

“Against the odds

There have been many changes since the IGL Retriever Championship was first run in 1909. As analysed in the chapter Patterns of Excellence in 'The Best of the Best', the social makeup of those taking part has changed considerably, taking it from a sport almost exclusively dominated by the 'landed gentry' to one where the ordinary person could compete and expect to do well against professionals who make their living from the sport. Over the years the rules and criteria have changed, but not the overall enthusiasm of competitors.

One such 'gifted amateur' who later became one of today's top professionals is the 2016 IGL Championship winner David Latham. With this year's victory at Ampton, on the heels of three previous wins at Sandringham in 2003 and 2010 and Cawdor in 2012, he joins Lady Hill Wood and John Halstead in the top elite of handlers to have won the premier event four times.

From Middlewich, Cheshire, David spent many years training gundogs in his free time while working as a coach builder for Bentley Motors, before becoming a full-time professional in 2010 and joining his wife Stefanie, also a professional handler and breeder, in Austria. He remembers living in a terraced house and training on dark winter nights in carparks, something many of us can identify with.

As he mentioned in this year's winner's speech at Ampton, John Halstead has been of the utmost significance in his trialling career, both as a friend and a mentor. Not only has David followed in his footsteps by winning the Championship four times, but he also took over his role as England's Gundog Team Captain in 2015.

For competitors in Britain and beyond, David's success is an inspiration: with passion, dedication and perseverance, it's possible to beat the odds to achieve the highest accolades of success, wherever you come from.”

In the photo, David Latham in line with fellow competitors at the 2013 IGL Retriever Championship.

