

COCKER CHALLENGE

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I have been thinking about our conference call on July 24, 2007, and the prospect of creating a greater challenge in our cocker trials. Since I am afflicted with the list maker's syndrome I am trying to think of ways we can further challenge our cockers in field trials and put them into print. I am excited to think that our little dogs could lead the way not only for the betterment of our breed, but also for the possible spin off and challenge to others. We heard several ideas during the call and I am wondering if we can build on these and distribute our ideas to the people out there who are connected to the cocker world as club members, judges, guns, bird planters, etc. The following are ideas that came up during the conference call plus a few others. There is nothing new here, nothing we couldn't be doing already. Common sense and innovative thinking at every individual trial could provide a unique challenge every time we come to the line.

- Prior to the trial date, the clubs' field trial committees should discuss how their particular venues can uniquely challenge the cockers.
- The judges, the field trial committee, and the bird planters could meet together on the morning of the trial to discuss specific means they can utilize to challenge the dogs and the handlers on that particular course on that particular day.
- Judges can work together to implement the eye wipe when they see it as a productive challenge.
- Judges can communicate with each other on retrieves. If the dog on the other beat needs a retrieve, or would be better challenged by a specific retrieve, then let's go for it. The second series would be a perfect time for this approach.
- A field trial is supposed to emulate hunting. Therefore, if a bird is shot or missed and comes down in an area safe for shooting, the logical action would be to take the dog, handler, and gun(s) to that area either for a retrieve or another flush.
- Bird planters can be creative. Handlers should never assume where birds are to be found. Birds may be planted randomly always paying attention to wind while balancing the equal amount of birds for each side of the course. They may do double plants in the third series; in any series, they may plant two birds on one side before planting one on the other.
- If flags aren't necessary for portions of the course, then don't put them out. Try to remain true to the hunt and not to a contrived situation as much as possible.
- If a dog flushes another bird on the way to or from a retrieve, the guns should feel free to take the bird if it is a safe shot. The judges will instruct the handler(s) how to proceed from there.
- If the dogs on both sides of the beat are making birds at the same time and birds are flushed on both courses, guns should feel free to take both birds and judges will instruct how the situation should be handled.
- Judges are empowered to dispense with a third series if placements are evident after the second. The third series should be considered a run off for placements when judges don't concur.
- Judges should feel free to challenge the dogs and handlers when the opportunity presents itself.
- And (I'm sure there are many more suggestions out there. Let's hear them!!)

If those of us in the cocker community could make a promise to ourselves that our club will inject some "new" element into our 2008 trials that will offer our cockers just one more way to demonstrate and showcase their abilities.