



Training with Dad

Hi! I'm Klaire Kirsch. I'm nine-years-old, in the fourth grade, and live in Rapid City, South Dakota.

I'm also an assistant dog trainer. Last August, I got to spend a weekend with my dad, Craig Kirsch, in Freeman, South Dakota to watch our dog perform in a NAVHDA Utility Test. For two months I had helped my dad train our Pointer, Ice, for the test, so I was excited to see how he would do. My dad had taken other dogs to Natural Ability tests, but this was his first try at the UT.

When we were looking for another dog last year, my dad wanted one with a lot of natural pointing ability and a coat that was easy to take care of, so he decided to try a Pointer. We called Ross Calloway of Caladen Kennels in South Carolina, and asked for a pup that would retrieve, was not afraid of the water, and would be a calm dog at home. I think Ross sent us the perfect dog, because Ice does all of those things. He was born in February of 2008 and he came to us as a four-month-old puppy. We liked him right away, because he was so calm and quiet in the yard. He didn't dig or bark like some of our other dogs and that kept Mom and the neighbors happy. A few days after we got Ice, we took him to a pond and threw a dummy in for him. He jumped a long ways out in the water, swam out to the dummy, and brought it back to Dad. Some people think English Pointers aren't good swimmers, but this dog would swim all day, if we would let him. The longest we have let him swim is 46 minutes. He was chasing a duck and would not give up. Dad finally had to wade in and grab him because it was time for us to go.

Dad took Ice to a Natural Ability test when he was seven months old, and he did great. He scored a 110 Prize I. When we took him grouse and pheasant hunting for the first time last fall, Ice did well. Dad was pretty sure that we had a good dog on our hands. He said that Ice had a good nose, looked great when he pointed, and did a good job retrieving birds. His favorite thing about the dog was that he was so easy to train. He pointed and retrieved a lot of grouse and pheasants that year, and Dad decided to enter him in the Utility Test the next fall.

Dad and I started training Ice for the UT in June. Training with my dad was a lot of fun. I got up at 5:30 lots of mornings to go training with him. I enjoyed it a lot, and it brought us closer together as father and daughter. I liked helping and learning so that I can train a pup of my own some day. I dragged birds for Ice to track, threw our dead duck into the water for him to retrieve, and got to wear ear plugs and shoot the

starter pistol. Dad also let me work the heeling stakes with Ice, which was a lot of fun. We bought eight chukars to use, and trapped two wild pigeons. Most of the time we put corn in the trap and left, but something kept going into the trap and eating the birds we caught. When we came back all of the corn was gone and nothing was in the trap but feathers! We did catch a young pigeon that was really tame. I fed and watered the birds each day, and I got so attached to that young pigeon that Dad told me I could let it go. I loved him even more when he let me do that! The two other pigeons and all of the chukars got shot in training. Dad said it takes birds to make a bird dog, so I understood. We tried to buy some ducks, but couldn't find any. One morning when Dad was driving out to a training pond, he saw a dead duck lying in the road, so he stopped and picked it up. We put that duck in the freezer and used it for a month. It was in pretty bad shape by the time we finally threw it away.

The test was held about five hours away from Rapid City, so we left the Friday before, and I got to skip a day of school. We drove to Rod and Judy Mace's house near Tyndall, South Dakota. Rod got my dad started in NAVHDA about five years ago, and they have become good friends. He has a whole kennel full of wirehairs, and helped us with ideas for training Ice during the summer. We left Rod and Judy's house very early on Saturday morning for the drive to Freeman, where the test was being held. There were people there from South Dakota, Iowa, North Dakota, and Nebraska, and six dogs were testing that day. My favorite dog was a really pretty German Shorthair named Rip. It was really foggy and cool when we got there, but by the time it was Ice's turn to go, the sun had come out. Rod and I got to follow along behind the judges to watch him in the field, and I got to take some pictures. When Dad turned Ice loose, he took off like a shot and I was worried that he would keep going. He finally turned and started hunting. He ran into a corn field a couple of times, because there were some pheasants in there from earlier in the day, and Dad had to holler at him to come back. Ice pointed his first bird and Dad walked in to flush it. I held my breath. Ice had been breaking on the shot once in a while in practice. We were lucky that morning. He stayed put when the bird was shot and made a good retrieve. He found a few more birds but was pretty wild. After it was over Dad was a little disappointed, and we were not sure what score we would get on that part of the test.

Next was the drag. The judges took a duck and dragged it across a hayfield, and then left it in a cornfield. Ice sniffed the

feather pile and ran straight into the corn. He was in there for a little bit, but Dad said it seemed like a long, long time. When he came out, with the duck in his mouth, he ran right back to Dad and handed it over - just like he was supposed to do.

After lunch, we all drove to a swampy pond for the water tests. In the Duck Search, Ice waited after Dad shot and jumped in the water. He swam around the pond and went into the reeds right where the duck had been let go. After that we didn't see him, until the judges told Dad to call him back. It took a few minutes to get Ice out of the water, but Dad was smiling when they came back to the truck.

The last test was the duck retrieve. First, Ice had to heel through some stakes. He went through them with no problem. Next they went down to the duck blind. Dad gave Ice a good "whoa" and left to walk behind some big bushes where the dog couldn't see him. He shot twice and Ice stayed steady. Dad walked back to the blind. He and the gunner both fired shots, and the duck was tossed and splashed into the water. Ice waited for Dad to say "fetch", and then swam out to the duck. I was worried that he might drop it before he got back, because the water was full of moss and weeds, but he carried it back and handed it to Dad. That was a big relief!

After all the dogs finished in the water, we drove back to town to hear the scores. I was so nervous when the judges came out to read them off. Dad had told me that he thought Ice had done pretty well in most of the test, but had been a little shaky in the field portion. I knew he had to get a "4" in Search in order to get a Prize I. When the judge called out "Search, 4" I knew we were in good shape. Ice got "4"s in everything except Steadiness and Obedience, to end up with a 198 points and a Prize I. Everyone cheered for us, and my dad had a big smile on his face. I did too! Dad thanked me for all my help in training. He told me that when we get our next puppy, he wanted me to run it in the NA test! This made me feel pretty special.

Now we're thinking about entering Ice in the 2010 Invitational. It will be in Iowa, so we won't have to drive very far. Dad thinks Ice probably has a shot at it, but is not sure if he is a good enough trainer. I told him that I'll help him, so maybe I'll be able to get out of a couple of days of school again to go with him! I hope Ross has another good pup for us, because I'm going to keep reminding Dad about his promise. I can't wait to take my own puppy to a test. Maybe I'll see you at one next year!

