

HGS: Novice FT at Little Pix Hall Farm, Kent 30th December 2022
Judges: Helen Evans (A Panel) & Nigel Wroe (Non-panel)

It had rained heavily overnight and light rain had arrived just as the trial was being called to order. The terrain was occasional spinneys and wooded strips bounding open fields of cover crop and with extensive patches of wild bird seed/cover crop. Both the open field cover crop and wild bird seed crop was laying flat due to recent heavy snow, now thawed, it became evident that this would be holding partridge and pheasant, though the wind and rain would make scenting in open fields very difficult. The wind strengthened during the day to an uncomfortable bluster driving the rain unpleasantly. The temperature was cold but a tad warmer out of the wind in the wooded areas, and with birds sitting tight in the woodland under storey, dogs had more success pointing and flushing.

Half of the dogs were lost during the day due to the usual reasons including chasing game, missed game and abandonment. Those that did impress most favourably created their own opportunities to be run both in woodland and out in the open field, and to try for retrieves of worked birds.

1st: No. 3 Northern Arrow's Merry Maus von Trubon (Imp Fin) (Weim) handled by S Burton

This young bitch was run first in a short and narrow wooded strip comprising a flooded gully forming into a duck pond. The ground cover was very dense and littered with tall reeds and underhanging branches with the dog, facing cover, having to work hard to push through at times. The woodland edge was interspersed with thick brambles. Birds were moving ahead. Taken to a larger wood the dog worked at pace along the left-hand boundary where the cover was such that it would likely hold birds. The dog came onto point but under pressure the bird ran under dense cover and out of the wood and was not shot.

The dog's second run was in the open field of cover crop and it worked a classic backwind pattern in a fierce wind, ranging widely with minimal handling. The dog hunted with pace, drive and with some style, but the run was unproductive.

The dog was brought up at the start of its third run to retrieve a previously shot unmarked bird some 80 yards distant out in the open adjacent to a strip wood on the left-hand side, with a right to left cheek wind. The dog took a direct line and on winding the bird, a white cock pheasant, made a quick return and delivered tenderly to hand. The dog was then asked to work the strip wood and quickly came onto staunch point on the left-hand edge. Flushing on command the dog was steady to flush, shot and the fall of the bird. The dog immediately encountered more game and pointed and flushed on command two further birds which were not shot at. The dog was steady to wing. Taken out into the field on the right of the strip wood the dog made short work of the bird shot earlier off its own point. Delivering tenderly to hand.

2nd: No. 4 Archenfield Islay (HV) handled by N Lambert

The dog's first run was in a sizeable wood, with the ground cover of low brambles, becoming denser at the left-hand edge. The dog worked at a fast pace and ranged into the centre of the wood when on scent. Returning to the left-hand edge the dog came onto point but this proved unproductive.

The dog's second run was out in the open field of flattened game crop, with a fierce backwind. The dog ranged very wide at pace and with some style covering the guns diligently, with minimal handling. The left-hand edge was bounded by a thick hedge and the dog could not have favour of the wind. The run was unproductive.

At the start of its third run the dog was first asked to retrieve an unmarked white cock pheasant laying unseen in cover out in the open field adjacent to a strip wood, at about 60 yards distance, having been taken forward, and given a mark. The dog made a quick find and returned tenderly to hand. The dog was then asked to hunt the strip wood with a right to left cheek wind. Being a narrow strip the ground cover was quite dense. The dog came quickly onto a staunch point and flushed on command, being steady to flush shot and fall. Taken out of the wood the handler was given a mark and the dog made a quick find with minimal handling, retrieving tenderly to hand.

3rd: No 8 Helwycwm Gwyn (GSP) handled by S Kirby

This youngster's first run was out in the open in the extensive patch of wild bird seed crop, laying flat after heavy snow. A covey of partridge had lifted earlier and the previous dog had found both pheasant and partridge. The patch was bounded on two sides by tall woodland and the strong wind tended to swirl. The dog found the wind readily and worked at a fast pace with some style with minimal handling which was most pleasing. Having pivoted on the left-hand gun, the dog was allowed to work beyond the patch into the regular game cover crop with a headwind, but the run was unproductive.

The dog's second run was in the open field of game cover crop, bounded on the right by tall woodland, and on the left by a wide hedge. The wind was strong tending to a head wind. Indicating game ahead in the left-hand edge the dog persevered on a partridge moving ahead in the hedge. The dog then came onto a staunch point and the dog was steady to flush and shot fired. The bird was not hit but came to ground some distance away with sodden wings watched by the dog which remained steady throughout.

The dog was later brought up to retrieve the third and final bird shot out of a strip wood. The handler was given a mark just beyond where a bird had been retrieved by an earlier dog. The dog was handled further out into the field and wined its bird, returning at a fast pace and delivering the hen pheasant tenderly to hand. The dog displayed exemplary diligence through all aspects of its work for its handler.

4th: No. 1 Mustwork Witch Water at Inkiana (GWP) handled by D Campbell

The dog's first run was in a hazel wood of mature trees with variable ground cover of bramble and ivy, with denser cover at the left-hand boundary of the wood adjacent to a track. The wind was very light. The right-hand side gave way to steep gullies with fast flowing watery bottoms. The dog got under way keenly and quickly came on to a staunch point. When asked to flush two cock birds lifted and the dog sat immediately. The bird that flew right-handed was shot and fell down through the high branches. The dog remained sitting to flush, shot and fall, and when commanded made a quick retrieve tenderly to hand. The suddenness of the point and steadiness was most impressive.

On the dog's second run the dog was hunted from the end of a wood in an open field of game cover. By this time wind had stiffened and the dog was required to work a back wind. The left-hand side was bounded by a tall hedge row and the dog diligently checked for game scent when on that side, with minimal handling. The dog ranged across its beat with pace and style. This was a blank run.

Certificate of Merit: No.2 Zoldmali Irka Firka at Canalgame (Imp SRB) (HWV) handled by F Briley

The dog's first run was in a hazel wood of tall trees bounded on the left-hand side by a track with fairly dense cover along this edge. The right-hand side fell into a number of steep gullies with watery bottoms and scant ground cover. Nevertheless the dog ranged wide and into the more accessible gullies to cover the right-hand guns with minimal handling, returning as necessary across the full width of the beat, to work the left hand edge. Heavy rain penetrated the wood and the wind was a back wind. The dog ranged at pace and into cover of brambles as necessary but the run was unproductive.

Before being asked to hunt on its second run the dog was asked to make a retrieve of a previously shot, unmarked bird which had fallen out in the open beyond the end of a wood. The dog made short work of the find and delivered tenderly to hand. The dog was then asked to work uphill in game cover with a fierce back wind and along a hedge on the left-hand side. The dog began to indicate game and was drawn into the hedge which formed later into a dense spinney. The dog persisted in and out of cover within the spinney, and then came onto point, producing on command a white cock pheasant. The dog was steady throughout.

Certificate of Merit: No.9 Parhelis Mentat Master (Weim) handled by A Morgan

The dog's first run was into a narrow, wooded hollow with a backwind penetrating the wood. The dog was first asked by its handler to progress downwind outside of the wood on the right-hand side the cover being fairly dense brambles, and was worked back diligently hopeful of winding scent with

favour of the wind. This was unproductive and the dog and handler then entered the hollow. The dog then had to penetrate the dense cover and fallen branches turning to work into pockets to gain favour of the wind. The dog came onto point which was claimed and the dog was commanded to flush, which it did and two birds lifted, flying left and right. The right-hand bird flew back over the dog and out of the wood and was shot. The dog extricated itself from the cover and stayed close to the handler attempting to flush the second bird which had lifted out of sight. The handler moved out of the wood to send the dog when requested and made a quick find, delivering to hand.

The dog's second run was in the open in the game crop between a hedge on the left and a tall wood on the right. The dog worked diligently at pace ranging across its beat into a headwind. The work was unproductive. The dog was then taken into a narrow strip wood and the dog came quickly onto point, asked to flush, three birds (two white cock pheasants and a hen) were produced and shot. The dog was steady to flush, shot and fall to the satisfaction of the judges.

I am grateful to the Hampshire Gundog Society for the invitation to judge with A Panel Helen Evans and I am indebted to Helen for her guidance and our rapport throughout the day which given the deluge and fierce winds we realised was going to be challenging for all participants. The guns shot expertly throughout the day and I thank also the host, the Canal Game Shoot. In spite of the weather it proved to be an enjoyable and beneficial experience.

Nigel Wroe

30/12/2022