

Jimmy John - Brittany Trainer Extraordinaire

Winner of Eight United States Open Brittany Championships

By David A. Fletcher

A good story begs to be told. This one is about a very successful and experienced beyond his years Brittany trainer by the name of Jimmy John, and his love affair with the United States Open Brittany Championship, perhaps the toughest Brittany Championship in the country to win . . . a prestigious championship that he has won eight times in the past fourteen years! No other trainer has come close to that record.

What's so special about winning the U. S. Open Brittany Championship? One would have to understand the nature of this Championship and the reason for its creation nearly 50 years ago, and what it means to the world of Brittany field trials.

Without hesitation I can label the U. S. Open Brittany Championship the Free-for-All of the Brittany field trial world.

In the early 1900s the pointer and setter field trial world was cluttered with big, blocky dogs that could run, hunt and point birds but lacked the stamina and staying power to suit the leaders of the field trial sport. They were a far cry from the great, superbly athletic dogs that compete today. Very few could go well in anything but one hour stakes. It was the looking forward vision of the founders of the National Free-for-All Championship to design a stake that would demand a running dog, one that was a supreme athlete and could focus on finding birds for endurance heats of three hours. The inaugural running was held in 1916.

The very best description I have ever read of a Free-for-All type dog came from the pen of my mentor Bill Brown, legendary editor of *The American Field*. He wrote: ". . . these standards glorify the ideal field trial dog, one with phenomenal pace, reckless range, extraordinary bird-finding ability, superlative game handling qualities, thrilling style on point, accurate location, beautiful manners, plus unlimited stamina."

I think the founders of the U. S. Open Brittany Championship had something similar to the Free-for-All in mind when they established this wonderful Championship in 1963. They were not totally pleased with the myriad of half-hour Brittany stakes throughout the country; they wanted something more . . . something more challenging.

The new U. S. Open Brittany Championship just off the drawing board with one-hour qualifying heats and a one-hour final series, and also brought in horseback handling, a radical change from the AKC events of the day including the National Championship which featured foot handling.

Delmar Smith was certainly the chief architect of this new venture, supported by Dan Huddleston and others. It has been nurtured down through the years by presidents who have kept the flame burning brightly . . . men such as John Doak, Dr. W. T. Young, Dr. John Webb and Dr. Robert Rankin.

As Jimmy turned 17, just out of high school, he became a professional trainer in partnership with his Dad training Brittany's for top level field trial competition.

It all started when his Dad bought a Brittany and began to train it and field trial. Jimmy was an early grade schooler then, but by age nine he had a Brittany of his own and the training of dogs for field trials began.

Jimmy's initial Brittany was registered as Bazooka's Bullet De Britt. Jimmy started him in several puppy stakes, then went on with the dog in Derby competition, but that first bird dog ended up getting struck by an automobile.

His next Britt was Pokey Smokey. He started running this dog in trials when he was 11, ending when he was 16; that dog rang up an almost unbelievable 147 placements. Jimmy was piling up the experience.

More dogs came to the John kennels for training and competition in field trials.

In 1986 he won the ABC Quail Classic with Ridona's Rebel Sadie, owned by Naomi Rigas, and his career was on its way. This was only the beginning for Jimmy John. He went on with his training, and field trial handling,

attracting owners who sent some very talented and well bred dogs with him and his win record blossomed. We've given in detail his record at the U. S. Open Brittany Championship and the Victoire Nationale Derby. In addition to those remarkable feats, Jim has won 42 American Field Dog Stud Book recognized championships, 38 runner-up championships and has trained three of the top all-age one-hour top placing Brittany's, notably, 44 NFC/AFC Shambo's Dark Shadow, 28 FC/AFC Smarteyes-Joker and 26 NFC/AFC Tequila's Joker.



Shambo's Dark Shadow



Smarteyes-Joker



Tequila's Joker

What are the most important factors in Jimmy's success with field trial Brittany's?

"You have to have a talented prospect to start with," he said, "don't get in a hurry to get results. Treat every dog differently according to what they are, and finally patience. You have to have that.

"Good training grounds with lots of birds is a huge asset, you must have a good system of training and set some disciplinary standards. One stern disciplinary session is far superior to a repetition of smaller, less meaningful disciplines."

Jimmy knew in high school that he wanted to be a dog trainer for the rest of his life. No other career had any appeal for him nor was any other career considered. His priorities in life were listed: a successful career, devotion to family and look ahead and plan for retirement.

Owners rate Jimmy very highly. Owners of dogs that Jimmy John trained and which spend some part of the season at home, tell me their dogs are excited to see Jimmy when he comes to their kennel. None of the dogs he's trained are ever afraid of him. They love him.

To save a lot of time, money and difficulty Jimmy would always size up a dog right away when he was put in training for an owner and if he was a dog that was not going to make it, he would send it home right away. Jimmy is a very competitive handler who calls things as he sees them.

One thing that makes Jimmy's owners very happy is the breaking and handling that Jimmy builds into his dogs. The National Amateur Brittany Championship has a very good representation of Jimmy John trained dogs every year handled by their amateur owners, and they do well with them.

At age 27, in 1993, Jimmy John won his first U. S. Open Brittany Championship with Bonine's Lucky Bandit, four-year-old Brittany male owned by Herb Rea of Wichita, Kan. Bandit was bred by Herman Bonine. Bandit was placed in training with Jimmy John from the time Herb Rea saw him run in a trial and acquired the dog at the age of three. He was started in the U. S. Open in 1993, competing in a field of 33 starters. He ran well in the first series, qualified without the benefit of bird work and was called back for the finals. It was here that his aggressive, forward hunting, his strength and stamina came to the fore. With a very strong ground race and two perfect finds Bandit was named champion in a close race with runner-up Microdot, owned by Bill Oliver of Wichita, Kan., handled by Lyle Johnson. Judges were Rick Smith and Bill Cartmell.



1994 U. S. Open Brittany Championship

The next season Jimmy John won the U. S. Open with the four-year-old male A Bunch of Butch, owned by Jack Murphy of Buffalo, Kan. The field again consisted of 33 entries and the judges were Ronnie Smith of Big Cabin, Okla., and Allen Vincent of Collinsville, Okla. Butch had superb bird work and well directed efforts on the ground in both series to take top honors and the championship title. In the first series he scored two perfect finds and in the final series three great finds to win it all. He was braced with his sire Blaze and Lobo's Evil Roy which took the runner-up spot for handler Vic Carrington.



1995 U. S. Open Brittany Championship

Three consecutive wins of the U. S. Open came the following year (1995) for Jimmy John, No. 3 with Jim De Bob's Super Starr, owned by R.W. Hines of Norristown, Pa. This orange and white female prevailed in a field 29 Britts under Judges Hugo Ford of West Columbia, Tex., and Rick Smith of Pleasanton, Tex. As many of Jimmy John's competitors do Starr had a very strong qualifying heat, two flawless finds and a great finish to qualify. In the latter series Starr again had strong footwork and finish and had great work on a covey and a single.



1996 U. S. Open Brittany Championship

In 1996 Jimmy John took both ends of the Championship - winner and runner-up - capturing his fourth consecutive U. S. Open. There were 28 in the starting field; judges were Hugo Ford and Robert Reynolds. It was the 34th renewal of the Championship. With traditional running dates in March, this was one of the few times the event was held in February and conditions were almost "dustbowl" dry. Jim De Bob's Sparks A Dan D, owned by Bernie Crain of Raymore, Mo., was named champion; Tequila's Joker, owned by Ed and Judy Tillson of Albuquerque, N. M., was awarded runner-up. Both dogs had bird work and powerful races in the initial series and they came back to score big again in the final series. Sparky had such great bird work and running prowess in the final series galleryites related he had set the standard with his sterling performance.



1997 U. S. Open Brittany Championship

Five in a row! Incredible! Jimmy John won his fifth U. S. Open in succession with Ed and Judy Tillson's Tequila's Joker in 1997. The competing field consisted of 37 starters and the stake was judged by Roy Pelton and Ronnie Smith. Again a Jimmy John entry stood tall in the class that competed

with great, strong and wide hunting and two finds in the qualifying hour and a single but well done bit of bird work on a covey just before the hour ended, in the final series. No other handler in the history of the U. S. Open Brittany Championship had ever come close to five successive wins of this hard to win stake.

Following the 1997 triumph Jimmy John scored three U. S. Open runner-up titles - 1998, 2000, and 2001. The first was with Jim De Bob's Super Starr, which had won the title in 1995 for Roy Hines, then in 2000 with Tequila's Joker for the Tillsons, and in 2001 with Shambo's Dark Shadow for Philip Dangerfield. Again the pattern of the performance on all three was strong forward hunting and sharp, stylish bird work.



2002 U. S. Open Brittany Championship

In 2002 Jimmy John handled Shambo's Dark Shadow to the U. S. Open crown. There was a field of 38 competing under judges Larry Cox and Jim Pratt. Shambo had a great winning season in 2002 capped by his triumph of the U. S. Open for owner Philip Dangerfield. Shadow had ground races in both the qualifying and final series that made galleryites sit up in the saddle and had two perfect finds in each series to take the nod from the judges.



2006 U. S. Open Brittany Championship

Jimmy John piloted Shambo's Dark Shadow to runner-up in the U. S. Open in 2005, and in 2006 and 2007 won the coveted title for a seventh and eighth time. In the 2006 event Shambo's Dark Shadow was again the winner making him two-time champion and two-time runner-up in the past six years. In 2006 he

competed in a field of 35 Britts. Judges were Garvin Collins and Larry Loftin. Shadow put on a show of fast, forward moves in his hunting pattern coupled with two finds in the initial series then came back with a similarly strong ground race in the finals with more excellent bird work to take the title.



2007 U. S. Open Brittany Championship

In 2007 Jimmy won the U. S. Open for the eighth time in 14 years with Tequila Jack, jointly owned by Dr. Robert Rankin and Ed Tillson. The dog was also named top qualifier because of his outstanding performance in the initial series. Judges were Stan Truksa of Firth, Neb., and Charlie Barbaree of Pryor, Okla., evaluating a field of 39 starters. Aside from wide and powerful hunting which got the gallery buzzing in the initial series, Jack had an unproductive and a divided find. He had three flawless finds in the final series and ran to the limits with speed and endurance to take the crown.

In addition to Jimmy John's unmatched record in winning eight U. S. Open Brittany Championships in 14 years, he has also handled a host of winners in the companion Victoire Nationale Derby held in conjunction with the U. S. Open. That stake was inaugurated in 1974 and was won by Senator T J, owned by T. D. Belfied, handled by North Carolina's Terry Cleary. Your writer was at that inaugural riding a judicial saddle with Eugene Brown and Joe McCrary. We also judged the Championship that year naming Jacolet's Wandering Star the champion. The Victoire Nationale was granted titular status in 2005 and remains as the only one-hour Brittany Derby stake in the country. Jimmy John placed Tequila's Joker runner-up in 1992, Rebel's Wild Sparks, winner, and Rebel J J's Wishful Thinking runner-up in 1995. In 2003 he won runner-up with Tequila Jack; in 2004 K B's Shadow Dancer was runner-up.

Jimmy John's career as a Brittany trainer is nothing short of sensational. I expect he will carry on his life plan and new horizons are ahead for him and I have no doubt they will be successful.