) were running a boarding kennel and had a solid interest in obedience and utility work when they stepped into the Flatcoat in the beginning of the eighties. Their foundation bitch was bred back to the very first Swedish Flatcoat generations, bringing in blood from the Blakeholme Jamie/Black Penny of Yarlaw combination and two lines back to Mimosa of Halstock, adding a Flatcoat/Golden interbred in her close pedigree. Their bitch was bred several times to a son of Shargleam Blackcap but in the coming generations a major input came from the Hovhills line.

I believe it must have been Hinnareds Dojja (Kentoo Kelvin x Bhalgairs Creampuff) who raised their strong interest in gundog work. She had a successful career in utility and obedience classes behind her when she stepped into the B-test scene conquering a "Jakt" Champion title after just a few years. Dojja had a few successful litters but it was her litter mate, Hinnareds Bolla, who probably had the strongest impact on the working lines when mated to Bamse, a dog with numerous high awards from the utility and obedience scenes. Four of their offspring; the three dogs Hinnareds Mutter, Hinnareds Winner, Hinnareds Oddie-Opus and the bitch Hinnareds Unita gained firsts in Elit Class and the dogs did all become strong stud forces being used by several work oriented breeders

Tom and Annika consider their homebred dog Hinnareds Nitro to be their best dog ever "a dog having everything and with no vices" according to a memorial statement on their homepage. "He was absolutely quiet and strongly focused with a tremendous drive and perseverance. He was easily trained, spontaneous on game and a wonderful hunter. He was biddable and easily handled but still being able to hunt independently when he was asked. He had a laid-back attitude when off work and you hardly noticed him at home. He had a golden career getting his first wins at 14 months of age at an area championship for any variety young dogs. He achieved firsts in the Young dogs and Open Classes during the same weekend being 18-month-old. At 2,5 years of age he was 4:th in Elite Class at the Flatcoat Championship. Later the same season he conquered the Jakt Champion title starting four times during one month in the Elite Class (Any variety) and of those he was the best dog at three times. In 2000 he conquered the Jakt Champion titles in Norway and Finland. He was a part of the winning team at the Swedish Team championship in 2000 and 2001. He won the Flatcoat Championship in 2001. Ten of his offspring gained 1:st prices in Elite Class and of those eight got the Jakt Champion title. Nitro had strong lines back to the Hovhills dogs on his dam's side, the sire being the great worker Kecas Fetisof!



*Hinnareds Nitro and Hinnareds Älton John,
two great winners out of a long line of top workers.*

23 dogs with the Hinnareds prefix have scored on Elite class level since the millennium shift and of those H. Fenya, Rappa, Xara, Zidane, Zynnö and Älton-John are the most outstanding ones with exceptionally even lists of merits making Hinnareds the most successful work-oriented kennel in Sweden. The kennel has been priced as the best breeder at eleven occasions at the Swedish Flatcoat (B-test) Championship over the years 1993 to 2008, exposing their strong position on the Swedish working Flatcoat scene. The Rölander couple have successfully followed a breeding policy where first class, well merited workers are used in every generation, no doubt placing them among the very best pro work breeders over time in the Nordics.

Gunnel Wahlströms, Gunhills kennel, is most probably the oldest active breeder in Sweden today. Although primarily a show-oriented breeder she has provided northern Sweden with first class Flatcoats since the beginning of the seventies and of those eight have conquered the "Jakt" Champion title.

The most dominant working kennel today on the Swedish working scene is with no doubt the Norwegian Waternuts kennel: The Swedish bred top worker Duckstream Cragganmore and her offspring in two litters sired by the Danish Holly Hunter's Woody Guthrie and the latter's half-brother Holly Hunter's Jaspas expose a track record on B-test as well as A-test level that is second to none. Their two dogs Waternuts Man of The Moment and Waternuts High and Mighty have been consistent winners all over the Nordics on B- as well as A-tests. High and Mighty, named Pete among his friends, did show his great qualities when he entered the British scene in 2017, being best dog at the FCRS Open Stake with a Certificate of Merit

The most prominent working kennels over the last few years alongside the Hinnared's and the Waternuts kennel are probably Zebulons, Skattkammarens, Straight Flush and Svartalwen. But many other breeders, no matter if they are/were dual purpose or mainly work oriented contributed to the maintenance of the working Flatcoat over here. I would particularly mention the following kennels continuously producing stock of high quality over many years; Boltitorps, Bez-Ami, Coatfloat, Conovers, Comics, Duckstreams, Decorous, Engsboda, Feedbacks, Flatterhafts, Kecas, Lopplådans, Lady Doc's, Matsbokurvans, Searovers, Semtegens and Sherlocks.



Zebulons Karrakatta and Skattkammarens Isle of Isla – two of the greatest workers during the last few years in the Nordics.

International competition

If you look at the working Flatcoat scene over here it's an encouraging fact that cross border competition has been in increased focus over the last fifteen years or so. Some of the best working Flatcoats from all the Nordic countries are gathering every year, in any of the Nordic countries based on a revolving scheme, to compete about the Nordic Team and individual Championship titles. The regular set up is to run the team challenge as a working test or cold game test day one and the individual challenge as a proper Field Trial (A-test) day two.

The Swedish team has gone to the top at eight out of nine occasions being nr two at the ninth. But that doesn't mean that the other countries are far from that. The quality of the competing dogs from all countries are high. If you look at the individual competition, mostly run as an A-test, the picture is more mixed with Sweden winning four times, Denmark three times, Norway twice and Finland once.



The Swedish winning team at the Nordic Championship in 2012. From left to right; SEJCh NOJCh Straight Flush Velvet Vega, Andreas Josefsson, SEJ(j)Ch Waternuts Sweet Science, Helena Närling, NordJCh SESpCh Waternuts Caleigh, Anna-Lena Wendt, NordJCh Coatfloats Marimekko, Ingela Karlsson. It's no doubt that these handlers have proven their capabilities as some of the best handlers on the Nordic scene.



Coatfloat Marimekko, being one of the very best on the Swedish working scene, with an even list of merits from B-test, three 2nds a A-tests, two individual wins at the Nordic Championship and a Certificate of Merit at her one and only start at a British trial, the FCRS Open Stake in 2013.

We have been happy to see that a few of the best Swedish handlers have taken the opportunities to expose their qualities on the British scene as well. The very first to get a FT merit was no doubt Ingela Karlsson with Coatfloats Marimekko, getting a Certificate of Merit at her very first start at a British FCRS Open Stake in 2013.



Swedish handlers matching the best at the British Game Fair International Retriever team and individual challenges

Left - Åke Fuchs (Zebulons) handling his bitch Friia Agnar Windy to become third best Retriever overall and best minor breed at the CLA/The Aigle World Challenge at Belvoir Castle in 2005.

Right - Camilla Jakobsen (Starflats) handling her bitch Flatterhaft Fay Crocker to become second-best Retriever overall and the best European dog at the Euro Challenge, Hatfield House Game Fair in 2017.

Impact of the British working lines

This headline might sound strange to you as we are all aware that the original Flatcoat is a British breed and all local bloodlines were started in Britain. But it's a definite fact that the Swedish Flatcoat, to a much larger extent than the other Retriever breeds, is bred from lines that have been maintained in Sweden since the foundation years in the nineteen sixties.

I started this story telling that dogs from the Yarlaw, Downstream, Blakeholme and Ryshot kennels founded the Swedish Flatcoat. Looking at the Blakeholme and Yarlaw dogs

their pedigrees were dominated by prefixes like Pewcroft, Denmere, Sauch and Ponsbourne with their roots deep down among the prewar working lines with their fair share of Interbreds. The Ryshot dog, had its roots among the livers coming from Forestholme Rufus, the Atherbram dogs and the first Ryshot bitches starting with two unregistered dogs which probably had some Interbred background. Quite many Ryshot dogs have been imported since then giving a significant portion of in depth outcross blood to the Swedish Flatcoat. Although the "W" dogs, linebred to Waterboy was the dominant factor there was a quite large share of blood from a number of other working lines which was excellent seen from a gene pool aspect.

Starting with these dogs, from the Apports and Puhs kennels, the major later influences have come from the "W" line, or more correctly the "W"/ Downstream line, which by far has had the strongest impact on the Swedish (working) Flatcoat. A broad commitment towards a dual-purpose oriented breeding within the local Flatcoat club, and a targeted breeding on working skills over many years, have maintained and improved the working qualities in those lines. But that couldn't be the full explanation. If we look at the Working Labrador, the latest imports and artificial insemination with British top performers always had a dominating effect on the local strains. But that hasn't been the case in the working Flatcoat.

Colin Wells (W/Woodlands) and Peter Johnson (Downstream) were gamekeepers and it's plausible that their type of Flatcoat was more hard-going and more suitable for our local shooting conditions than many other working Flatcoats. Sweden became a bit of a second home country for Peter Jonson, during the seventies and eighties, repeatedly running training classes over here. Colin travelled a lot to Sweden and Norway during these years on judging appointments. It was his first trips abroad since the war, he made many friends over here and I'm sure he sent some of his best pups to the Nordics at the end of his career. I remember that both of them saw a strong point in the "Free search", the cold picking up way of work, that is asked for at the Nordic Cold game tests stating that it added a lot of value for the examination of a Retriever. Few imports over the years have been able to challenge dogs from the older generations and to become prominent stud forces.

I've heard many times that the British Field Trial probably doesn't promote the working qualities that are required on the Nordic working grounds, lacking the needed focus on the free search and the water work. I don't agree on that and it's quite obvious when you look at the top performing Labradors in Sweden that a quite large share of these are bred directly from the best British stock. I would say in fact that you could hardly talk about a Swedish working Labrador line as the best working lines are heavily dominated by the British top performers. The Swedish top Labradors have high merits even from "All-European" competition so they're quite good seen from a holistic perspective.



The bloodlines produced by the gamekeeper breeders Colin Wells ("W") and Peter Johnson (Downstream), mainly based on Waterboy and his son Woodlark, have no doubt played the main roles as the base for the Swedish working Flatcoat, being subject for a continuous linebreeding.

You might argue then saying that British top working Flatcoats probably aren't good enough. I don't agree on that either. I remember a training session many years ago with Joan Marsden on a moor quite close to where she lived. She brought Wemdom Bright Bond of Tarncourt and Tarncourt Rejoice and a friend of hers brought Hermitage Hector (sired by Tarncourt Crofter). These dogs worked hard on the heavy grounds and I remember

specifically a few, long, handled retrieves over a stormy lake. This was like watching a Swedish Cold game test and they all performed beautifully, Hector being the most stylish, Bright Bond hard going and Rejoice being the softer, handling beautifully on a few long blinds.

My experiences from British Field Trials are the same and I'm quite sure that a top performer at a British Open Trial would do very well at a Nordic Cold Game test or Field Trial. Even if there are fewer dominating breeders in Britain today comparable with the quite outstanding Nancy Laughton (Claverdon), Amelia Jessel (Collyers) or Joan Marsden (Tarncourt), with their lifelong commitment to the working Flatcoat, there is a viable British working Flatcoat culture. There are numerous work-oriented breeders having just a few litters over time but still contributing to the maintenance of the excellent British working lines.

Looking at the long list of Swedish "Jakt-Champions" there is only one dog however, the outstanding Danish Reltub Black Velvet, being gamekeeper bred in Britain, reaching "Jakt" Champion status. Most Swedish "Jakt" champions have several generations of homebred dogs behind and they're mainly linebred to the "W"/-Downstream lines. But don't misunderstand me. The best British working Flatcoats are first class and it's no doubt that British exports like Claverdon Fantasia, the offspring of Claverdon Gaff, Claverdon Lysander and Claverdon Flapper, dogs sired by Heronsflight Tercel, Tarncourt Noteable, the litter brothers Varingo Richboy and Stormbrook and many others out of the more recent British working generations have meant a lot to the Swedish Working Flatcoat stock. I believe they have added a lot to steadiness, biddability and style, when it comes to field work and handled retrieves. The best Flatcoat we ever had, High Leys Scott (Claverdon Lysander x Marlcot Nicks Woodchuck), was bred by Colin's son Ron Wells and imported at three years of age. He could for sure match the very best Swedish Retrievers in the field, but although he had the strongest water passion (and partly just because it), the challenge was too hard at that age to teach him to manage the long, handled water retrieves in the highest class.



At the Nordic Flatcoated Retriever Championship 2014

Dual purpose and the future working Flatcoat?

The term Dual-Purpose is a tenacious term that is carved into the fundament on which the Flatcoat is built, based on a principle that a good Flatcoat should present a first-class work at a trial and win at a show. That's a wonderful promise but what does it mean in practice and is it realistic knowing about the current competition levels?

It's an excellent ambition for sure to avoid dividing a breed in different fully separated strains. Knowing the very limited gene pool of the Flatcoat it's of utmost importance to preserve most odd bloodlines and at least do the occasional outcrosses between more work oriented and show oriented bloodlines. There are not too few breeders enjoying shows as well as work competition of a varying kind. Many show-oriented breeders for sure are doing the occasional picking up work with their show dogs in many countries. For those it must be an option to work the show winner and show the good worker with a reasonable potential to get a reward.

In an article, published in the Swedish Flatcoated Retriever Club magazine in 1982, the British top breeder Read Flowers (Fenrivers) said: "I believe it's time now in England to change the current trend and try to select our breeding stock with regard to a suitable temperament and biddability and to hope that this will generate good looks as well. We must keep working capabilities in the forefront when we breed and to strive for calm, sensitive and kind pups to train." For him it was a bit of a trend break from the days when you could breed a good looker and get a quite good worker out of it. But from then on, he and many others like Nancy Laughton, Colin Wells, Amelia Jessel, Joan Marsden and Peter and Shirley Johnson, started to breed from the first-class workers keeping in mind that a good type and conformation is of importance even in a working Flatcoat.

But without a quite significant share of breeders persistently focusing on first-class working capabilities the working capability of the breed will slowly deteriorate and that's a trend that is clearly visible all through the Flatcoat world. Fewer Flatcoats are competing on top levels. Two of the countries consistently producing first-class workers over the years, Great Britain and Denmark, have seen a downward trend in top performers over the last ten to twenty years. In Sweden, probably being the country with the largest average interest in working Flatcoats there is a downward trend when it comes to the number of competing Flatcoats on high levels. I'm quite sure the picture looks the same in the other Nordic countries and for sure as well in the US and in many other countries around the world with a larger interest in working Flatcoats.

I'm quite sure it doesn't have to be like that. But it takes an openness for targeted pro-work breeding programs in parallel to a dual purpose breeding focusing on working capabilities. It takes an acceptance towards diversity in breeding and an understanding that we won't reach the tree tops if we don't reach for the stars. It requires a fair share of breeders consistently breeding from first class stock and it requires cross border

cooperation to distribute good outcross blood. It takes at last a willingness to preserve a workmanlike conformation in show/dual purpose dogs enabling a mix of blood between different strains to improve options to look for and use the best no matter if it's dual purpose bred or bred primarily for work.

NUMBER OF ENTERED DOGS AT SWEDISH B-TESTS (COLD GAME)						
	Labrador – nr of dogs	Golden – nr of dogs	Flatcoat – nr of dogs	Flatcoat entries ekl	Flatcoat 1:st prices all classes	Flatcoat share (%) of 1 prices all classes
2017	762	213	285	83	74	15,3
2016	763	220	279	82	66	13,8
2015	737	210	307	89	88	15.4
2014	729	237	354	130	118	16,3
2013	726	220	359	132	104	13,7
2012	698	227	381	152	106	11,8
2011	720	244	383	148	138	16.1
2010	718	237	439	198	170	17.6
2009	757	257	466	181	165	16.0
2008	690	248	496	185	173	15,7
2007	662	268	521	187	165	14,2
2006	643	265	567	152	176	14,9
2005	629	260	502	134	174	16.1
2004	610	229	496	137	193	18,5
2003	589	227	459	111	171	16,6
2002	594	238	495	136	173	16.0
2001	658	237	477	137	167	15.0
2000	634	254	464	142	189	17,3

It's a notable fact that the number of entered Flatcoats at Swedish trials and tests has shown a continuous downward trend since 2006. Simultaneously the number of entered Golden Retrievers are surprisingly even for all these years. The number of Labradors are slowly growing with some variations. Looking at the overall share of 1st prices the Flatcoat is slightly below the Golden. Among Labradors more than 30 % of all prices are 1st st.

BREEDERS HAVING PRODUCED TWO OR MORE SWEDISH JAKTCHAMPIONS OVER THE YEARS 1972 - 2017				
Prefix	Jakt Champions (B-test = cold game)	Nr of Prices in Ekl (B-test)/ years	Certificate/CK /1:st (A-test)	Prices (A-test EKL)
Hinnareds	16	186/25	2	6
Hovhills	13	199/24		1
Gunhills	8	159/33		1
Roghöjdens	7	103/12		1
Inkwells	6	80/15		3
Micawbers	5	73/14		
Lady Doc's	4	51/16		
Matsbokurvans	4	27/7		
Straight Flush	4	61/13	3	3
Feedbacks	4	79/17		1
Waternuts	4	32/8	4	19
Zebulons	4	90/20		
Almanza	3	104/22		1
Boltitorps	3	64/22		
Lopplådans	3	48/13		
O'Flanagan	3	76/22		
Searover	3	66/14		
Coatfloats	2	72/16		3
Comics	2	61/15		
Duckstream	2	22/11	2	
Flatterhaft	2	60/16	1	1

Flaxarnas	2	33/9		
Kecas	2	20/8		
Lustans	2	61/15		
Puhs	2	13/5		
Skattkamma- rens	2	46/10		
Svartalwen	2	16/4	1	
Twinkles	2	7/3		
Viltin	2	3/2		

This list is presenting breeders with a proven capability to produce top performers at Swedish trials producing at least two Jaktchampions over the years. It's no doubt that Hinnareds, Hovhills, Roghöjdens, Inkwells and Micawbers have been the most successful ones, being active trialers themselves and running training classes over numerous years. But it's no doubt as well that the Gunhills kennel, being active since 1969 stands out as one of the top performing ones although its main focus has been on shows.

For those of you who believe that trials on warm game (Field Trials – A-test) is the only valid testing ground for a working retriever you'll find some of the most successful ones as well on this list.

But it's no doubt there are many other high performing pro-work-oriented kennels as well and to get a current view of the most successful ones you should go to "ssrk.se" and click on "Prov-utställning" in the top menu, scroll down to "Retrieverjaktprov" and choose "Resultat och statistik för SSRKs Jaktprov" in the left-hand menu. Please apologize for any faults and please provide us with any corrections or additions to "bearstream@me.com"

