

THE RIDGEBACK REGISTER

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The 2005
Best in
National
Specialty
Show
Winner



Mojave

BISS BIS AM/AU CH. CAMELOT'S CODE RED

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Double or Nothing...

By Theresa M. Lyons
The Ridgeback Register

Writing this cover story was sort of like laying bets at the track. Which angle do I work? Which trainer do I spotlight? How do I write about "Mojave" (BISS BIS Am/Au Ch. Camelot's Code Red), the National Specialty winner, and not write about his litter brother and Top 20 winner, "Ruger" (BIF Ch. Camelot's Promise to Bakari, SC)? How do I not focus on their highly accomplished sire and dam? And what about the breeders, the owners ... gosh, the handlers?

Instead of tussling over word counts, or trying my luck on which story would be more exciting, I opted for the winner-take-all approach.

So, to give credit everywhere it is due, let me start at the beginning.

Flashback to 1976, University of California at Berkeley. Clayton Heathcock, a recently divorced professor living with four teenage children, meets a beautiful young graduate student named Cheri Hadley. While Clayton admits "she was only seven years older than my oldest daughter," he knew they were destined to be together. Married in 1980 and celebrating their silver anniversary, the couple found it ironic, Clayton smiles, "that this is the year we won the RRCUS silver medallion."

Clayton and Cheri were married for several years before bringing dogs into their lives. Clayton traveled a lot, and Cheri wanted a large dog for company and safety. "We wanted a purebred," Clayton remembers, "but did not want a breed that required surgical intervention, such as ear cropping or tail docking." Other considerations: "a short

coat, preferably with hair the same color as our brown hardwood floors, and no slobberers."

In 1988, the couple went to the Golden Gate Kennel Club show in San Francisco, visiting all 145 breeds on exhibit. "Believe it or not," Clayton recalls, "there was only one breed that satisfied every single one of our criteria.



Moreover, we were struck by the regal look of the dog and attracted by the friendliness of the Ridgeback owners we met there." By the end of the next week they had brought home their first Ridgeback, a beautiful 8-week old bitch they named Morganna (Ch. Deer Ridge Morganna, ROM).

Clayton and Cheri bred their first litter in 1990, under the kennel prefix Camelot. Since then, they have bred 25 litters. "In the beginning," Clayton says, "my main mentor was Diane Jacobsen. She helped me grade our first few litters and taught me what faults were hard to correct." Later, he turned to Mike and Karen Kurtzner, who handled for him for many years. "Mike and Karen are very good with structure and were

instrumental in helping me identify the best puppies from later litters."

Now, 15 years later, eight dogs currently reside at Camelot -- all Ridgebacks, but for one named Nana. "She is a rescue who is clearly part Ridgeback because of her spectacular ridge, but is mostly Collie or Chesapeake Bay retriever," Clayton explains. The rest of the canine family includes Uma, a 6-year old pet bitch who was returned about two years ago when her family could no longer care for her; Hadley, a 5-year-old champion and stud dog; Rosie, a 4-year-old who was spayed when she was diagnosed thyroid autoantibody positive; Napa, a Group-winning 2-year-old son of Marley and Hadley; and Elvira and Monroe, two young bitches (18 and 17 months, respectively) who are just starting their show careers. And finally, there is Clayton's pride and joy, Marley, "our 9-year old champion and retired brood bitch whom we love to death."

BIS Ch. Camelot's Follow The Sun, ROM, "is as close to the perfect Ridgeback bitch as I can come," Clayton says with great pride. "She has a great substance and imparts it to her puppies. She has the most amazing shoulder layback that I have ever seen. She is true coming and going, never puts a foot down wrong, and has exceptional reach and drive."

Clayton has just as many compliments for the father in this equation, MBIS MBISS Ch. Kimani's Blue Chip Image, JC, ROM. He first saw Chip in 1995, winning his first RRCUS National. In 1999, while judging the RRCUS



“RUGER”
Mojave’s regular handler, Mike Szabo, Clayton turned to Mike and said, “Well, we just got whacked!” Then, when Priscilla placed the Winners Bitch behind Mojave, “my heart skipped a beat.” And when she moved the group around and pointed, Clayton and Mike jumped and hugged with joy.

income to see the Mojave-Ruger project to the end.

It has been a long journey, and for Clayton, winning both these events produced mixed emotions. “I had just as much pleasure, for complicated reasons,” he explains. “Working with two handlers of the caliber of Mike Szabo and Don Rodgers has not been easy. They both have just what an owner wants — a high degree of professionalism and a very strong desire to win.” The two have a standing policy that they will not compete against each other, except at the National, and so far that has worked.

National Specialty Veteran Sweepstakes, Clayton had his first chance to actually put his hands on Chip. “I was awed with his front end assembly,” he remembers. Clayton went on to award Chip Best in Veteran Sweepstakes. The very next year, he decided to take two of his bitches to Chip, and was well pleased with the outcome.

A few nights later, it was time for the winner of the Top Twenty to be announced. The name of Mojave’s littermate, Ruger, was read, and Clayton’s table went wild as he and co-owner Julie Schilling hugged and shed a few tears before accepting the award.

Clayton admits that when Don and Ruger were eliminated on the very first cut, he was disappointed. To complicate matters, Mojave’s Specialty win has dropped Don and Ruger from number one in breed points to number two. Clayton says that when he called Don after the BISS win, Don was very cordial in congratulating him. So it gave Clayton great pleasure to call Don on Thursday night to tell him that he and Ruger had won the Top Twenty!

In 2001, at the RRCUS National Specialty in Pasco, Wash., Clayton watched Chip win his third RRCUS National Specialty. He also watched his bitch Marley give Chip a run for his money and stand right behind him for Best of Opposite. It was while watching them receive their rosettes that he decided he had to use Chip one more time.

Clayton is matter of fact about his decision to run two dogs in the same year. “When I saw those two puppies in February of 2002, I knew I had two really exceptional dogs,” he says. “As they grew and matured, it was clear that either or both could be a top-winning dog, and that each has a lot to contribute

Did Clayton’s dream to win, place or show pay off? Considering that 2005 gave Mojave a Best in National Specialty win and most recently an all-breed Best in Show, and as Ruger continues to take Group firsts, my money says these two dogs will keep

Now, a few years later, the pairing of these two greats has brought Camelot so much joy, and is a part of history. This year’s Specialty was the first time littermates have won the show’s two biggest conformation honors.



The first words that came to Clayton’s mind when Mojave got the Best of Breed nod can’t be repeated in this magazine. But he has a vivid memory of what happened just before.

to the breed.” When the time came, he pitched in and helped Chris and Michele Bohrer with Mojave’s campaign and Jullie Schilling with Ruger’s campaign. It did not take long before Clayton realized the potential of these two dogs and this “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.” After retiring from the University of California last July, he even took on a half-time job for a few more years just so he would have enough extra

racing neck and neck. *And like some of the most famous horse races in history, we might just have to a Kodak moment to see who crosses the finish line first!*

While judge Priscilla Gabosch lined up dogs, Clayton thought she was making a final cut before the grand finale. When she passed by Mojave and Frank Murphy, who was pinch-hitting for

Behind the Scenes

The people behind the dogs

Mojave was named by Chris and Michele Bohrer of Makana Kennels in California. Mojave has a rich red wheaten color and they wanted a name with punch, so they chose "Code Red." The call name came to them while they were driving across the Mojave Desert and saw the red dunes. To Clayton, Mojave's real family are Chris and Michele.

"They selected him from my litter in February of 2002 and raised him, nurturing and bringing out his wonderful temperament," Clayton states. Michele showed him to his championship from the puppy classes and graciously cooperated when Clayton suggested that they send him to Australia. While in Australia, Lisa Barrenger was his host and co-owner, and gave him just as much love and care as Chris and Michele.

Ruger was named by Julie Schilling, who breeds under the kennel name of Bakari Rhodesian Ridgebacks. Julie lives in the Seattle area and is relatively new to the breed. She has bred two litters and shows her own class dogs. She also showed Ruger to his championship. Very involved in performance activities, she owns three different dogs that have won Best in Field. Julie is a dedicated owner who has gone on to prove that not only can a Ridgeback race to the top of the conformation rankings, but also race to a Best in Field against other hounds. Ruger has 14 points towards his AKC field championship, but both owners have decided it best that he finish his conformation career before heading back out to the field. With his strong prey drive, it is a sure bet that he will be a Dual Champion before long.

To Clayton, working with Don and Mike has been very rewarding. They don't just take the dog into the ring and exhibit; they train them, they roadwork them, they bond with them. Clayton believes that both handlers have really come to love the dogs. He takes pleasure when he sees Ruger play-bow to Don while waiting his turn in the Group ring. He enjoys watching Mojave clown around, leaping into the air from all four feet while waiting ringside with Mike.

Being a Special is hard work for a dog – 120 shows a year, traveling every week, spending a lot of time in crates and ex pens. Because of that, Clayton believes it is really important that his dogs love their handlers, and the handlers, in turn, love them.

ON THE COVER

Mojave

BISS BIS Am/Au Ch. Camelot's Code Red



Sire: Multiple Best in Show and Multiple Best in Specialty Show
Champion Kimani's Blue Chip Image, JC, ROM
Dam: Best in Show Champion Camelot's Follow the Sun, ROM

Best in National Specialty

Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of the United States

Ridgeback entry = 326
Breeder Judge Mrs. Priscilla Gabosch

Bred by Camelot Rhodesian Ridgebacks
Clayton Heathcock & Cheri Hadley

Owned by Chris Bohrer, Michele Bohrer and Clayton Heathcock
Exhibited at the Specialty by
Frank Murphy, PHA, AKC Registered Handler

Mojave is normally exhibited
by Mike Szabo, PHA, AKC Registered Handler