

Thoughts on the Clumber 2015 National Specialty hunt test

By

Michael Finnegan | Roe, Gordie and the BlueMoon crew | Sarah Bulwinkle

Michael Finnegan:

It starts out like all the other mornings on the day of a test. You get up before the sun, double & triple check that you packed everything. Make sure the dogs have had a chance to potty and fill their buckets in the car with fresh water. Then you drive off into the Sun (rise), hoping that all the pieces will come together and you will end the day with a ribbon or 2 and a feeling that all the time you spend drilling and training does bring tangible results. When it is a new test (like this one was for me and most of the other Clumber people) you also get the little knot of nervousness about how the test “experience” will be. Will the event run smoothly? Will we have good weather? Will the grounds be good? Will the local club be friendly?

All of these concerns were tugging at me as Jen and I pulled in to the grounds at LBJ Grasslands. Stepping out of the minivan, I was greeted with that perfect slight chill that comes with weather in the mid-40s. A little on the cool side for people but pretty much perfect for running dogs. “One down,” I thought to myself as I zipped up my blaze orange vest and walked into the thick of the event area. Having a couple moments to look at the field I was struck right away by the good quality grasses that were plentiful and sure to be great for holding birds. “2 for 2,” I thought as I said hello to Linda Fraser and asked where I needed to go with my planting bags to start lending a hand with event work. “Go see Kent,” was her direction to me with a quick point in the direction of a pickup some 20 yards further down the service road.

Kent turned out to be Kent Rudolph, president of our local club, the North Texas Sporting Spaniel club (and head bird planter for the weekend). We talked for a few minutes about how they were setting up. (They run what is known as continuous course, which a system borrowed from spaniel field trials.) This meant that Kent and I would get to walk a few laps around the course while we planted for the entrants who were running their dogs behind us. This system is valued for its efficiency in getting field work completed and in little time we had finished running all the Junior level dogs, which meant I need to say goodbye to Kent to go get my own dogs ready to run at Senior.

Working on event staff and also running dogs is great because it gives you an opportunity to get a wider picture of the whole event. You have an idea of what the event staff is trying to accomplish with the choices they make to provide a smooth and satisfying event for the entrants. As a handler running dogs you get to see how well those decisions are put into practice. I was delighted to have the opportunity to run my dogs at such a well-organized event. While my Clumber took this opportunity to do more “free hunting” than I would have liked, I also ran my Field Spaniel who gave me very nice work having had the last couple of months off from field work due to frigid conditions in WI. The gunners I ran with were extremely accurate and professional in their performance. I witnessed no unsafe shots taken all weekend and the vast majority of birds that went up came down in short order. The judges were clear in their instructions and I felt were excellent in allowing the entrants and their dogs every opportunity to succeed.

One of the plusses of the grounds was that the pond for the water work was no more than 80 yards from the field. This allowed for a quick and smooth transition from field to water which meant that tests would be completed that much more quickly. The pond was of good dimensions and both the dogs I personally ran and those I watched had no issues entering or leaving the pond to perform the water marks and

blinds.

In summation I would like to thank and congratulate the CSCA and the North Texas Sporting Spaniel Club for their tremendous effort in putting together a wonderful event. I know a number of people added qualifying legs on their dogs toward various titles and I know at Least 1 Clumber owner who titled her dog on the weekend. In addition to the test crew I would like to thank Jack Rutherford for taking time and coming out to conduct the CSCA Birdiness test. (June Petit, who has conducted the Birdiness testing in the past, is on break this year, though we hope to see her back 2016.) Jack did a great job making sure the event continued to run smoothly. Thanks also to all of the Clumber folks who came out to participate in the Birdiness test and watch some of the Hunt test. Hopefully you had such a good time that now you are thinking about running you troops in next year's test.

Finally a quick additional word of appreciation to the North Texas Sporting Spaniel Club, you put on an excellent event, went out of your way to accommodate people and innovated the process of testing along the way. I am not certain there has been a collaborative effort like this one in the past where entrants could complete 4 qualifications in the space of 3 days' time. As every hunt test club struggles with economic woes and retreating entries, you have found a way to encourage people to commit to your event by giving more chances to earn qualifications in a weekend than is traditionally possible. It is a model I fully expect to be imitated in the months to come.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Finnegan

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Roe, Gordie and the BlueMoon crew:

The hunt test at the National were wonderful. Great grounds, terrific workers (thank you, English Springer Spaniel Club of Texas) and good dogs and people.

We loved seeing Sarah Bullwinkle's great successes with Moo and Nattie. They have trained long and hard for this, and it was wonderful to be there when everything clicked! Super job!

Our experiences were a bit different, but can serve to illustrate that the journey is what matters! Shandy (Ch. BlueMoonRysn's Summer Shandy, WD), had a very good first test. She found and flushed her birds hard, marked them well, and brought them back (with a bit of encouragement). Her first delivery was to hand. She went to the water, and marked the fall well, went down the bank just a bit to enter, swam straight out to the mark and came right back. As she was swimming back I heard one judge murmur to the other "that's just beautiful. THAT is how a water retrieve should be done". Of course, Shandy had to put her own mark on it - she came out, was TROTTING to me with the bird, and then...set it down, went swimming again, ran around the pond, and then went over to visit Jack Rutherford, who was throwing the retrieves. NQ, but with real style! On Saturday, her enthusiasm overcame her trained abilities...she was finding and flushing birds with gusto, but failed the retrieves (which she of course does in her sleep at home!). The second test (first time, we believe, that two tests have been held on the same day - great idea!), she was on fire. Her first bird was a leftover chukar from the other tests. Low and straight in front of her, it was not a straight shot. She came back, took off again (so fast, in fact, that one judge remarked to the other that he couldn't believe they would be telling folks they struggled to keep up with a CLUMBER!), and flushed two pigeons in quick succession. Each flew into a tree, so no shots there. Her fourth flush was another flyaway, so the judges did a thrown retrieve. She marked it, made it to the fall -

and then said "oh, that's just a pigeon. I will go find you a BETTER bird!" and off she went again. Another NQ, but again with great style!

Pippi (BlueMoon's Calypso), was entered solely to support the club. We haven't particularly trained her yet, other than retrieving work in the back yard. She hunted well, flushed her bird, and it was a flyaway. The judges threw a retrieve - and she delivered it promptly to Gordie's hand! At the water we had little hope - our ponds have all been frozen, and she has yet to learn to swim! She walked out, but wouldn't swim, so NQ. BUT, afterwards she did a lovely water retrieve, so we were delighted!

Annie was in season, so could not run. That was a disappointment, and we are still trying to make it up to her! Rules are rules.

Peach was home with the babies - perhaps they will be at next year's test! We certainly will be - and we know what we have to work on!

Roe, Gordie and the BlueMoon crew

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Sarah Bulwinkle:

I was looking forward to the Hunt Tests at the National and was so excited when I heard that there would be 4 tests run by both clubs. Moo was in a horrific accident a few years ago and is truly a miracle dog. My hunt trainer Trish Jackson worked diligently with him and although he showed consistently that he had the talent and skills he would not swim in competition for her. I used an animal communicator last year in hopes that he would swim and still had no positive result. He was not in the water after the first few days of October last fall. I was so amazed when he not only swam for me at the National but continued to improve with every test. He swam twice on Saturday and I would never have thought that to be possible. That he was able to finish his Junior title in a weekend was more than I had hoped for I am so proud of him. Nattie finished her junior title last summer and I have never done a senior test in competition. I missed the requirement that I would have to point a "gun" at the water and was hoping that she would remain steady. The support and the assistance that I received from the other competitors and the judges was amazing. I enjoyed going out to dinner as a group on Friday and listening to the "war stories." The judges told me how impressed they were with my dogs and that Nattie "is a lot of dog" and runs like a Springer LOL she is a pistol for sure, she got away from me on the last day and because I didn't keep up with her the gunners had no shot so she just went down the field flushing bird after bird and was a little confused when I retrieved her without a shot fired! Despite my inexperience she was able to pass 3 of her SH tests. Thank you so much to the event organizers, judges and Linda and the Watts it would not have gone so smoothly without you it was truly a magical time that I will treasure the memories of forever.

Sarah Bulwinkle