

April Newsletter  
Wildrose Kennel  
Mike Stewart

## **Training for the Wildrose British Championship Part I**

On March 23, 2002, the Second Annual Wildrose British Retriever Championship was held on the training grounds of Wildrose Kennels, Oxford, Mississippi. Sixteen retrievers including Labs (both English and American), Flatcoats, and a Golden competed for the distinguished Wildrose Retriever Challenge Cup in addition to four other awards, all recognized by engraved, silver plaques imported from England.

Pictures from the day's competition will be posted to our website, [www.uklabs.com](http://www.uklabs.com). Judges included Vic Barlow, Wildrose Kennels UK, Cheshire, England and Mike Stewart, Wildrose Kennels USA, Oxford, Mississippi.

### **Awards:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Spencer Ragland with Bradley (English), Birmingham, Alabama
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Levoy Castellaw with Ace (English), Brownsville, Tennessee
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Andre Fendalson with Rusty (American Golden), Louisiana
- 4<sup>th</sup> Bill Gibson with Jet (English), Tupelo, Mississippi
- Gun's Award Larry Smith with Bracken (English), Kingwood, Texas

Visitors came from many states: California, Alaska, Minnesota, Louisiana, Florida. Many competitors and visitors alike commented that the tests were fine indicators of hunting ability, compatibility and steadiness and noted strengths and deficiencies in their own training processes. I thought it meaningful to review with our readership the structure of each series and the skills necessary for completion. Use the design of each series as transitional exercises and the overview of skill requirements to complement your own training plan.

The Wildrose British Field Trial was established in 2001 with two objectives in mind:

1. Provide competitors and visitors the unique experience of running in a test/trial in the UK as compared to the tests available in the states.
2. Develop tests which are reflective of an actual hunting experience for both waterfowl and upland game, a test which emphasized hunting ability, control, obedience, steadiness and overall compatibility on the hunt: The Gentleman's Gundog.

### **The Trial:**

The tests involved one water series, four walk-up series and one driven shoot test. All dogs were required to be off lead with no collars during all tests. Each series was scored and those not completing the series with a high enough score were eliminated.

### **Series I - The Water Test**

The first test of the morning was a water test, simulated duck hunt. Dogs were required to work side by side in a skid blind completely camouflaged except for two dog holds at water level. Decoys, calls and gunfire were involved with each retrieve.

A 60-yard water double for mallard dead fowl training birds was set up with both birds falling very close together. The primary and honor dogs both were expected to sit quietly until asked for the retrieve. The primary dog picks both birds and on the second return, a diversion is shot and fall was placed in the returning path of the primary dog. The honor dog must pick it while the primary is still in the water. Each should deliver birds to hand inside the blind. Both dogs are scored.

### **Problems Encountered:**

1. Switching Only one dog was inclined to switch from one bird to the other on the double. None of the 16 dogs switched on the diversion! Switching should be discouraged in the early stages of training on land as it is difficult to correct on water. Don't pile dummies on lining drills and carry a game bag to store dummies in training. Never place dummies on the ground.
2. Steadiness There are degrees of steadiness:
  - a. Running in or breaking (a big fault)
  - b. Interfering with another dog's retrieve
  - c. Whining or disruptive behavior in the blind

Some honor dogs found it difficult to remain steady in the cramped, exciting environment of the skid blind. Several broke when the primary was sent and some interfered with the other dog's delivering their retrieves. A couple of dogs moved about inside the blind. Dogs must be conditioned to sit still, quiet and be patient awaiting their commands, never interfering with the hunter(s) or other working dogs.

3. Somewhat surprisingly, no dogs prove to have problems working together in the water on separate retrieves. In American tests this is not

required but in hunting situations, two dogs may well find themselves working simultaneously in the water. Train for it. As one dog returns from a retrieve, when no further handling will be required, send the second dog for a bird thrown as a diversion for the first dog.

4. Delivery to Hand Some dogs had difficulty re-entering the dog port in the skid blind. If they couldn't re-enter, they could not make a delivery to hand. In a hunting situation, this could be a problem. It may be difficult to get to the dog carrying a crippled bird. If the dog drops the bird in an effort to re-enter the blind, the bird may be lost. Involve simulated hunting blinds and water stands in training. Construct a simulated blind for pups to pass through to make retrieves. Use elevated water stands which will be required in flooded timber or boats. Teach pups to walk up wood ramps to enter an elevated blind. A simple board and picnic table in the backyard is a simple place to start.

There were a couple of dogs to complete the water test with near perfect scores. These dogs marked well and made delivery to hand of the birds with no noise or fuss required. They remained still and quiet in the blind, honored the other working dog and were not fazed by diversion birds and gunfire. Steadiness was an absolute requirement.

Next month we will review the 5 upland game series. Afterward we will pick up on our ongoing discussion on Balance in Training. Congratulations to all winners. I hope to see many of you next year here as competitors or spectators. Come on and join the fun and run your dog. You have a whole year to prepare.