

This was written by Sarah Whittaker for the URC Golden Jubilee Year Book.

FROM STONEMEADE TO BRAMATHA

Philip Whittaker started the Stonemeade kennel with a cocker spaniel given to him by his mother, who had the “Stones” cocker spaniels. Being a farmer, it was a natural progression to retrievers, the first being a Labrador.

Philip’s wife, Suzanne, always preferred the Golden Retrievers and in 1969, the first Golden Retriever was purchased. Alresford Saturn was the start of a long and happy association with the entertaining Lottie Pilkington and her Alresford kennel.

Then in 1970 having been enchanted by Miss Buchanan’s Hallbent Flatcoated Retrievers, Philip purchased Hallbent New Novel (Hallbent Woodcock x Hallbent Dusk) as a puppy. Jessie, as she was known by the family, was to become an outstanding bitch. She gained her show title and working qualifier with relative ease and was a great credit wherever she went, whether in the ring or the shooting field. Her charm never failed her.

Philip then purchased the dam of New Novel, Hallbent Dusk and from this same union bred Stonemeade Shandygaff, who with Stonemeade Fine Lace, was the foundation stock of today’s Flatcoated Retrievers in Australia. One of the high points for Philip was winning the bitch CC at Crufts in 1973 with New Novel.

In 1971, history repeated itself and a third generation of Whittakers started its fascination with the dog world. Philip gave his daughter, Sarah, her first Flatcoated Retriever, Stonemeade Prince Charming, a son from Hallbent Woodcock x Hallbent Dusk. Stonemeade Bertram, a son of Prince was mated to a bitch, Auriga of Hartmead of Atherbram, owned by Miss Payne, who was the great niece of Will Phizacklea the founder of the Atherbram Flatcoated Retrievers. From this litter Sarah had two puppies back, a liver bitch, Atherbram Ability and a black dog, Atherbram Absolom.

Ability was to prove a marvellous bitch, both in the field and the show ring, always capable of holding her own! She was responsible for

Sarah's weakness for the liver Flatcoats, which will always hold a special place in her heart.

It wasn't until 1979 that Sarah bred her first litter, this was from Atherbram Ability and started the Bramatha kennel. Today all the Bramatha dogs go back to Prince. When Sarah breeds a litter which contains both black and livers, then all the puppies in that litter are given a colour in their registered name, so that in years to come people can distinguish possible impure black lines.

Father and daughter have striven for the ever elusive dual purpose Flatcoated Retriever. However, Sarah believes that the dual purpose gundog is a virtual impossibility, like breeding the animal with perfect conformation. Emphasis will always lean towards either the work or the show, perhaps within different lines of that kennel. But she will still breed for sound animals that hopefully are within the breed standard and that can achieve a good honest days work.

Philip and Sarah have both been members of the U.R.C. and have actively supported various events, with Flatcoated and Golden Retrievers, even hosting Essex area working tests at their home in Suffolk.

Sadly Philip Whittaker died of a heart attack in 1989, however his wife, Suzanne, continues the Stonemeade kennel of Flatcoated Retrievers and Golden Retrievers.

Sarah is out regularly in the shooting field with her dogs and is seen at a number of shows during the year. Philip taught Sarah from early days, before she even owned a dog, that dogs were to bring pleasure and enjoyment. It has been her philosophy to always go out and enjoy her day, win or loose, wet or fine, it is a day out and something to be grateful to be a part of.