DON'T WORRY BE HAPPY
At Home with Your Flat-Coated Retriever

By Claire Koshar

If my Flat-Coated Retrievers could choose a theme song, surely it would be the 1980's hit “Don't Worry Be Happy”. At home, the Flat-Coat is a happy and loving member of his family. His sweetness is part of his intrinsic charm.

In her authoritative book on the breed, A Review of the Flat-Coated Retriever, Dr. Nancy Laughton described the Flat-Coat as “a canine Peter Pan”. He is the dog who never wants to grow up, an optimist who remains young at heart to his last days. These are active, energetic dogs and they mature very slowly. This can be frustrating for someone who expects to accomplish the complete training of one at a young age. The Flat-Coat will learn whatever you are smart enough to teach him. Quiet, firm and upbeat training works the best. Flat-Coats need to know that they are pleasing you. They respond to warm praise and, of course, a cookie. If there is too much repetition or pressure they seem to think, “Well, if you weren't happy with the other five times let me show you something more creative.”

In the house, our dogs want to stay close. Bess can be fast asleep at my feet but if I get up from my computer she...
“THERE IS A JOYOUSNESS
ABOUT THESE DOGS,
AS CHARACTERISTIC AS
their distinctive heads, soft
expression and shining coats.”

is instantly awake and following me. I
would describe the Flat-Coat far more
a “guardian dog” than, in any way, a
“guard dog”. We generally say that they
might lick you to death. A devoted fam-
ily dog, he really knows no strangers.
He is gentle with children but in his
adolescence, his sheer size and enthusi-
asm can be overwhelming. In our fam-
ily there were rules for both children
and dogs. For the children there was no
running, no screaming and no rough
play with puppies. And to be fair, the
puppies learned that jumping and nipp-
ing were off-limits. As with all breeds,
early training is the most effective.
First and foremost, the Flat-Coat
is a retriever. He will carry anything
in his mouth that he can lift. If you
don’t want your underclothing proudly
delivered to the company, it would be
a good idea to keep it out of reach. The
characteristics of trainability and kind-
liness that makes him a good retriever
are just as valued in the family dog. It
is not uncommon for the dog who was
Best of Breed on Sunday to be training
for a hunt title on Monday and trek-
king with his family on the next week-
end. The Flat-Coat is an adaptable dog
and he can be happy in a wide range
of activities as long as he has adequate
exercise and the companionship of
his people.

From a naughty twinkle in a puppy’s
eye to the final thump of his tail, the

Flat-Coat sees life as a happy advan-
ture. Every day my dogs remind me
to see life as they do. Hey, life’s good.
Don’t Worry. Be Happy.

“EVERY DAY MY DOGS REMIND ME TO
SEE LIFE AS THEY DO.
Hey, life’s good. Don’t Worry. Be Happy.”

About the Author:
Claire Kosbar, FCRSA member for 40 years, its past Secre-
tary and Parliamentarian and a Life Member of the Society,
is the author of A Guide to Dog Sports: From Beginners to
Winners”. Her Flat-Coated Retrievers have held titles in con-
formation, field and obedience. She has judged Sweepstakes
at National Specialties in the U.S. and Canada.