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## DOG DAYS AT BUNKER HILL



BRENT McCOWN/Tribune

Above: Riley brings a pheasant back to handler Martin Bell during the water series of the 2003 National Cocker Championship held at Bunker Hill Sunday. Top right: Handler Paul McGagh of Bismarck, N.D., takes a pheasant from Millie's mouth after she retrieved it from the lake during the water series of the cocker championship at Bunker Hill Sunday.

COCKER SPANIELS, HANDLERS  
COME FROM ACROSS THE  
COUNTRY FOR COMPETITION

KATIE BELL  
Hastings Tribune

**C**LAY COUNTY — Ahh, the life of a dog. Chasing birds, rabbits and occasionally their own tails. Not a care in the world. Sleeping all day and soaking up attention from their owners.

But not every dog revels in the joys of laziness — some dogs enjoy the thrill of the hunt and the outdoor weather. Fifty-nine English cocker spaniels

spent the weekend doing what they do best — flushing up and retrieving game in the 2003 National Cocker Championships at Bunker Hill Hunting Resort east of Hastings. "These are the dogs that have placed somewhere in another hunting trial," said Shelley Wiley, event co-chairwoman. "We try to put them in a hunting situation and then judge their ability, so we can bring out the best of the breed. This is about getting the best hunting dog for someone."

Most of the dogs on the course were over the age of 2, with one 8-year-old and one 13-month-old dog.

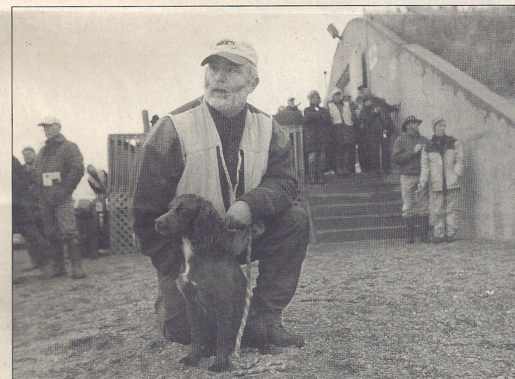
The dogs, handlers, gunners and judges came from across the country and Canada to participate in the event.

"I am really impressed with the competition," said Dan Longboat of Ontario, Canada, gun team captain. "There's dogs and handlers here from all across the country. There's a lot of really good competition here."

This is the first time the championships have been at Hastings. "It's beautiful here," said Rumi Schroeder, a competitor from Hilbert, Wis. "This is gorgeous with lots of different kinds of cover."

Pheasants are planted in the bromo or switchgrass field, and chuckers are planted in the wooded area. The dogs are judged on their ability to flush the bird, retrieve it, and honor the other dog on the course.

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BRENT McCOWN/Tribune

Michael Delaney of Bismarck, N.D., holds on to Megan while they wait for handler Paul McGagh to finish competing with another dog during the National Cocker Championship at Spring Ranch and Bunker Hill Sunday during the water series.

## Dog: Bunker Hill plays host to cocker championship

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"We look for their bird-finding ability — their nose," said Ernie Hasse, a judge. "How they search for birds, steadiness to shot, how accurate they are to marking and that type of thing."

Two dogs hunt in the field at one time, with their handler, two gunmen and two judges, Wiley said.

"We have five runs they have to do," she said.

There are five land runs and one water competition.

After the first day of competition, just 19 dogs remained.

In the fifth and final land series, the dogs ran solo and were scored by the two-judge team. Once the field runs were complete, the remaining dogs participated in a water retrieval course.

Hasse of Michigan and Ray Cacchio of New York judged the competition.

"I've seen a lot of good dog work," Hasse said. "It's very good — strong competition."

The top three dogs were chosen by the judges and awarded trophies and prizes.

"It's really quite an honor," Wiley said. "They're a national champion and field champion, too."

The gun team also awarded the dog it

"I've seen a lot of good dog work."

- Judge  
Ernie  
Hasse



BRENT McCOWN/Tribune

Karter Ginn of Houston, Texas, plays with his dog, Rosie, after she competed in the fourth series of the National Cocker Championship at Spring Ranch Saturday.

enjoyed working with the most.

"It would be their favorite," Wiley said. "They would want that dog to hunt over anytime."

Schroeder brought her 2-year-old imported black cocker, Crawford Kennie of Kingcott, otherwise known as Frank.

To prepare for the event, Schroeder began training Frank when he was 6 months old.

"They're bred for this," Schroeder said. "They love it — they're natural retrievers."

Frank competed well until the fifth series in the woods.

"He kind of dawdled around on the retrieve, and we got booted," Schroeder said.

The winning dog will have a picture print created in his likeness and sold.