

Picture Perfect

Orvis Cover Dog Photo Contest makes winning Labs famous – and has raised over \$1 million for canine cancer research

by Jen Reeder

Virginia engineer Alex Terry was extremely motivated to give his fiancée a chocolate Lab puppy last year. “Ashley asked for three things as her bride present: a baby, a house, or a dog,” he said with a laugh.

“So I decided to get her a dog.”

A week after the couple’s honeymoon, they went to pick up eight-week-old Penny Lane, a pup with a sweet personality. Terry had a new camera – a wedding gift from his wife – so as soon as they got Penny home, he started taking photos of the little Lab in the backyard.

One of those photos was a 2016 Orvis Cover Dog Photo Contest winner. Terry won a \$500 Orvis gift

ALEX TERRY PHOTO



Penny Lane on the Orvis cover.
Penny Lane

card, and his picture of Penny Lane will appear on the cover of one of the Orvis Dog Books this year. “Penny is our pride and joy, so both of us were ecstatic that she won,” Terry said.

Orvis, an outdoor clothing and gear company that caters to flyfishers and hunters, sponsors the Orvis Cover Dog Photo Contest each year. Dog lovers can upload a photo of their pooch for free, then people can “vote” for their favorite photo by making an online donation to



EMILY KLARER PHOTO

Koi having fun with a stick.
Koi on an upcoming edition of the Orvis catalog.



Morris Animal Foundation, a nonprofit organization that invests in science to advance animal health. The math is simple: \$1 = 1 vote. While the judges of the contest ultimately decide the winners, the votes can help draw special consideration for a photo competing with thousands of other submissions each year. More importantly, those “votes” have raised over \$1 million for canine cancer research since 2009.

Orvis CEO Perk Perkins said the Orvis team was initially “dumbfounded” by the overwhelming response to the contest. “It’s astonishing that something that is so fun and relatively easy to do has resulted in such a huge benefit to an important cause,” he said, adding that the judges who sift through 10,000 photos to pick the winners might object to his use of the word “easy.”

Perkins said offering a dog photo contest fits perfectly with the “higher purpose” of Orvis because dogs are integral to the company’s values. “Through our products and services, we help customers connect to the adventure and the wonder of the great outdoors,” he said. “And when you think of it, a dog does exactly that.”

As we all know, since Labrador retrievers are sporting dogs, they’re fantastic partners for outdoor recreation. That’s one reason why Perkins has had Labs all his life. One special black Lab, Anneli, was a constant companion on his fly fishing, hunting, hiking, and sailing adventures. The loyal, versatile girl once even took a flying leap off a sinking sailboat into a life raft. So when Anneli died of cancer a few years ago, the charitable component of the Orvis photo contest became intensely personal for Perkins. “It absolutely strengthened my commitment to canine cancer research,” he said. “There’s a host of benefits that come out of this research.”



Perk Perkins and Anneli fishing on the Caribbean flats.

For instance, he said while finding a cure for cancer is the ultimate goal, other research discoveries are critical because they lead to better and more comfortable treatments, such as oral chemotherapy pills. “A lot of people’s pets are unfortunately going to encounter cancer. It’s a very tough decision at that time about what you’re going to do,” Perkins said. “Every bit we can advance research into canine cancer is going to make that decision easier, more humane, and less costly. The more we can help, the better.”

Dan Reed, chief development officer of Morris Animal Foundation, said the nonprofit has made commitments of over \$40 million in canine cancer research over the past seven years because the disease is so prevalent in dogs. “It’s estimated that one in four dogs will die of cancer. Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in dogs over the age of two,” Reed said. “So we had to ask ourselves, what are we going to do about it?”

Reed and his wife know firsthand the pain of losing a dog to cancer; their beloved Sydney died of hemangiosarcoma last year. He said it was devastating since she was their “first baby.” “Dogs are family,” he said.


Fortunately, there are reasons to be hopeful about the fight to protect our canine family members from cancer. Reed said scientific breakthroughs are frequently occurring and more is learned about the disease every year, such as potential causes – understanding them could help prevent canine cancer altogether. One project the foundation is funding to further that goal is the groundbreaking Golden Retriever Lifetime Study.

“While the name of the study calls out golden retrievers, it is applicable to all dog breeds, especially those with high cancer rates like Labs,” he said. “The study is the largest observational study ever conducted in veterinary medicine. Over three thousand dogs are enrolled in this study, where lifestyle will be observed over the course of the dog’s entire lifetime. Genetics, nutrition, environment, behavior, exercise, etc. The list goes on.... The applications of this study are enormous.”

In the meantime, Reed said taking your dog to see a veterinarian on a routine basis is the most effective way to detect canine cancer. And dog lovers who want to support canine cancer research can donate directly to Morris Animal Foundation. Reed said the organization depends on the generosity of individuals and organizations like The Orvis Company, so “we’re deeply grateful for the support and friendship of our donors and supporters across the world.”

Emily Klarer of Moab, Utah, said knowing “votes” in the Orvis Cover Dog Photo Contest are donated to Morris Animal Foundation was a strong incentive to enter the competition last year. She took a winning photo of her boyfriend’s yellow Lab, Koi, when she was tossing a stick for him during a fly fishing trip in Colorado.

“I was really excited with how the shot came out because it kind of encapsulates him as a Lab – that obedience and that waiting and that wanting the stick so, so bad,” she said. “And he was soaking wet, which he loves, too.”

When Klarer learned her photo was a winner, she rewarded Koi with – what else? – a stick. “I hope Orvis keeps running the contest – it’s been doing so much for canine cancer research,” she said. “To know that many people voted I think speaks volumes to dog lovers in general just being good people.” 

For more information about the Orvis Cover Dog Photo Contest, visit: www.orvis.com/s/welcome-to-the-orvis-cover-dog-photo-contest/6335.

For more information about Morris Animal Foundation, visit: www.morrisanimalfoundation.org/.

What does it take to win the Orvis Cover Dog Photo Contest?

Think your Lab has what it takes to be an Orvis Cover Dog? Of course you do! But how can you make your photo stand out among the thousands of contest entries? Only up to 16 photos win each year, after all.

You might guess that only the “cutest” or “most beautiful” dogs would win the contest, but that’s not the key to winning, according to Orvis CEO Perk Perkins.

“A photograph that portrays the unique personality or even the quirk of the dog usually is what really captures the jury,” he said. “Whether it portrays the curiosity or the fun or their wonderful ability to relax, it captures the unique characteristic or personality of the dog.”