

# GOING to the DOGS

**YOUNG VET TECH** closes in on a championship rating for her Flat-Coat Retriever, also young.

By Carol Stuart  
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“I can’t remember a time in my life without a dog! Though we have been competing for this short amount of time, I remember accompanying my mom to Dick Russell’s obedience classes when I was 6 or 7.”

Now 24, Katie Coleman, accompanied by her mother, Leslie Norton, has already been competing in dog shows for about five years and doing very well. So well that she and her 20-month-old Flat Coat Retriever, Annabel, received not one, but three invitations to the prestigious AKC Eukanuba National Championship show in Orlando, Fla., in December.

A 2009 Denham Springs High School graduate, Coleman won a Pet Care plaque and first place on 4-H testing day in vet science and dog care.

“I did my Senior Project on dog competitions, and brought my dog to school to demonstrate basic obedience skills during my oral presentation,” Coleman said.

At LSU, Coleman majored in Animal/Dairy/Poultry Science and graduated with a B.S. degree in 2013. She works as a vet tech and groomer at Denham Springs Animal Hospital.

Coleman’s obsession with dog sports began when she rescued an Australian Cattle Dog dumped at the clinic, a high drive dog that needed activity. Coleman supplied it by searching out an agility instructor.

“My dog was very good at it,” Coleman said, “and you could say dog sports are addicting!”

Coincidentally, Norton was told that her Chihuahua was a very nice specimen of the breed and should be shown in conformation (a competition based on the dog’s conformity to breed standards). So mother and daughter became a team, attending dog shows together.

They have shown the Cattle Dog and the Chihuahua in a lot of shows, not only in Louisiana, but also in Texas, Mississippi, Florida and beyond.

“The bug was spread and both my mom and I were now addicted,” Coleman said.

Coleman still shows that first Cattle Dog, Bindi Sue, and now

shows three others as well. They do very well in competition, having finished two championships in conformation and also competing in dog sports: agility dock diving, barn hunt and coursing ability. Coleman also trains them for herding, obedience and rally.

But Coleman’s real star these days is Annabel.

Officially named Shasta’s Stoney Castle By the Sea At K&L, DM, CGC, CA, Annabel’s final three pairs of initials stand for her current titles: Dock Master, Canine Good Citizen and Coursing Ability.

She too was acquired by Coleman as a result of fostering, this time of a dog of uncertain breed that came to the hospital after being hit by a car. He seemed to be a Flat-Coat Retriever

(FCR) and had the happy and loving disposition for which that breed is known.

“He helped me heal too after my stepfather was hospitalized and subsequently put in a care facility after reaching the progressed stages of Alzheimer’s. When he left for his new home, it felt like I was now missing that joy that he had brought,” Coleman said.

Acquiring Annabel was not an easy matter. After researching the top Flat-Coat Retriever (FCR) breeders, she chose the Shasta Kennel in California and then had to send in a questionnaire to see if she was suitable before being put on a waitlist for her birth.

“The day came when my girl had been born, and I was so excited,” Coleman said. “My mom and I planned our trip to pick up Annabel and meet our breeder. Since then I send almost weekly updates on everything we are doing. I send pictures and videos, and I got to see my breeder again at the 2015 FCR National Specialty show at Purina Farms.”

The Purina Farms show in Gray Summit, Mo., was just one of the shows at which Annabel has been making points towards her championship ranking. She first showed in a puppy match at the Texarkana Dog Show when she was four months old. When she reached six months, she could start competing in



Annabel leaps off the dock after a toy thrown by her owner/trainer/handler Katie Coleman of Denham Springs in competition at the 2015 Flat Coat Retriever National Specialty Show at Purina Farms in Gray Summit, Mo. Annabel took fourth place in the event.

the regular rings. Now, each time she wins the conformation title (most closely conforming to the breed standards), she gains points, and she now has 14. When she gets that final point, 15, Annabel will be named a champion.

Coleman entered Eukanuba as the No. 7 Flat-Coat of 10 invited for the conformation competition for the National Owner Handler title (not all owners train and handle their own dogs). Since she’d been working toward this for some time, it was eagerly awaited, but not unexpected.

What surprised her were the other two invitations, which were for the Diving Dog compe-

titions, both the Master Open class, which judges how far the dog can leap into the water from the dock, and the Air Retrieve, which judges both vertical and horizontal distance of the leap.

“Her record is 22 feet, 10 inches, and she is currently the farthest jumping Flat-Coat in the nation,” Coleman said, before heading to the Eukanuba.

Most unexpected was the invitation to compete in Air Retrieve, an event in which Annabel has only competed twice with a record of 17 feet.

At Eukanuba, Annabel showed well and was named Best of Opposite Sex (opposite of the champion who was a male) in National Owner Handler and fourth place in Dock Diving, but the desired

15th point was not to be. “It was all very memorable, but I love the exhilaration felt right before I enter the ring, or the moment before Annabel launches off the dock,” Coleman said of the experience.

Next on the agenda for Coleman and Annabel is a foray into the activity for which she was bred – hunting.

“I have never hunted before and probably won’t be an active hunter, but I will certainly train my dog to be the retriever she was meant to be,” Coleman said. “I have a friend that actively competes in hunting trials with labs who is going to help me train.”

Coleman also does outreach into the community. Most recently, she brought three dogs along with a friend and her dog to work with 150 4-Hers at Project Training Day.

A member of the Baton Rouge Kennel Club for three years, Coleman is now a board member, is on the membership committee and helps run the Facebook page.

BRKC is the sponsor of Annabel’s next show in Alexandria, the one where Coleman believes she is most likely to achieve that elusive 15th point - the one that will name her the champion she undoubtedly already is.



Above, Katie Coleman shows Annabel at the 2015 Flat-Coat National Specialty Show at Purina Farms in Gray Summit, Mo. At left, Katie Coleman and her mom, Leslie Norton, stand behind a nicely posed Annabel for her winning photo as Best of the Opposite Sex in the National Owner-Handler Division Finals (ribbon inset above left) at Eukanuba. In oval above, Katie Coleman and Annabel pose for a photo after her first show as a 4-month-old.