

A LOOK AT THE PAST

(Revised and updated 2007)

During the first golden era of cocker field trials (I say first, because surely in 2003, with the Cocker National becoming an annual event, we are embarking on the second golden era, don't you think?), the years following World War II, the Cocker National was sponsored by the American Spaniel Club, the venerable parent club for the (American) Cocker Spaniel, which, in its original formation, had served as "parent club" for all the flushing spaniel breeds. (To this day the ACS holds an annual conformation show in early January open to just flushing spaniels.)

English Springers had held several successful nationals by the time Henry Berol, chairman of the ASC Field Trial Committee, persuaded the ASC to offer a National Cocker Championship in 1953. Trials for cockers had been held off and on from the late 1920s, but wins for English cockers were few and far between. Several did complete Field Championships prior to WWII, including the imported solid liver dog, *Arbury Squib* which was later to become one of the breed's two Dual Champions. There was an active group of cocker trial participants in Northern California as well as in the east during the years immediately following WWII, and in 1953 they met in Herrin, Illinois, site of the first Cocker National.

Evelyn Monte wrote in The American Field about the premier event: "To qualify for the national, dogs had to place in one of the recognized Open All-Age Stakes held in 1953...twenty were entered in the National, 11 American and 9 English, and all started." The judges for that first National were Elias Vail and A. M. Lewis who awarded first and the National Championship to *Field Ch. Camino's Cheetah*, a black, white and tan bitch bred and owned by H. C. "Dan" McGrew and handled by Stanley Head. A runner-up award was given to Dr. J. E. Dodson's owner-handled black ECS bitch, *Wildacre Harum Scarum*.

The Cocker National became, for a time, a worthy finale to the annual trial season. The 1954 event was again held in Herrin, Illinois with an English Cocker again taking top honors: the imported blue roan dog, *Eng/Am. Field Ch. Shawfield Glenfire*, owned by Andrew Porter and handled by Larry MacQueen. The year 1955 saw the event move east to Ringoes, New Jersey, where another British import, *Eng/Am Field Champion Greatford Meadowcourt Pin*, lemon roan dog owned by Albert Winslow and handled by Jasper Briggs won a hotly contested contest in atrocious weather.

In 1956, again held in New Jersey, seemingly out from nowhere, came a smallish owner-handled buff American Cocker, *Prince Tom III, U.D.*, to win the championship for his owner, Tom Clute. He became the first American Cocker to win a National, the first dog with an obedience title and the first handled by an amateur – definitely a surprise for the die-hard trialers of that era! Another American Cocker copped the national in 1957, the black dog, *Field Ch. Berol Lodge Glen Garry*, owned by Mr. Berol and handled by Blair Crowell.

In 1958 English Cockers came to the fore again when the red dog *Field Ch. Camino's Red Rocket*, handled by Ivan Brower for the actor, Clark Gable took the championship. The seventh championship in 1959 was won again by an English Cocker, the black dog *Field Ch. Greatford Charlie*, another import from the United Kingdom, owned by Dean Bedford and handled by Larry MacQueen. Charlie had been runner-up in 1958 and Red Rocket was runner-up to him in 1959.

By the early 1960s, for various reasons, interest in cocker field trials was starting to wane. American Cockers accounted for the 1960 and 1961 championships, but the number of entries was beginning to decline. Since the National was based on dogs qualifying from trial placements during the season, obviously less trials would mean fewer entries for a National. An American Cocker, *Field Ch. Ru-Char's High Jinks*, owned by Ruth Greening (known to many for her excellent field English Springers) won the last Cocker National held in 1962. The ASC Field Trial Chairman, Mr. Peter D. Garvan reported: "The entry was deceptive (19) as the number of exhibitors decreased, ten entries being made by two kennels. Overall the quality of the stake was good, but not overpowering, the low point being reached during the running of the water series." Sadly with entries and interest waning, there were not enough entries even at the regular trials to warrant holding a National Championship in 1963 and by 1964 the Cocker field trials in the United States had ceased.

The ECSCA, a parent club in its own right in those days, was still closely connected to the American Spaniel Club. A small amount of ECSCA members supported the trials of those times; however there is nothing in the ECSCA archives, which indicates that there had ever been any interest by the ECSCA itself to hold a National Cocker Field Championship. The American Spaniel Club found its group of field-oriented members declining, and, until recently, did not appear at all interested in offering field events.

Thanks to a dedicated group of fanciers of the English Cocker who wanted to maintain and nourish the working abilities of the breed, the ECSCA started the long path back to the revival of cocker trials back in the 1970s with the introduction of Working Tests for English Cockers. During that time several individuals imported working-bred English Cockers from the United Kingdom and these quickly made friends with the hunting fraternity nationwide. The American Kennel Club, following the lead of other performance clubs, proposed Spaniel Hunting Tests in the mid-1980s and these became a reality in 1988. Other clubs including the ASC, and several local Cocker and English Cocker clubs across the nation held sanctioned field trials. The ECSCA was approached in the early 90s about holding a Cocker trial. The reply was that the ECSCA had never held a field trial and would need to get AKC sanction and approval, but possibly a friendly Springer club with experience might be willing to sponsor a Cocker trial. And the good folks at the Rocky Mountain English Springer Spaniel Association did just that in April 1993, holding the first trial for Cockers in some 30 years!

During the first five years of the revived field trials, interest in the working English Cocker grew, fostered by a small, but dedicated group of fanciers who worked with the ECSCA to get the trials going again. Judging by the entries at most events, there was no cause for complaint though everyone realized the importance of the on-going need for new faces, new dogs and continued support of such events – for in truth, there was an entirely new generation of field-trialers and fanciers involved with the working Cockers. To help maintain an on-going interest in the newly revived trials, the ECSCA decided to take the plunge in 1998 and offer a “new/revived” – call it what you will – National Field Trial Championship for Cocker Spaniels and English Cockers. The oldest regional club for the breed, the Heart of Michigan ECSC, took on the task of hosting the event which was held October 30-31, 1998 in Hillsdale, Michigan. A “local boy made good” when Ernie Hasse (who later judged the 2003 NCC) handled his imported solid liver dog, **Field Ch. Flathome Accord**, to first place, to become the first NFC in 36 years.

To insure a high standard of competition the decision was made to hold the National Cocker Championship (NCC) every other year and this was done in 2000 and 2002 with the winners being the American-bred liver roan bitch, **Field Ch. Dareg Cal Shraid Marshen**, bred and owned by Arthur Person and handled by Paul McGagh winning the 2000 NCC in Wisconsin and the golden imported dog, **Field Ch. Creignantt Mordred**, owned by Ramon Rustia and handled by Fred Bradley taking the honors in Maine in 2002.

It was an exciting decade for Cocker field trials even though there were many ups and down along the way. By 2003 an annual calendar of Cocker trials had been developed, not an easy task due to the many Springer trials crowding the calendar. Some are hosted by Cocker clubs, others by Springer clubs or sporting spaniel groups and the American Spaniel Club has gotten back in the act by holding its own trials on occasion. And the ECSCA often offers to run trials by “loaning” its name to clubs which have not received AKC sanction and which serve as the “hosting” clubs actually running the event. The National Cocker Championship has become an “event” all its own, and in 2003 the ECSCA Board of Directors gave its blessing to hold an **annual** National Cocker Championship, with the event continuing to move around the country, organized and manned by club members and non-members alike.

In late fall of 2003, the NCC (as it has become to be known) was held in Hastings, Nebraska with 56 starters on hand. An imported solid liver bitch, **Eng/Am. Field Ch. Chyknell Megan** owned by Mr. A. R. Ginn and handled by Paul McGagh took the honors. Although not acknowledged per AKC rules on publishing foreign titles, Megan had won the British National Cocker Field Championship title before immigrating to these shores.

In 2004 the NCC moved to Leicester, New York, where once again an import, the black bitch **Field Ch. Mallowdale Naomi**, captured the big win over an entry of 57. She was handled by Fred Bradley for owner Mr. William J. Drake.

In 2005 we moved back to the Midwest into North Dakota where 47 hopefuls entered and all started. Here the eight years young black bitch, **Field Ch. Diana Floss of Windmillwood**, already the dam of winners

came out and showed the youngsters how we do these things. “Millie”, imported from the UK by Harold Bixby and co-owned by him with Martha Calabrese, was handed by Paul McGagh.

In 2006 the NCC came back to Michigan where it had started in 1998, again hosted by the Heart of Michigan ECSC. There were 56 started on hand and for the first time in the modern Cocker Field Championships, the winner was amateur owner-handled. In addition to winning the National title, this imported setter red bitch, **Chyknell Red Kite** also completed her AKC Field championship at the same time with her owner handler, Mr. A. R. Ginn.

The 2007 NCC, held in Wisconsin, drew on of the largest entries to date – 68 with all present!! This year another “first” was accomplished. - a first for the entire history of the Cocker Field Championships in the USA.- we saw a repeat winner! The black bitch, **National Field Ch/Field Ch. Mallowdale Naomi**, owned by Mr. William J. Drake and handled by Fred Bradley repeated her win from 2004. Perhaps she could now carry NFC2/FC in front of her name!

Thanks must be extended to everyone who contributes to these exciting annual events, be they ECSCA members, outside club members, field fanciers, or just plain fans of the English Cocker Spaniel in all its guises and talents. Without all of you, the NCC could not happen. So pat yourselves on the back for a job well done and continue the good work! You’ve helped continue a great tradition.

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