

THE BREEDING & TRAINING BEHIND OBEDIENCE'S TOP DOG

A two-time Top Obedience Dog of the Year, "Tapper," a 5 ½-year-old male Golden Retriever, who won in 2016 and 2017 and took second in 2015, is the result of nearly a century of combined performance breeding and training.

Seemingly never to tire of retrieving with gusto, heeling proudly or delivering front to finish with flair, OTCH Sunfire's What's On Tap UDX31 OGM GN GO OBHF was bred by Sunfire Golden Retriever breeder Barbara Biewer with Christine Osborn, of Greenville, South Carolina, co-owner of the dam. Biewer and her husband, Michael "Mike" Book, of Suffield, Connecticut, have etched a legacy as the breeders of more than 500 performance-titled dogs over 45 years.

Raised by owner-handler Lynn Heidinger of Tinley Park, Illinois, a veteran obedience trainer with six

Obedience Trial Champions (OTCH) before him, Tapper started learning in reverse order, mastering the most challenging utility and open exercises at 4 months old. Conceding that her method is based on "practice, practice, practice," Heidinger trains daily with Tapper.

In 2014, Book and Biewer were named the AKC Breeders of the Year for Obedience, recognizing the more than 40 OTCH dogs they have bred and their long-term commitment to the sport. "The honor reflects the dedication and talent of many people who have trusted our breeding program and accomplished amazing things with our dogs," Biewer says.

The best-known owner is Heidinger. In 2001, she handled "Toasty" (NOC2 OTCH Sunfire's Toast Of The Town UDX45 OBHF) to Top Obedience Dog of the Year, after two consecutive wins at the AKC National



"Tapper" is shown with rosettes won at shows and the Winkies he received for being the Top Obedience Dog of the Year in 2016 and 2017.

Championship in 1999 and 2000. The highest-rated Golden in obedience based on his lifetime accrual of 8,555 points, Toasty also holds the record as the youngest Golden to earn an OTCH, which he did at 23 ½ months old.

Naturally competitive with a streak of stubbornness, traits that have served her well, Heidinger recalls her start in obedience in 1968 with a Wire Fox Terrier named "Frosty." "Halfway through the class, the trainer told me, 'You are wasting your time and mine,'" she says. "We went on to finish first in the class and then started going to shows and earned a UD (Utility Dog) title."

BREEDING FOR TEMPERAMENT

When Biewer and Book started out in obedience, it was the amiable temperament of the Golden Retriever that took hold of their hearts. "Goldens are versatile, all-around dogs," Book says. "They are 24-hours-a-day dogs that want to be with you."

They attribute the third litter out of their foundation bitch, Tanya-Du Shanka CD WC OD; Can ÇD, sired by a littermate to her grandsire, FC AFC Kinike's Oro De Rojo, to jump starting the Sunfire line. Keeping two bitches from that litter, they inadvertently began developing two lines, learning about the differences in Golden temperament and how temperament impacts breeding.

"Cascade" (Can OTCH Sunfire's Kinetic Cascade UD MH WCX OD), who trained under up-and-coming pro retriever trainer Mike Lardy in the winter of 1981-82 and later became one of the first Master Hunters to also hold a UD title, was the first of their field line. "Cascade was a very trainable bitch who could be bred to dogs with tougher temperaments," Book says.

The other bitch from the litter, "Ruffian" (Sunfire's Kinetic Ruffian CD WC), was the start of a blended line of show, field and obedience titled dogs. She produced Sunfire's first competition obedience dog, "Dynamite" (Can CH Sunfire's Kinetic Dynamite UD JH WCX OD; Can UD WCI), when bred to a show champion. "Ruffian was a smart, independent female with good conformation who we bred to softer, easygoing dogs," he says.

Mentor Sydney Waller of Jamestown, Rhode Island, whom they met in 1980 through obedience, was impressed with their dogs' sound structure but wanted to help them improve the looks of their dogs. That led to Book co-owning "Bonnie" (Am Can CH Clark's Easter Bonnet UD WCX OD; Can CDX WC) with Waller.

"Bonnie became an essential part of our breeding program," he says. "She was our first show champion. We swapped litters with Sydney, breeding Bonnie to



Lynn Heidinger and Tapper practice heeling at a park near their home.

a Field Champion, then to an Obedience Trial Champion and lastly to a combination show, field and obedience dog."

Bonnie's second litter, sired by OTCH Heelalong Cracklin' Sunfire TDX WC OS OBHF, owned by Karen Johnson of Lake Mills, Wisconsin, produced Sunfire's first obedience champions. "Flash" (OTCH Sunfire Spontaneous Combustn JH WCX OS OBHF), owned by Karen Price of Chatsworth, California, and "Rowdy" (OTCH Sunfire's Rowdy Rebel JH WCX OBHF), owned by Amy Gooch of Palm Coast, Florida, finished their titles in the 1980s, giving Sunfire status as an obedience-producing kennel.

Eight generations later, both Sunfire lines are going strong. Book competes in obedience and hunting tests, and Biewer focuses on obedience. They have proved

(continued on next page)