



# Spaniels

SUMMER 1993  
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## IN THE FIELD

THOMAS TULLIDGE 9510  
RTE. 2 BOX 9A  
MIDDLEBROOK VA 24459



**1ST PLACE  
PARKBRECK  
MOORHEN (LUCY)  
O/H: PAUL MCGAGH**

Photo by Dennis Sutton



**2ND PLACE  
WINDMILLWOOD  
HONEY (SANDY)**

OWNERS: JOHN & SHEILA COURTS  
PICTURED ARE HANDLER KEVIN  
MARTINEAU & SHEILA COURTS

**3RD PLACE  
EZEKEAL WILLIAMS  
(ZEKE)**

O/H: DAVID WILLIAMS

Photos by Don Cunningham





# AKC LICENSED COCKER TRIAL — AT LAST!!

## The Cockers Are Back

By Don Cunningham

Photo's by Don Cunningham & Hudson Nichols

It has been said before, in the pages of this magazine and elsewhere, and it has been said with increasing frequency in the past two or three years -- often enough, perhaps, that only the most benighted of spaniel enthusiasts have managed to ignore it -- but it bears repeating at least one more time: The cockers are back!

To a coterie of hunters and breeders, of course, field cockers were never really gone, although relatively few of them were at work in this country. But since the early 1960s, there had been no licensed trial for this happy, speedy, enthusiastic hunter. All of that changed in April 1993, with the running of the first AKC licensed field trial for English and American Cocker spaniels in 30 years. On April 3 and 4, at Cobb Lake State Wildlife Area north of Fort Collins, Colorado, 25 Open Stakes dogs and three puppies from locations as widespread as New Jersey, Mississippi, Michigan, Minnesota, Texas, Colorado, Washington, Kansas, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Virginia and Maine competed in this smoothly run, well organized trial.



Field Trial Secretary,  
Charlene Curtis-Dihel  
Field Trial Committee,  
Larry Dihel  
Field Trial Chairman,  
David Williams  
Social Hour, Banquet, Etc.,  
John Bishop

Sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Springer Spaniel Association, the trial was the brainchild of several RMSSA cocker owners, among them Larry Dihel, a member of the field trial committee and his wife, Charlene Curtis-Dihel, field trial secretary. Says Larry, "More and more cockers were beginning to show up on the training grounds of the springer spaniel club, and we got to thinking how we needed a way to test these dogs. We thought it would be fun to have our own trials"

"Larry and I would talk about how much fun it would be to have a cocker trial" continues Charlene, "and to run a dog in the first cocker trial."

Field Trial Chairman David Williams adds, "we talked about how it would be good to meet the people who own cockers, to get everybody together and have a big party. Really, we'd have just thrown a big picnic, invited everybody to bring their dogs, done a little training and had a good time, but we didn't think people would drive halfway across the country just for a picnic, so we thought we'd better put on a little bit more for them."

The springer club supported the trial idea enthusiastically, but no one knew for sure what kind of response to expect or, for that matter, how to spread word of the event. "When you haven't held a trial for 30 years," says David Williams, "it's hard contacting people. You don't know where to start. "With the help of spaniel enthusiasts around the country - and the support of Spaniels in the Field publisher Art Rodger - the trial committee began making contacts and soon



### THE WINNERS

Standing (L-R) Owner, Arthur Person with "Brittany" (3rd place puppy); O/H, David Williams with 3rd place open winner "Zeke" Kneeling (L-R) Co-owner & Handler, Bill Trout with "Tess", 1st place puppy; O/H, Paul McGagh with open winner "Lucy"; Co-owner & Handler, John Bishop with "KOA" (2nd place puppy; Handler, Kevin Martineau with "Sandy" (2nd place open)

discovered that interest in a trial was high. They found, too enough people willing to offer financial support that they could proceed confidently, knowing that even with only a few dog more than the required minimum for a licensed trial, they could hold the event without losing much money.

In the end, however, the trial was a financial success, and the club, not wanting to profit at the expense of contributors, had



Under the expert guidance Mark Hairfield, Minstrel Caerau "Midge" (Owner Jo Kelsey) honors her braced flush. Mark is planning a cocker trial in Texas this fall.



## COCKER TRIAL

pledged \$250 each to the next two clubs around the country who hold AKC licensed cocker trials.

Finding the perfect trial grounds was another problem. After driving an estimated 1,000 miles over a period of about a year, club members decided on the Cobb Lake area near Fort Collins. The area has a variety cover types, including grassy areas; dense, high weedy cover; open uplands and tree lines; ditches and wet lowlands with cattails, willows and lakes. The circuit was well designed to replicate actual hunting conditions; brace partners often ran in different cover types, and frequently dogs were difficult to see in the heavy stuff. Handlers and their dogs were occasionally even separated by trees or ditches, intensifying the test of control.

Essentially a triangle with one open leg, the course also offered varying field and wind conditions, presenting dogs and handlers with broad set of challenges. The third series, held in high, brittle cover brought out the best in dogs and handlers, and tested all of them equally, although the dense cover made it somewhat difficult for the gallery -- 40 to 50 spectators throughout the entire two days of the event, and more than 60 at times -- to see the fine dog work of the finalists.

Trial Judges for the open stakes were Stan Wrobel from Greenleaf, Wisconsin and David Jones from Victoria, Texas. Puppy stakes judges were Cindy Goode of Denver, Colorado and Sue Sellers Rose of Mason, Michigan. All four were clearly professional, decisive, experienced and knowledgeable about the working characteristics of the breed.

The execution of the trial itself was clean and professional. Field Marshall (and RMSSA president) Linda Davidson kept the event moving and under control; the bird planters, under Bird Coordinator Perry Radic, worked smoothly and efficiently, and with Gun Captain Al Wilson in

charge, the guns shot well and safely. Associated events -- a social hour, meals, awards, silent auction and banquet -- went like clockwork under the supervision of John Bishop. How the RMSSA managed to know more than a year in advance when they could count on the only break for weeks in the notoriously unsettled weather of a Colorado April is a secret other trial groups might well try to pry out of the club.



Linda Davidson, President R.M.S.S.A. presents 3rd placement in the open to David Williams who accepts for "Zeke"

Ultimately, of course the event was about dogs. Other writers will comment more knowledgeably about the characteristics of individual dogs and the subtleties of handler styles, but no one at the event came away with any doubts that they had seen some of the best in the country.

The dogs were a real pleasure to watch, even those eliminated in the first series -- most for breaking on a flush in the



O/H: John Bishop casts off "KOA" (2nd place puppy)

excitement of the event -- and all worked enthusiastically, hunted strongly and were a credit to the breed and to the dedication of their handlers. The RMSSA has available a professionally made video tape which captures much of the best dog work. Uncluttered with narration, music or titles, the tape is a 45 minute introduction to some of the best cockers in the country. For more information, see the ad on page 12.

If a few dogs were not up to trial standards, who could be blamed? Much of the point of this first-in-30-years trial was to bring the dogs together to see what the standards might be. As David Williams says, "This was a different situation than a springer trial, for example. There would probably not be a person running in a springer trial who had not already seen a springer trial and knew what kind of a dog was necessary to compete. Here, people didn't know what a trial cocker would run like -- nobody did, except those who'd been to England."

We now know how trial cockers run, thanks to the efficient, superbly well organized Rocky Mountain Springer Spaniel Association and cocker supporters around the country. We know, too, about cocker people: the level of friendliness and enthusiasm in the owners, handlers and spectators was surpassed only by those same qualities in the dogs. ■

### Editor's Note:

Don Cunningham is a professional outdoor writer and photographer, and is Editor of NEBRASKAland Magazine. Thanks, Don for your contribution.

### JUDGE DAVID JONES COMMENTS

On Friday evening, Stan Wrobel, my co-judge and I got together for an hour and discussed how we would judge and handle different situations. The flush was one of our topics as we had both had phone calls from competitors before the trial



## COCKER TRIAL



F.T. Chairman, David Williams, guides 3rd place open winner "Zeke", Judge, David Jones follows.

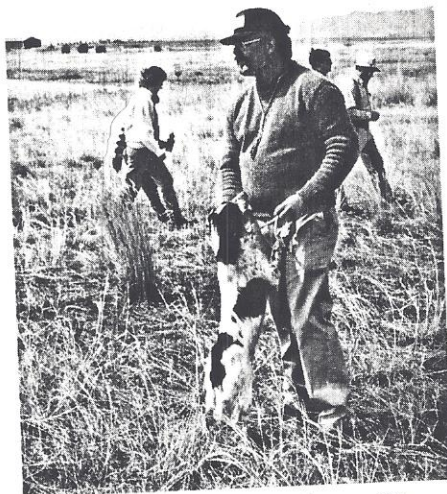
asking us how it would be judged. I made some phone calls myself and had been in Britain two weeks earlier where I talked with reputable Cocker people. I came to this conclusion for this particular trial. If the flushing manner hurt the production of the bird into the air, it would hurt the dog's overall marks. If, however, it was a flush type location, hesitation before putting the bird into the air, it would be noted and the dog would proceed to the third if the rest of its performance warranted it; then at the end of the day we would evaluate everything. After all, this is a flushing breed.

During the course of the trial, I witnessed all types of bird production from great hard driving flushes, to good solid flushes, to flash pointing, to full pointing. A couple of dogs even refused to flush the bird when commanded.

I answered a barrage of questions after the trial again about the flush and stated what I thought would happen. The Cocker trials will probably evolve to a point (pun intended) where the softer flushing dogs would place less and less if at all. As trainers became more knowledgeable and competitive, the competition will become harder and judging more critical.

In this trial Stan and I were very lenient in our judging. The weather was beautiful, the birds good and we had two days to run 25 dogs. We were also determined to only place deserving dogs. We

also wanted to give everyone as much running time as possible for the experience and because of the distance some of these competitors had traveled to the trial.



O/H: Paul Harris from New Jersey with Parkbreck Jet (Clip). Paul is planning a Cocker Trial this coming September.

We lost most of our dogs through breaking and failing to honor, which again will not happen in the future as the game progresses.

First place dog was Parkbreck Moorhen, call name Lucy. This dog caught my eye in the first series. In between dogs on my side I caught sight of Lucy quartering her ground on Stan's side and was immediately impressed. In the second series under me, owner/handler Paul McGagh and Lucy had to work the edge of the lake. After honoring her brace mate she proceeded to produce a bird working the cover briskly and efficiently. This bird ended up being a long fall, dropping into the edge of the lake in the rushes. A long downwind fall was complicated by the handler on the right hand side screaming a loud "no" when his dog broke honor as Lucy was half way to her fall. Lucy spun around and looked at Paul, checking to be sure it wasn't her handler who was screaming, then proceeded to work out towards the fall, finding the bird and returning it to hand. This was a solid A series under me. Her third series was fine and we had a winner.

Windmillwood Honey "Sandy", owned by John & Sheila Courts, was our 2nd place dog. Under the skillful handling of Kevin Martineau Sandy was able to stay competitive in the 1st and 2nd series and closed out with an excellent 3rd series, taking a runner, and nicely producing the bird in the heavy cover along the lake.

Ezekeal Williams "Zeke" was our 3rd place dog. "Zeke" is a fast hard running, exciting dog who kept owner/handler David Williams on his toes throughout the entire trial.

Two dogs worthy of mention who failed to finish the trial but were obviously quality animals were EFTCH Winton Wildfow Mustard "Flash" owned by John Kelsey and run by Mark Hairfield and Parsonage Promise owned by Larry & Charlene Dihel and run by Charlene Curtis-Diehl. We will be hearing more about these two dogs in the future.



While "Promise" didn't finish the trial she did qualify in the All Hunt Test put on by the RMS the day after the trial at Be Away Gun Club. It's obvious that Charlene is happy with "Promises" senior hunt ribbon.

I enjoyed this trial very much and got to see some old friends and make some new ones. Stan and I tried to judge it as we would a normal day's hunting. For instance, when asked would you send the dogs out into the field for retrievers, I answered, "would you leave the bird out in the field when hunting?" We think that the way cocker trials should be run and judged. The fall appears to be the biggest question right now but it is one, I'm sure that will be taken care of with the evolution of the game.



## COCKER TRIAL



O/H: Ernie Hasse hands bird to Judge Stan Wrobel as "Trill" watches. Ernie is organizing a cocker trial in Michigan this October.

### JUDGE STAN WROBEL'S COMMENTS

Since no formal Field Trial competition for cocker spaniels had been held for many years, being invited to judge the Colorado Cocker Trial was indeed an honor for David Jones and myself. Everyone seemed to be on equal ground at the start, no trial wise dogs, and very few experienced handlers. This created a barrage of pretrial questions, mostly aimed at what we would be looking for in the dogs. I explained to each handler that this is really a breeders question, not a judges question. A quality judge should be adding up the positive points of each dog seen, in a given weekend, to determine placement. Our basic trial is outlined in black and white. After that we should mark the positive points, not penalize for personal preference. All in all, we would judge in a positive way, while still only placing quality dog work.

One of my biggest concerns, was for the trial to really demonstrate a cockers work, and not turn into a springer test. Chairman David Williams, and committee member Larry Dihel, took me out Saturday morning to stake a course and we were quite pleased. We had some good heavy cover, especially for spring, a long stretch next to water, and a mix of hedges and trees. All things considered, we had great spring courses.

We started this trial with 25 dogs to come to the line, and truly

did see 25 individuals. Some cockers were very impressive, some rather puppyish, others with lack of training refinement, and only a few lacking traits we expect in most field dogs. At the end of the 1st series, we had trimmed the field to 13 dogs. Most dropped in the 1st were evident fouls, breaking, refusing water retrieves and lack of control. With the dogs off and running, and the nerves of the handlers settled a bit, we looked forward to the 2nd series.

The most outstanding point of the 2nd series was the trailing. We had many birds moving about the course and I took many walks off the grounds to produce birds, and it was, at times, most impressive. Much of this was happening in hedges, and stands of trees and furrows. Add the many marsh and water retrieves David had on his course, and we saw some real work take place. With a little breaking, some rough honors, and a failed retrieve or two, we now had 7 dogs for the final run.

Sunday morning brought good weather, and a new course with the heaviest cover available. We had an enthusiastic gallery, good birds, good guns, and 7 qualified dogs, all the makings of a great finish. In the end, David and I suffered a few disappointments, but had 3 good solid dogs to place.



2nd Place - Open  
Windmillwood Honey "Sandy"

Clearly in 1st was dog #22, Parkbreck Moorhen, "Lucy". She ended the 3rd very solid, with a short trail, two shot birds for retrieves, one retrieve being a very tough job. For me she was #1 since the 1st series. There we trailed a runner 80 to 100 yards, in a heavy hedge of brush, often not being able to see her in the cover. Owner/handler, Paul

McGagh stopped her twice, and in the end flushed six roosters! Lucy was steady, and in the excitement, we did drop one bird for a retrieve. What a job!

Second place went to a young dog called Windmillwood Honey, "Sandy". Kevin Martineau handled this young dog very well, and kept her in the trial when she was on the verge of fouling out. With 5 good finds, and 5 good retrieves, she was indeed solid. In the 3rd, a great job of trailing, along the heavy lake shore cover, with a good flush and tough retrieve, she sealed 2nd place.

Our third place dog was an all black male named Ezekeal Williams, "Zeke". This was indeed an aggressive male that kept us on our toes throughout the trial. A big runner, with a tendency to crash cover, he proved to be very exciting. A few nice finds, with several very tough retrieves gave Zeke and handler David Williams a placement. Zeke was quite often on the verge of fouling, but came through and proved to be a fine cocker specimen.

Much was said before and after the trial of the quality of the flush. No 3rd series dogs had a questionable flush. Any others during the weekend can be attributed to training style or a weakness in the dog. However, I feel with the relatively low number of dogs available for trial competition, we will see this weak point until numbers and refined training, push this out of sight.

In closing I might also add that to a woodtick from Wisconsin, like myself, the Colorado Rockies are a spectacular sight to behold! ■



The Gallery with "Rockies" in the background.



# SPANIEL TRAINING

## Training The Strong Willed Pup

By Jim DeVoll

In the last three issues we have covered the training, and steady-ing, of an average spaniel puppy with good intelligence, biddable, and a desire to please. But occasionally we get one that is not so smart, or lacks the desire to cooperate with the trainer. Many times a well-bred dog will be a bit too independent, which makes the training go just a little different than normal.

If you have one of these, a rebel of sorts, your need for correction will have to be much different than the normal. One rule of thumb is to use only as much pressure as needed with each individual dog. You can always increase the amount of corrective pressure, or change the method to get through to the tough guy. If you start off too strong you may take the drive out of the dog, or just make him a hard case, which will make your training that much more difficult.

As I mentioned earlier, even a well bred dog can be a bit out of the norm. For some reason the gene pool mix in an individual puppy may kick back to an ancestor that was headstrong, independent, or bullheaded. Call it whatever you want, it all amounts to the same thing, this puppy is going to be harder to train than most others.

Sound reasoning tells us that if this happens with really well bred spaniels, even more can be expected from a litter of also rans. As professional trainers we see numerous dogs come in for training that look suspicious. Then one look at the dogs ancestors tells the whole story, random breeding at best. You know before training even begins you have

your work cut out for you.

The point is, buy the best bred puppy you can and your training days will be much more enjoyable. Get a hardhead and the enjoyable days will fade as training progresses.

With that said let's assume we have a very talented youngster that is a bit too good to dispose of. You are willing to pay the price, whatever it takes to train this one, just too much potential to ignore.

The difference in the training comes early. When teaching the pup to sit (hup) you pick him up and put him back over and over. This is just not sufficient to make him sit there for more than a couple of seconds. He has to be up and gone doing something. He's not happy to just hup and allow you to stroke his head. He will continue to leave the hup position over and over again until you become more stern than you have been. A strong, verbal hup means little to him, so as you pick him up, look him in the eye, and shake him somewhat to startle him, hopefully getting his attention. Give the most stern hup you can and put him back down in the hup position, stand over him to insure he stays. If he continues to fight this, (some of the easiest training,) you should begin to use the short check cord at once. This will be a big help in keeping him on the spot when you give the hup command.

This short, light check cord is usually about six foot long with a double strap tied to one end. This allows us to go around his neck snapping back to the cord giving a slip knot effect. Place this on the pup daily as your



Jim has been training dog almost three decades. He began training professionally in 1986, winning the National Championship with "Pat". He has judged five National Championships, and has been an official gunner at the National on a regular basis since 1967. Together with his wife, Luanne, he co-owns the Field Trial Shooting Seminars and they are actively breeding and campaigning English Springer Spaniels. He is also a member of the Midlands Kennels in Omaha, Nebraska.

training begins and you want more control over all situations. This is important. When you give a command you must be able to enforce it if he disregards the command. As the training progresses this becomes more important.

The check cord becomes important to the dog. It will not bother the dog. It will not bother the dog to run with it on but, as you use it to help correct his behavior, it becomes a physiological thing with him. Your arms become longer, you can pick up easily with one hand and the other free to do what you wish to him. Dogs both young and old do not like to be completely off the ground when corrected. They lose all control giving you the upper hand. At least for the time being the youngster is introduced to the check cord and finds out how much he can take. You'll get the help you can get.

To this point we have been able to get by training



## SPANIEL TRAINING

firmly, intimidating the young dog to some degree, by grabbing the cord, picking him off the ground and shaking the pants off him. Remember we have him off the ground, suspended by the neck verbally giving him the works. We are looking him right in the eye and shaking him until his teeth rattle, but believe me it will get worse.

His hunting instincts will become stronger as he is worked on more birds and his running becomes a big part of his life. Slowly he will become more confident, and more headstrong. It seems that his life becomes more fun, but yours gets more miserable. Soon he'll be running out of gun range, thus out of control. He will begin to run through the whistle. By this I mean he continues to run on after hearing the turn command and turns only when he wants too.

The six foot cord is then replaced by a light seventy five or one hundred foot cord, enabling you to force him to turn upon command. I have had dogs run out to the end of the cord, knowing full well that as he reaches the limit and hears the turn whistle, he (or she) will be flipped and be brought about if they don't turn on their own. Yet they will run on only to have their neck stretched, maybe flipped over, at best forced to turn back towards you. This, of course, is no fun for man or dog. Some will get the idea after a few weeks, others never do. If he starts to turn on his own before hitting the end of the line, you are making progress. This is where the physiology of the shorter check cord will help you. Replace the long with the six foot one, and the young dog will not know for sure that you cannot still flip him. The same principle applies in training an elephant. He is heavily chained. He tugs and pulls until he knows he

cannot break free, so he gives in and no longer fights to run off. Even after the heavy training chains are replaced with lighter rope he could easily break he no longer fights to get away. Hopefully your dog is at least as smart as the elephant, and you can continue on with the training.

Things will go pretty good some days, then others you'll be tested over and over again. This type of dog may go through the steadiness training pretty good and do well for a time. He then becomes overwhelmed with the fun of his work. He will be unable to contain his enthusiasm, his desire to "do it his way" will overpower much of the training. He may begin running out of control again, or begin breaking to the shot. He may just forget he was ever steady and begin to leave for every retrieve on his own timing, why wait, the bird is right out there for the taking.

This is when additional correction is needed. There are numerous ways to become more firm with a willfully disobedient dog. I use a leather strap, doubled over at the end, which strikes the dog, thus giving a loud crack. I usually pick the dog up by the check cord, holding him all four legs off the ground. Using the strap will in no way harm the dog, but they soon learn to respect that type of correction. The strap only stings, but after hitting my leg a few times (clean miss on the dog) I have respect for it also.

It's much better training to correct the dog severely once in a while, rather than nag at him over and over again for the same infraction. If you constantly go out to correct your spaniel, getting to him only to let him off lightly, he'll soon become immune to one slight irritation you are causing, and accept it as part of the routine. I try not to nag at any dog, but correct them severely, getting it behind us. They can accept this if they know

why you are down on them.

Some of the most difficult dogs will need discipline changes from time to time. A new type of correction will only improve their attitude for a short time, sooner or later it's back to "doing it his way". You must use your ingenuity as you two go through life. I have had dogs that respect a certain type of method over any other. Once you find that corrective method you may have the ticket for making your life a little less miserable.

You could try picking him up by the hind legs, holding him belly up, swinging him in circles at arms length, until you are both dizzy. For some reason this has worked with some of the most problem dogs. The shock prod (a small hand held cattle prod) is what many trainers use, with a good degree of success. The electric shock collar is also used successfully by experienced trainers. I use this only as a last resort type of training, and only to correct one thing. It's not a cure all that can be used to stop your dog from running too big today, and for breaking tomorrow.

I'm not advocating the use of the "collar" for inexperienced trainers. Know what you are doing before you begin with any training aid. Enlist the help of your local professional, or experienced amateur trainers. This may help you from making a big mistake with your young dog, as he may not be as tough as you think.

My wife and I had dinner at the Nationals with a couple, Jim and Phyllis Dobbs, who manage the Tri-Tronics Training Center in California. They have developed a new method of training with a collar using only the slightest stimulation to train with. They conduct seminars which I hear are very good. I'll attempt to get more information, and experience on this type of training, and let you know the outcome. ■



## Duck Hunting "Southern Cocker Style"

By Art Person, Natchez, Mississippi

Duck hunters in our area have for many, many years enjoyed absolutely the finest hunting in North America. One only has to look at a map of the U.S. to see the natural funnel created by the Mississippi river and the streams and rivers that feed it. We have been blessed with bountiful winter feeding and resting areas for all those ducks that make it down both the Central and Mississippi flyways. A rich and colorful history of both legal and illegal hunts and hunters. Who of us have not been educated and entertained by those wonderful tales of "The Beaver Dam" club and the Memphis bunch, led by that legendary writer Nash Buckingham. Unfortunately, the days of no limits and flights of ducks and geese that blackened the sky, are long gone.

Although I am much too young to remember those "good ole days", I still remember the days of ten point ducks, when two hunters with a little skill and a generous portion of luck could come home with twenty ducks! Good ducks too — Pintails, Teal and Widgeon. Throw in a few Mallard drakes and you could literally harvest more ducks than you could easily carry. These days are gone forever I'm afraid, which brings me to the heart of this story.

Several years ago, as the duck population dwindled and seasons and bag limits steadily shrunk, I began to realize that duck hunting as we knew it was really history.

As good as the duck hunting has been down here at the end of the flyways, we have some pretty good "alternative" wingshooting as well. Woodcock stage by the thousands in our low-lying bottomland, and we have some pretty fair dove shoots as well. Maybe it was time to rethink the

whole hunting game, if we were going to hunt at all. Although we have had Labs for many years, and still have three (all retired or semi-retired), we wanted a smaller, more versatile dog that could be used for all sorts of wingshooting. Luckily for us, about the same time Gun Dog magazine had an article about the English Cocker. Cheryl, my wife, had been really keen about purchasing a "cocker spaniel" for herself. After showing her the article, and deciding that we could "kill two birds with one stone" so to speak, she gets her cocker, I get a hunting dog; the deal was struck. Enter the English Cocker, the merry minstrel of dogdom.

Much rhetoric has been bantered back and forth about the shortcomings of the spaniels as "waterdogs". A recent article, taken out of context, states that the spaniels are not the dog for "big, fast, or cold water". Fortunately, in our area, we don't have any of the above, except cold, and usually not much of that. In fact in several of the areas where we hunt, we pray for cold water because of the danger from alligators. Our duck hunting is usually done in either flooded Mississippi river backwaters or flooded rice fields. We hunt from blinds in the rice fields, and either wade or use boat blinds in the backwater areas. The river level



Art Person & English Cocker at "wor

fluctuates on almost a dai so permanent blinds are until this past year, we Cockers for all of these except for those that wading into the back Usually water is from waist deep. You can pictu cocker treading water f hours, waiting for the ducks. Thanks to m ingenuity, he came up solution to the treading problem. The first hun season, he took the bot of his climbing deer attached it to a big Wi about six inches above tl and alas had the perfect for "Roux" his little liver Cocker.

Generally, the way v either from our boat or w to scout the lease and try where the ducks are com feed. We have lots of



## HUNTING TALE

fields that flood when the river rises. The ducks love to feed in the shallow areas around the edges of the flooded fields. When the shallow areas are close to wooded cover, we set decoys, and wade into the woods at the edge of the field. Often we set up early the afternoon before, brush up a "hide", put the dog platform up, and set out the decoys. The next morning we wade in before daylight, get set up, and wait for the ducks. When the conditions are such that we don't have good cover near where ducks are feeding, we use the boat as a blind, and set up in sheltered areas along the woodline, set out the decoys and use our calling to decoy ducks in that are looking for a sheltered loafing area. Cloudy, windy days are the best for this type hunting.

As you can see, we don't hunt swift running, big waters. Most of our areas are confined to smaller flooded fields, and still water. For this type hunting, the English Cocker does a fine job. We have found them to be natural water dogs, good retrievers, and a whole lot easier to get in a small boat, than a hundred pound Lab. They also only bring about a gallon of muddy water into the boat each time they make a retrieve. Since we have been using the platform, the little Cockers can really see the area, and make great wade hunting dogs. The Cockers are very trainable, and catch on to all the little duck tricks pretty fast. They can swim down a cripple, and they aren't easily fooled by divers. Most of our retrieves are made on decoyed ducks and rarely are the retrieves over about forty yards, although occasionally we will get a wing-tipped duck that will sail out for a long distance. The Cockers may have trouble with these birds, but if they mark them well, they will usually make the retrieve. Shooting out of a boat or blind is about the same, with the

distances the same. The rice fields can give the dogs a little trouble if the water is very shallow, and the mud is deep. Retrieving a large duck can be a chore, but these little dogs won't quit. If the water is much over ankle deep, they can push the duck, sort of let them float along. Smaller ducks like Teal or Wood ducks are easy even in mud.

Problems? We encountered a big one on the first duck that we ever used an English Cocker. My son was hunting with a friend on our lease, opening day of our first split season. The River had been rising, and some of the very lowest soybean fields were flooded. In this area, we have a real problem with these low fields, in that they flood first and are the last to dry out; so they often don't get much cultivation and often aren't, completely planted. Arty, my son, and his friend had seen lots of ducks going into this little field for several days prior to the season, so they set out about two dozen decoys the afternoon before, and planned to wade in and hide in some small willows at the edge of the field. What they didn't take into account was that the field was filled with cockleburrs. At the edge, the burrs were above the dog, but in the middle of the field, the dog had to swim right through them. Unfortunately for poor "Roux" after a couple of retrieves, he was covered with cockleburrs, in fact he had so many burrs on his ears, they stuck straight out. Arty was in a panic, as by this time, the dog was in pain, whining, and trying to bite the burrs. They came back to the camp, and about four of us tried to pick the burrs out. After about thirty minutes and a coffee can full of burrs we realized that we weren't making much progress. "Roux" had about three layers of cockleburrs covering his entire body. I called our Vet, and he told me to have Arty bring the dog in, and he would see what he could do. After several hours, Arty came back without his dog. The vet had to

anesthetize him and clip him after he was asleep. We picked him up later that afternoon and he looked like a sheared sheep! Boy, did we learn our lesson. I bought some clippers, and we clipped all the dogs that we planned to hunt. That solved the problem of the cockleburrs. Now we clip all the dogs for the summer, except for one bitch that is extremely short haired. The dogs do better in the summer and early fall dove hunts, and the hair is longer by duck season, but not long enough to be a problem.

Can you duck hunt with English Cockers? You bet you can. For our type hunting, under our conditions, they do just great. As a bonus, they make great little woodcock dogs, and good dove retrievers. Their biggest plus however, is their wonderful temperament. They make great house dogs, when they aren't hunting. This may not have been a factor to hunters in the past but today with most families living in cities or suburbs, a smaller dog may be their only option.

For the average duck hunter of the 1990's with severely curtailed bag limits, and a shortened hunting season, the English Cocker makes a great little versatile hunting dog, wonderful companion, and family dog. I'm glad we found them. I bet you will be too. ■

### BRAMBLE CREEK KENNELS

- Field Bred Springers and English Cockers
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# *Congratulations*

## Paul and "Lucy"

For winning the first Cocker Field Trial in the USA in thirty years



### *Spring Litter Due In May*

MAESYDERWN GRIFFIN "Brin"

NFTC Jasper of Parkbreak

FTCH Wernffrwd Melyngoch

FTCH Jade of Livermere

FTCH Wernffrwd Pawn

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"BRIT"

This should be a wonderful cross, Maesyderwn Griffin is the sire of Parkbreck Moorhen "Lucy", Paul McGagh's great little bitch who won the RMSSA Cocker Trial, the first licensed Cocker field trial in the USA since 1964! Nancarrow Rosy Mantle "Brit", placed third in the puppy stake at the RMSSA Cocker Trial. Pups will be raised inside and will be well socialized, all shots, dewclaws removed. Written health guarantee furnished.



R: "LUCY" (Son of Griffin)  
L: "BRIT"

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