

FC Oak Alley Snowy Egret “Natchez”

Natchez was born, not surprisingly, in Natchez, Mississippi. She was out of Brit's second litter, again bred to Bran. This, a repeat breeding, was the one that produced Rocky, Freckles, and Ruby. Natchez's birth coincided with a springer judging assignment I had outside of Huntsville, Texas in the winter of 1996. It was my first return trip to Texas for quite a few years. I had moved to central Texas in 1984 from England and had spent three good years there working as a gamekeeper. It was good to be back.



After the trial, Vicky and I flew to Natchez to visit with Art and Cheryl Persons. We arrived just minutes before a horrendous ice storm. It was spectacular. I had a sneaking suspicion that ice storms are not a regular occurrence in Natchez. The power to the town went out on our arrival and had not returned when we departed three days later. Whatever people may think to the contrary, Mississippi can be really cold.

Natchez's litter was three days old at the time of our visit. All but one of the pups were liver colored like the sire Bran, other than one which was as white as driven snow. Vicky wanted the white bitch and on the return to the airport we spotted a flock of egrets. We had a name for our little white pup, Snowy Egret.

She was the first pup I started in Los Angeles. It was quite a change from rural Virginia. I had brought a number of older dogs to California. They had the benefit of working the fields and apple orchards underneath the majestic watch of the Blue Ridge Mountains before our exodus west. Natchez

would have to learn her trade in the garden, the soccer pitch at the edge of the Rose Bowl, and Prado Dog Park. Change is always inspiring; it spurs creativity like nothing else.

Natchez was built similar to her older sibling Freckles, but that's where their similarity ended. Freckles had a dominant personality and a very assertive demeanor. Natchez was really sweet but possessed nervous energy. She had no interest in being assertive.

She also had a great work ethic. She loved training and would retrieve anything. She did, however, prove trying when it came to instilling sitting and staying at a distance. She just didn't like sitting still. Combined with the fact that the further I walked away and the longer I stayed away, the more anxious she became. I shortened the distance I walked away from her and stopped calling her to me. Instead I always walked back to her. This was really good for stopping her anticipation of the recall whistle.

Then she perfected the art of ambivalent distraction. Instead of sitting and focusing on me, she would stretch her legs out as far as possible and rub her belly vigorously on the ground. Her other ploy would be to dart her eyes towards every distraction, perceived or otherwise. Patience was not her virtue.

As she progressed, I would buy a few pigeons at Prado Dog Park to work her on. I had no panned quail or good rabbit cover to get her moving well. She actually was a dog that didn't need much stimulation to go. She was a natural hunter from the start. It mattered not whether the focus of her attention was a squirrel, hummingbird or a lizard basking in the sun. She was convinced the next one would be hers. One afternoon at Prado we were working on a few marked water retrieves. I watched as a group of coots flew from a small pond into a Eucalyptus grove. They were feeding on shoots sprouting underneath the large trees. I took Natchez in amongst them; the birds other than the odd straggler flew en mass back to the sanctuary of the pond. Regardless, she really lit up on the departed birds scent. The coots were predictable; left alone they would head off to feed in the grove leaving plenty of scent to stimulate the young dogs hunting. Quail or rabbits they were not, but in their absence the coots proved really useful.



Jeff (holding Charm) and Carol (holding Natchez) Janousek

There's an old Chinese proverb, "It doesn't matter if the cat is black or the cat is white, as long as it catches the mouse." No truer words have been spoken. Having said that, I've found in the field trial game, a small, stylish white bitch catches the eye. Natchez was white, diminutive, animated, and eye-catching.

Natchez competed in the inaugural 1998 Cocker National Championship held in Michigan. She was a youngster still learning her trade. I recall the 2nd and 3rd series that were held in mature deciduous woodland. Sliding through the deadfall, she was in her element; fabulous. I

eventually lost her in the fifth series on a failed retrieve of a cock pheasant. Her two older siblings, Freckles and Rocky went on to finish and place second and fourth.

Natchez spent many years with our friends Jeff and Carol Janousek from Washington State. The old girl was present with Jeff and Carol at the 2011 Cocker National in Minnesota where she passed away. Her devoted owners were heartbroken. It was a fitting destination for her passing; she had put in a good shift.