

# Interview

with

## MS. JILL OF WISCOY KENNEL, USA

By Dinkar Pratap Singh



first two Labradors in Obedience and then I became interested in the Conformation ring. My obedience dogs did not do so well in Conformation. It was a learning experience.

One of the first dogs I began to show was a chocolate bitch named Hywaters Wiscoy Snickers. She was born in 1981. She never finished her Championship, but she was a well-bred bitch with a nice pedigree. I bred Snickers to a chocolate English Import, Charway John Brown and that is where my breeding program began. It took many generations from there to get to where I am with my dogs today. There is a page on my website with my past dogs. One could follow the trail from there. I took one of the girls from the Charway John Brown litter and bred her to CH Charway Maverick. Another English import. That gave me Wiscoys Court N Spark born in 1989. This bitch to me was perfect. If you were to look at her pedigree you would see that she was linebred on CH Lindall Mastercraft. After 8 years I had finally set the “type” that I was looking for.

*I have now known you for over 10 years and I am very happy that you have agreed to share your unmatched knowledge and experience on the Labrador Retrievers. I would like to thank you in advance on behalf of the committee of the Kennel Club of India, the Editorial Board of the Indian Kennel Gazette and all our reader.*

► **Dinkar:** *Can you tell us about your journey with the breed and how many years have you been involved with Labradors?*

**Jill:** I have had dogs all my life. When I first moved away from my parents’ home and had my own apartment, I thought I needed a dog for company and it had to be a large dog to protect me since I lived alone. I settled on a Great Dane. Crazy,

right? I remember the day I came home from work and found nothing left of my living room couch except the bare springs! So, the Great Dane and I headed off to Obedience School. Once I had this dog trained, I wanted to begin showing in Obedience trials. Now, we all know that the Great Dane is not the breed of dog for Obedience Competition, so that led me to the Labrador. I showed my



► **Dinkar:** *What is the significance of your kennel prefix, Wiscoy?*

**Jill:** Wiscoy is the name of a creek that flowed through my property at the home where I began breeding Labradors.

► **Dinkar:** *Two of your Labradors have been honored with the title of Labradors of Distinction by the Labrador Retriever Club. Can you tell us about this award and the dogs who won it?*

**Jill:** The Labrador Retriever Club of America honors Multi Titled Dogs with this title. In my case I have bred and co-owned two dogs that not only completed their AKC Championships, they also were AKC Master Hunters. The first one was a black dog named CH Wiscoys Midnight Train MH, and the second

was a black bitch, CH Wiscoys Carnival, MH. Both dogs were trained and co-owned with my good friend Mr. Fred Hallett. They both went back to my BISS CH Wiscoys Robin.

▶ **Dinkar:** *You have been awarded Breeder of Merit by the American Kennel Club. Can you tell us a bit about it?*

**Jill:** The following must be met in order to be accepted into the Breeder of Merit program:

- Have a history of at least 5 years involvement with AKC events.
- Earned AKC Conformation, Performance or Companion\* event titles on a minimum of 4 dogs from AKC litters they bred/co-bred in each breed applied for.
- Member of an AKC club.
- Certifies that applicable health screens are performed on your breeding stock as recommended by the Parent Club.
- Demonstrates a commitment to ensuring 100% of the puppies produced are individually AKC registered.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Please share some light on your active involvement with the Labrador Specialty Shows and also showcasing other Labrador breeders.*

**Jill:** We are truly fortunate in the U.S. to have many Specialty Shows and many other shows that have Breeder Judges judging Supported entries. I do not attend All Breed Shows unless a breeder judge is judging. Like many others, I value the opinion of my peers rather than a Terrier judge.

▶ **Dinkar:** *May I request you to kindly very briefly tell us a bit about the Labrador Retriever AKC breed standard.*

**Jill:** From the AKC Standard for Labrador Retrievers:

“General Appearance: The Labrador Retriever is a strongly built, medium-sized, short-coupled, dog possessing a sound, athletic, well-balanced conformation that enables



it to function as a retrieving gun dog; the substance and soundness to hunt waterfowl or upland game for long hours under difficult conditions; the character and quality to win in the show ring; and the temperament to be a family companion. Physical features and mental characteristics should denote a dog bred to perform as an efficient Retriever of game with a stable temperament suitable for a variety of pursuits beyond the hunting environment. The most distinguishing characteristics of the Labrador Retriever are its short, dense, weather resistant coat; an "otter" tail; a clean-cut head with broad back skull and moderate stop; powerful jaws; and its "kind," friendly eyes, expressing



character, intelligence and good temperament. Above all, a Labrador Retriever must be well balanced, enabling it to move in the show ring or work in the field with little or no effort. The typical Labrador possesses style and quality without over refinement, and substance without lumber or cloddiness. The Labrador is bred primarily as a working gun dog; hence structure and soundness are of great importance”

▶ **Dinkar:** *What makes the Labrador Retriever one of the most popular breeds in the United States of America and also across the world?*

**Jill:** The Labrador is a versatile dog. They are the #1 breed in the US because of the versatility of the breed. Their kind temperaments make for wonderful family companions. They are a biddable dog and are easily trained whether it is for the field, show ring, obedience, or therapy work. They are a low maintenance dog that does not require a lot of grooming. Most well-bred Labradors are quite, easy going dogs.



► **Dinkar:** *Can you tell us a bit about the much talked about Potomac Show which is held each year in April?*

**Jill:** Potomac.... This is a show that I have attended for over 25 years. (With the exception of 2020 due to the pandemic) The Potomac is held over the course of 5 days. Breeders from all over the world come to the Potomac every year. It is the place where the best Labradors from the US and abroad are showcased. I would strongly encourage anyone who is passionate about Labradors to come to this show at least once. The entry is large, and the quality of the dogs is superb.

► **Dinkar:** *The Westminster Dog Show is one of the most important all breed shows in America. If given a choice between attending and exhibiting at the Potomac or the Westminster Dog Show which one will you choose and why.*

**Jill:** This is an interesting question for me as my dog BISS CH Linrays Over The Top won Best of Breed at both Westminster and the Potomac in 1998. The Potomac win means much more to me. The Potomac draws entries of close (and sometimes over) 1000 of the best dogs in the country. By comparison, Westminster may draw 50 dogs. Both are certainly prestigious shows, but amongst most Labrador Breeders here in the U.S.

The Potomac is a coveted win.

► **Dinkar:** *Since you are a Labrador Breeder and Judge, can you tell us what Judges should look at when judging at a Labrador Specialty show as compared to an All-Breed Show. Is there any difference in what one should look for when judging?*

**Jill:** I am not a good one to answer that question as I do not judge or show at All Breed Shows.

► **Dinkar:** *When you refer to the term 'Type' when talking about Labradors, what exactly is meant by it?*

**Jill:** Type is what makes a good Labrador a good Labrador. A Labrador should never remind you of another breed. It is difficult to explain until you have seen it. Of course, there are different **\*\*types\*\*** within the breed. The Field Trial breeders have bred a dog that is much leaner, longer in leg and lacking the coat that we see in our show bred Labradors. An interesting fact is that many show bred Labradors can and do earn Master Hunter titles while a Field bred Labrador would not fare well in the Conformation ring.

That said, we also have kennel type. Different kennels here in the US are distinguished by the **\*type\*** of dog that they breed. I think that is the beautiful thing about breeding dogs. Aspiring to breed the type of dog that you like, and still have it recognizable

as a good Labrador.

► **Dinkar:** *Generally, people are quite obsessed with the head in a lot of breeds. What about the Labrador.*

**Jill:** Heads are particularly important in the Labrador, but that does not mean that you should breed for a head that resembles a Rottweiler. The proper Labrador head should only remind you of a Labrador. It should not stand out from the rest of the dog. Everything in moderation.

► **Dinkar:** *How easy or difficult is it to correct a head in a breeding program?*

**Jill:** I think heads are quite easy to fix in the breed. It is something that is easy to identify in young puppies thus helping us make wise choices in our breeding programs.

► **Dinkar:** *With popularity generally health issues also creep into a breed. In general is the Labrador a healthy breed.*

**Jill:** I believe that the breed is in rather good shape regarding overall health. We as breeders are the guardians of our breed. One pitfall that I see is using genetic testing to the detriment of the breed in so far that many exceptionally good Stud dogs are being eliminated because they cannot pass every test that is now available for the Labrador. I am not talking about the basics such as clear hips, elbows, eyes, hearts. I am speaking about all the other genetic tests that we know are recessive. There are so many of them now. These tests are useful in that they allow you to breed with the information that you are not breeding two carriers with the affected gene together. But there are now many bitch owners that only want to breed to dogs that are clear on everything, so they do not have to test their own bitches. That will hurt the gene pool.

► **Dinkar:** *Do you recommend any health tests before breeding for the sire and dam*

**Jill:** Yes, I do. Hips, elbows, heart (by echo) eyes, PRA, EIC, HNPk.

These are all basic tests. There are more. We can go on and on. Breeders are very often willing to take a chance by not testing for what we can but what happens to the puppies that we sell to pet homes. I feel a great responsibility that the puppies I sell to families are as healthy as possible. We are guardians of this breed. It is not all about winning at the dog show. We must breed responsibly.

▶ **Dinkar:** *What is the breeding program that you generally follow?*

**Jill:** I try to breed type to type. Sometimes the best plans on paper (pedigrees) are not the result we hope for. You must also know not just the sire and the dam. One must have knowledge of the dogs behind them. It is satisfying to look at a pedigree and picture each dog in your mind. That comes from decades of experience.

▶ **Dinkar:** *How important is the sire in any breeding program?*

**Jill:** My thoughts are that it takes two. BOTH the sire and the dam are important and sometimes you can breed the best two together and still not get what you were expecting.

▶ **Dinkar:** *What makes a good stud dog and any special care in regard to diet or exercise required.*

**Jill:** Of course, good food and exercise are important. A popular stud dog can produce many puppies. It is important that he be sound in body and mind. I love my males. They are healthy and happy, and they all get along together with each other as well as with the puppies.

▶ **Dinkar:** *I think Robin was one of your top producers. Can you tell us about him?*

**Jill:** Robin was a wonderful boy. He was so much fun to show and won several Specialties. He was also a particularly good producer for me giving me a strong male line. Robin also passed on his great desire for retrieving and is the sire of many Hunting Titled dogs as well as Champions.



▶ **Dinkar:** *In the US and even in a lot of other countries breeders generally don't do natural matings, why is that.*

**Jill:** Most Labrador breeders in the U.S. stopped doing natural breedings years ago. Firstly, it eliminates any chance of spreading sexually transmitted disease. Secondly it gives us access to evaluate the quality of the semen before breeding the bitch and thirdly, it allows us to breed to dogs that otherwise would be too far from our homes.

▶ **Dinkar:** *How do you get the timing right for mating a bitch, especially when you are doing an AI?*

**Jill:** You must test the progesterone using a blood draw from the bitch. There are many papers written on correct ovulation timing on the internet.

▶ **Dinkar:** *The Kennel Club of India too has now allowed AI to be done in India. Can you give readers some tips on AI? Dos and Don'ts.*

**Jill:** If you have access to a good reproduction veterinarian that would be the place to start. Many times for chilled shipped semen I will use my reproduction vet to breed the bitch using TCI (Transcervical Insemination) TCI's with correct ovulation timing is the key to success.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Can you very briefly touch upon color breeding in Labradors. Some do's and don'ts.*

**Jill:** Color should really be on the bottom of your list when breeding Labradors. That said, you certainly must be careful with mixing yellow with chocolate lines. The biggest problem there is the risk of getting lack of pigment. Speaking of pigment on yellows I have heard that breeding two yellows together gives you the best pigment. As I breed mainly black dogs I do not have firsthand experience with this.

▶ **Dinkar:** *At what age to you start selecting your pups for show homes and if you were to run a pup on till what age would you do so.*

**Jill:** I seldom sell puppies to show homes. I will usually run on two for myself and then make my final determination at around 12 months. By that age not only do I have a clearer idea of what they look like but I can also do their first hip and elbow x-rays to make certain that they are sound.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Correct bite in a show dog is very important. At what age do you feel the correct bite sets in?*

**Jill:** I have seen bites change up until 6 months of age.

▶ **Dinkar:** *A lot of countries are following the FCI which calls for full dentition and scissor bite in Labrador, whereas level bite is also acceptable in the US. May I request you to once again share your views on it?*

**Jill:** I prefer a scissor bite but will not penalize a dog with a level bite if everything else about the dog is proper. About missing teeth, I do not feel that



one or two missing premolars is a terrible fault, but I would be careful that I bred that dog to a mate with full dentition. A missing premolar does not prevent a dog from picking up a bird.

▶ **Dinkar:** *What are some important tips on raising Labrador pups keeping in mind their growth spurts?*

**Jill:** Good food is most important. I do not like my puppies to heavy or too thin. I also let them play in a large yard. I do not keep them in kennels. My puppies have plenty of free exercise all day long.

▶ **Dinkar:** *At times some pups develop weak pasterns. Their front legs go east west and their hinds too get weak. Is it due to how they are being raised and how can one avoid such conditions.*

**Jill:** As long as the puppy is being fed properly, I would say that this is more a conformation problem.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Socialization plays a very important role for any puppy show or pet. How do you socialize your puppies?*

**Jill:** I live in the country with no neighbors close by. As soon as their vaccines are finished I make it a point to take my puppies into town



to socialize them. I will take them with me to the Pet Shop where they can meet new people and new dogs. And then I try to start getting them to shows at 6 months.

▶ **Dinkar:** *When do you start show training and at what age do you typically start entering them in the ring.*

**Jill:** I start tossing dog cookies



at them at around 10 weeks, By 16 weeks they are catching the treat and free baiting themselves. At around 4 months I start to lead train them and at that time I also start teaching them to allow their bite to be examined. They are babies and everything should be fun for them.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Being a breeder Judge yourself do you prefer owners showing their dogs or professional handlers.*

**Jill:** It really does not matter to me. I am judging the dog not the handler.

▶ **Dinkar:** *India is a tropical country and due to the typical hot humid weather here, most Labradors seem to lack a double coat. Is it genetic or weather dependent? What can one do to get a better double coat on the Labrador?*

**Jill:** Genetics play a large part in coats. I have seen Labradors from warm climates that carried plenty of coat.

▶ **Dinkar:** *What is the ideal exercise for Labradors?*

**Jill:** Free exercise in large paddocks.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Any breed over time does go through some changes. Do you feel the Labrador too has changed over the years in the US and if so for the good or bad.*

**Jill:** Yes, the breed has evolved over the years. Although we do see some extremes, I feel that the breed is in rather good shape.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Is their functionality still intact?*

**Jill:** For the most part, yes.

▶ **Dinkar:** *We also hear about the field Labrador in the US. How different is it to our typical show dog and why was it developed. How popular is it.*

**Jill:** There is a vast difference in Field Bred dog and show dogs. I think I addressed this in a previous question.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Once again we also hear of a Silver Labrador in the US. Can you tell us about it and if it's an acceptable color.*

**Jill:** Sliver is NOT acceptable. This is something that the LRC of America addresses. There are only three colors recognized by the AKC and the LRC.

▶ **Dinkar:** *What about White Labradors? There seem to be quite a few very pale yellows mostly seen in Russia these days. Will you consider them to be called white Labradors unofficially?*

**Jill:** Again, only three colors. Yellows may range in color from fox-red to light cream.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Talking about the breed standard, can you tell us a bit about the correct tail in the Labrador?*

**Jill:** The tail should be very thick at the base, gradually tapering toward the tip, of medium length, and extending no longer than to the hock. The tail should be free from feathering and clothed thickly all around with the Labrador's short, dense coat, thus having that peculiar rounded appearance that has been described as the "otter" tail. If you pick a proper tail up and look underneath you will see that there is a seam where the wrapped hair meets.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Another point in the breed standard which at times confuses young breed enthusiasts is short coupled. Can you please tell us a bit about it?*

**Jill:** Coupling is the distance between that last rib and the pelvis. A "short coupled" dog has less space in that area

▶ **Dinkar:** *If a dog is short coupled, will it not affect its movement?*

**Jill:** Yes, if the dog is too short coupled it will crab when moving.

▶ **Dinkar:** *What does an average day look like in your kennel, from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed?*

**Jill:** I really do not have a large kennel. I only keep between 8 – 10 dogs. I feed them twice a day, and make sure they have interaction with me throughout the day. When I am outside with them, I will pick up a ball and through it. Just play with them. Training is a minimum. We just kind of live together. I usually have one or two dogs rotate through the house with me. Dogs are my hobby but not my life.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Can you share some of your most memorable moments in showing, breeding and judging?*

**Jill:** Of course, winning Best of Breed at Potomac would be the high point of my hobby of showing. My joy from breeding really comes from hearing from the families that have my dogs telling me how wonderful their dog is. That makes all the hard work easier. To know that people recognize everything you have put into making a good sound puppy that their family will enjoy for many years. As for judging, that has given me the opportunity to see dogs from all over the world and to meet breeders with the same passion for our breed. I've made friends that I would have never met throughout the world.

▶ **Dinkar:** *And the most disappointing moments you have experienced.*

**Jill:** Whelping puppies. My heart breaks when I lose a puppy in a difficult whelping. This is the thing I dislike most about breeding.

▶ **Dinkar:** *What made you stick with Labradors all your life? Did you at any point of time thing of shifting to another breed.*

**Jill:** It has taken me a lifetime to learn what I have about Labradors. I could not imagine having to learn about another breed.



▶ **Dinkar:** *If given a chance would you like to breed and exhibit another breed?*

**Jill:** No

▶ **Dinkar:** *Which have been some of the most successful dogs bred by you.*

**Jill:** Some of my favorites have been my bitch CH Wiscoys Say Goodnight Gracie. She gave me a beautiful bitch line to work with. I have had many males that were important to me as well. Robin, his son Jack Sparrow, Brick, Yogi, Tony and Rocco. I have been blessed with some very good dogs.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Do you have any exciting plans for the future that you would like to share*

**Jill:** Nope

▶ **Dinkar:** *How would you like to be remembered in the future?*

**Jill:** As an honest person of integrity.

▶ **Dinkar:** *In today's world of quick success and quick fame, what advice would you give people involved with Labradors or wanting to get involved?*

**Jill:** Slow down. It took me several generations of breeding to finally get to where I am today. True success in anything takes time and commitment.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Which are some of the most influential Labrador lines of the past and present found in the US?*

There are so many I am afraid that I will forget to mention many. There are kennels that are easily identifiable for their type. Just a few that come immediately to mind are Beechcroft, Tabatha, Hyspire, Blackwing. I think all four of those kennels have made their mark on the breed.

▶ **Dinkar:** *Finally, how has COVID affected dog shows in the US?*

**Jill:** COVID has had an impact on entries. We have had quite a few of the Specialties cancelled but now people are beginning to figure out how to social distance and wear masks and we are beginning to see some of the shows moving forward. As for myself, I am not ready to go back out either to show or to judge. We will see what the future holds.

**Jill:** In closing I would like to thank you for your invitation to answer your questions. I hope that I have helped you better understand the breed.

▶ **Dinkar:** *It truly has and will help all our reader to better understand the breed. It's been a pleasure interviewing you and getting some valuable insights on the Labrador Retriever. We wish you continued successes with the breed and stay safe.*