

NCC AIKANE HOKULANI “LANI”

The 2015 National Cocker Field Trial Champion

Lani turned eight on December 1, 2015. We got her on a spur of the moment “deal” during a late season pheasant hunt in South West Kansas. I had been begging my wife, Susan, for a puppy as my two cockers were getting on in years. I was hunting with my good friend Dave Williams who introduced me to these special little dogs 25 years ago, and I was on my 3rd field cocker. We both had shot our limits early that day and we were having a celebratory beer in the field when Dave suggested we call another mutual friend, Bill Pfaff. He was in Montana picking up a puppy from Robert Griffin. When we got him on the phone he said there was one pup left and volunteered to bring her home for me. I had Dave get on the phone to Susan and texted some photos to Susan, it was agreed. We had a new puppy!

Lani was at our house before I got home from my hunting trip. As a puppy, she was a terror causing more house hold destruction than my first 3 cockers combined, including dismantling a whole couch and taking it outside through a cocker size doggy door. I was concerned as she did not love or really care about retrieving as a puppy as that enthusiasm is really the basis of early and most training. This “could care less” attitude toward tennis balls and dummies has stayed with her all her life. **BUT** give her the real deal (birds) and she lights up.

Lani was sent to Paul McGagh for training that summer but he never ran her in a trial. I a passionate hunter, field trialing her wasn't my main goal. She was, and still is, an avid hunting dog and as all driven hunting dogs are, she could never understand why she did not hunt every field.

After the 2009 season during which I mainly hunted South West Kansas she became a bit sluggish. That was in February and she was running a bit of a fever. We knocked that down with some antibiotics but it came back with a vengeance 2 months later. After several consultations and strongly suspecting an inhaled weed seed and infection, we ended up at a veterinary specialty clinic with a Doc that had a lot of experience with weed awn infections named Dr. Matt Rooney of Longmont, Colorado. Going into the surgery Matt was pretty sure he would have to take out at least part of one of her lobes in her lungs and we informed him to not be heroic if her subsequent quality of life would be severely altered.

Dr. Rooney happens to be a patient in our dental practice and a year later he told our hygienist while she was cleaning his teeth that he almost lost her twice on the operating table during the 4 hour surgery, but said “I can't lose this dog!”

Lani's recovery was slow and shortly after being released from the hospital I took her for a drive to the dump just to get her out of the house. She spotted a prairie dog and launched herself out of the open window going 25 MPH! My heart was in my throat as she still had the staples in her chest from the surgery and easily could have split her chest wide open! She survived and made a full recovery.

For the next 4 years she was my main hunting dog as my other dog Kaika was at the end of his career. The birds were good those years and we hunted hard. I hunted her smart and “mostly” kept her steady but she was far from field trial ready. I decided to get back into trialing a bit when I got my latest Cocker, Kona. I ran Lani in our Colorado trials in the spring of 2014. She was a bird finding machine but

on the edge from only hunting and little formal training for 4 years. I did finish one trial with her and handler error may have kept her from a placement in another.

That July, I was planning on sending Kona to Paul for the summer and fall. We had planned a month long trip to Spain and we figured we might as well send Lani to Paul as well. I know he was skeptical about taking a 6 1/2 year old hunting dog on but he agreed. Whenever I asked Paul about the dogs, he'd say he loved Kona's flash and talent and then add, "Lani is doing fine." Paul asked us if we wanted to run both dogs in some fall trials and we said "Sure." Well the "old matronly figured dog"--Paul's words-- placed in three of the final four field trials that fall, including winning the North Dakota trial with over forty plus dogs entered. So, on to the 2014 Nationals and damn if Paul and Lani did not only finish the trial but placed 4th! I then ran her in 2 trials in Texas in the spring of 2015 and placed both days to finish her FC title. Quite the feat for a middle age hunting dog who had only run her first trial a few months prior.

This fall, I campaigned both of my dogs in Wisconsin. They ran great, but no placements. I stopped in ND on the way back to Colorado and Paul and Vicky convince me to leave the dogs with them that week and fly back up to run their ND trial the following weekend. I finished that trial with both dogs and Kona won! I had unfortunately booked a salt water fly fishing trip over this year's national field trial and was bummed as I thought both of my dogs were running nicely.

I knew Paul wanted to run Kona and I also knew he loved Lani but was not as enthused to run an 8 year old dog in the nationals. I was in Havana, Cuba with very poor internet when I got Paul's text that both dogs were back to the 5th series. I then left to fish the other side of Cuba where there was no wifi connection. I went to breakfast the next day and another angler from Canada was on the internet. I could not believe my eyes when I saw the results. **LANI**, my 8 year old hunting buddy was the 2015 National Champion!!!

I cannot thank Paul McGagh enough for the amazing work he has done with both of my dogs. He truly is an innovator and a genius at reading and training these dogs. I regret not being able to run Lani in the nationals myself but am not sure if the results would have been the same if I had.

Lani is an amazing dog, with an incredible nose and a knack for finding game. Back to wild birds for now until next trial season.