

THE ACTIVE, INQUISITIVE SPANIEL

By Nichole Dooley & Daphne Stover

I really thought the little black ball of fur I had just met was a long bodied cocker mix. I had been involved with Setters and Cocker Spaniels in performance events for over 10 years, but had never heard of a Field Spaniel. My first experience with the breed was amazing. The little Field bitch was confident and energetic, with a mind of her own. She was active, smart, and needed a “Job!” Doggie daycare was perfect for her. It was an outlet for her energy and taught her social skills.

We also started obedience and agility training. She learned quickly and was easy to motivate. Food, toys, she loved it all! I was her other mother, trainer, mentor, playmate, and her best friend. Although, together we challenged each other in the many venues in agility, rally and obedience. I learned how a Field Spaniel learns and thinks, and that they had their way of doing things. A true crowd pleaser, she also taught me that Field Spaniels can really do it all.

I now live with three wonderful Field Spaniels each with their own unique personalities. From room to room, I find a Field following me wondering what we will do next. Some of their favorite activities are fetching, running, wrestling with each other, going for a walk, chasing the birds, rabbits, and squirrels, burrowing through the snow, car rides, or just laying in the sun. They are funny, cuddly Spaniels that want to be my lap dogs. Not realizing that they are nearly too big for my lap! They are very much creatures of habit and love to predict their day, helping me with my daily duties. As long as they are with the family, they are happy.

They are a versatile spaniel that love the outdoors. They are eager to please their humans, and are happy doing agility, rally, obedience, hunting, tracking, lure coursing, dock diving, working as a therapy dog, or just being faithful companions. Being a sporting companion dog they must be



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employed or can become bored and destructive, they are best suited for an active lifestyle spending time with their owners. A Field responds well to positive and motivational training techniques that include toys, food, and drive. They quickly learn right or wrong. Minimal corrections are sufficient. Exposure to harsh train methods can cause a Field Spaniel to totally shut down. Their intelligence can fool them into thinking they know what you want, before you ask for it, offering behaviors you may not want. They admire and need a confident leader who is fun!

They will challenge every moment to live life to the fullest, so you must be one step ahead of them in the thinking process. The bond you create with your Field Spaniel through play, training, exercise, discipline, and trust will follow through in any performance arena.

Obedience with a Field can be rewarding for both dog and trainer. Baseline training before 6 months old is so crucial, it imprints on them for life. Reserved by nature, they need to be socialized with many people and dogs during this time. Most can learn and pass the CGC, Canine Good Citizen test, as a puppy and are very capable of competing at all levels of rally and obedience. Fields prefer rally obedience because of the versatility of exercises and the ability to praise, and interact with them while working. Although their ability to scent retrieve, jump, and focus for long periods of time, have allowed them to be great working utility

dogs. One must always remember that they are spaniels with a working nose. This can lead to occasional sniffing in obedience or rally, tracking the dog before them or hunting the area to free it from critters.

Field Spaniels love all aspects of agility and the constant course changes make them want more. Add a few extra tunnels and it increases their excitement. The tunnels draw them in full speed ahead, and they come out smiling. The quickness of the sport is highly contagious for handler and dog. A beautiful, comical sight is a photo of a Field flying over a jump with their ears flying like wings. Their sense of fun and desire to make you laugh will surely entertain in agility and make you think they forgot everything they have learned.



The tracking Field Spaniel is simply amazing and beautiful to watch. They can follow an invisible trail of scent through various covers and weather conditions. A Field Spaniel's "Nose, Knows!" Tracking is in their blood. They have been very successful in both search and rescue and tracking tests. Most Fields can pass a TD level tracking dog test with minimal training and patience. Learning how to read your Field's tracking style, is your challenge.

Of course, we can't forget what Field Spaniels were originally bred to do! A Field Spaniel doing what it was intended is truly a sight to behold. They are eager and willing to find, flush, and retrieve game from both land and water and they give meaning to saying "form follows function". Built for activity and endurance they can accommodate most terrains.

The Field Spaniels willingness to please and natural ability to problem solve make them perfect candidates for field work. While their curiosity level may get the best of them in their youth and when early in training and exposure to the field, consistency, patience and building a good

foundation of good habits is essential. In the end, this can make any seasoned hunter jealous of your Field Spaniel as an all-around hunt test competitor or tireless in-season companion. Over the years, since the breed was re-established in the second half of the 20th century, we have to be thankful for the longtime breeders that have helped move this breed forward whom have also committed to working their dogs in the Field. For a small breed, and to be able to boast Master Hunter titles from a several different kennels and many more running at the senior levels is proof that this breed remains a working dog at the core.

It is always an adventure training and exhibiting with a Field Spaniel. Many experiences with the Fields Spaniel breed have taught me that the Field will continue to learn as long as you continue to motivate and train them. Their active, inquisitive personality enables them to perform well into their retirement years in conformation and performance venues worldwide. Best of all, their impish nature will always keep you on your toes! ■

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BIO

Daphne Stover owns Hadley Acres Obedience & Care, a dog training, grooming, and kennel in Metamora, MI. When she is not helping her clients enjoy an easier life with their dogs, Daphne enjoys competing with her WyldKatz Field Spaniels in agility, obedience, and conformation. Daphne has earned hundreds of titles on her dogs in the past 15 years in many venues. She also volunteers her time helping the Field Spaniel Society of America with their performance activities as the current FSSA Performance Chairperson. Her latest accomplishment was certifying her field Sabre to be a USA Therapy dog. Daphne is USA Therapy Dog's lead Trainer.



BIO

Nichole Dooley Bunch is a longtime breeder, owner and handler. Having either owner/handled or breeder/owner/handled several different Field Spaniels (both dogs and bitches) to multiple sporting group wins, top breed & all-breed rankings, and earned winners at multiple National Specialties, among other top awards nationwide, she is one of the most accomplished handlers in the breed on a national scale.
Most recently, her dog Hudson was the #1 Field Spaniel All-systems for 2012 and was the first Field Spaniel to earn the Reserve BIS award; and her bitch Ginger was the #1 Field Spaniel bitch in 2012, both being the only two Field Spaniels ranked in the top 5 breed and all-breed. In 2013, Ginger went on to become the 1st FS Bitch to win Best of Breed at Westminster KC in 15 years. She and her mother, Corinne Dooley, breed under the SandsCape prefix.