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The Land Report

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THE MAGAZINE

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LAND REPORT 100
Robert O. Anderson



registered Labs serve strictly as family pets, the breed is the overwhelming favorite of serious waterfowl hunters. The Labrador has dominated retriever field trials for the past century. A good Lab is perfect for the landowner who needs an easily trained generalist around to woof at strangers, play with the kids, guard the henhouse and garden, and fetch waterfowl and upland game birds during hunting season.

My friend James Collier, a veteran pro trainer and hunting guide, offers five reasons for owning a Lab: drive, personality, versatility, trainability, and consistency. "The thing about Labs, especially the ones they're breeding these days, is that they come with such high hunting and retrieving drive," he says. "They have all the attributes you

as well as a first-rate duck fetcher. Although Chessies are territorial and might keep the extension agent in the truck until you step out the front door, they're rarely aggressive enough to get you sued. They tend to be especially protective of children.

HERDING DOGS

If you raise sheep and enjoy flashy, exacting stock dog work, you can't go wrong with a **border collie**. Often touted as the world's most intelligent breed, the border collie is without a doubt the most highly refined of the herding dogs. While good ones abound, mediocre and sorry ones are all too common, thanks to the influence of the show ring. Choose with care, and you're likely to be rewarded with beautiful, lovable, relentless workers.

If you run a cow-calf operation, you'll need a dog with more grit than the average border collie. And you won't find a grittier breed than the **Catahoula leopard dog**, also known as the Catahoula cur or Louisiana Catahoula. Nineteenth-century cracker cowboys prized leopard dogs for their ability to root wild cattle out of the dense Florida palmetto flats. Given its background, it's not surprising that the Catahoula is a bit rough for some kinds of work. They'll eat your sheep up getting them into the pen. But a good Catahoula will make a reasonable animal out of the surliest mama cow.

Randy Walker, of Ranger Creek Ranch in North Texas, has worked with cow dogs for the past 30 years. He loves border collies and Catahoulas. Naturally, he crosses the two

A yellow Lab fetches a duck. Labs out of solid working lines are natural retrievers and powerful swimmers. They also make fine companions and all-around farm and ranch dogs.

breeds to get the trainability of the border collie and the grittiness of the Catahoula. "I've tried Australian shepherds, heelers, and most of the other common breeds, but I've had the best luck with Catahoulas and border collies. And these crossbreeds are working great," he says.

His advice for prospective cow dog owners? "Papers don't work. Dogs work. Make sure you're dealing with reputable breeders who guarantee their pups," he says. "If a breeder isn't willing to replace a pup or refund your money if you aren't satisfied, then look elsewhere."

That's good advice, regardless of breed. 🐾

Wyman Meinzer and Henry Chappell are collaborating on *Working Dogs of Texas*, scheduled for publication by Collectors Covey in the autumn of 2009.

need in a good gun dog, plus they have the disposition that makes for an ideal family companion."

Unlike the Lab, which was developed in Newfoundland and refined on the British Isles by genteel sportsmen, the workaday **Chesapeake Bay retriever** retains many of the qualities of the 19th-century market hunters he served so long and well. A truly American breed, developed to retrieve hundreds of ducks a day from rough, cold water, the Chessie is independent, protective, and learns best on the job. The old market hunters had little time for formal training.

With his harsh outer coat and wooly undercoat (both oily for water repellence), the Chessie can break ice all day and holds up surprisingly well in hot weather. There is no tougher dog in the world. Like the Lab, the Chessie should make a fine all-around farm dog and companion

