

by Mike Lardy

Although you might think my most memorable retrieve for the past year would involve an accomplished National Field Champion like Prize or Patton, it just happens that a 21-month old black Lab male named Kicker is the hero of this tale. The setting for this retrieve was a little out of the ordinary as well.

This past March, I was competing in the Jacksonville Retriever Club's Licensed Field Trial held near Williston, Florida, which, incidentally, is nowhere near Jacksonville, but that's beside the point. The weather during the trial was less than ideal. Drizzling rain and steady winds were periodically interrupted by thunderstorms with drenching showers. The professional retriever trainer really earns his keep on a day like this – trudging back and forth from the truck to the line as each dog is run, airing the dogs on the truck as time permits, and sourrying between stakes when there's a break, all the while discovering the inadequacies of the latest rain gear technology. (Amateur handlers and volunteer workers and judges question their choice of hobbies – at least the pro is getting paid to endure the misery!)

At any rate, the first day ended pretty late, and I retreated to town. The previous night when I arrived at my motel, I had found a pretty good area to exercise the dogs. This is always a big concern for a pro with a truck full of dogs: finding a safe place where you can turn out 10-20 dogs, sometimes all at once, a short distance from your motel. It was pretty dark by the time I arrived at the airing spot just a block away from the motel. Owing to the darkness, I only turned out five dogs at a time. Lights from nearby businesses provided enough illumination to just make out the dogs as they wandered around during their final airing.

As a new batch of thunderstorms started to roll in, I called the last group of dogs and started loading them in the truck. Kicker dutifully reported when I called him, but just as I was about to tell him to load, I noticed he was carrying something – and it was glowing in the dark. Annoyed, yet curious, I reached down, and Kicker gently delivered... my cell phone.

It's hard to describe the relief I felt as I thought of the incredible hassles Kicker had just spared me from. My uninsured phone contains scores of numbers that I have not recorded anywhere else. I was 1,200 miles from home, and I could only imagine the time and money involved in replacing the phone if Kicker had not found it. For me, this definitely ranked as the retrieve of the year!

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Badger State Ram Kicker (2XNAFC-FC Candlewood's Ramblin Man X Bubba's Creed) finished his derby career with 26 derby points, including winning both the Qualifying and the Derby at Mid Illinois Trial. Kicker is shown with owners, Judy and Jim Powers.

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Kicker.

