

English Cocker Spaniel Club of America
Field Trial Committee

Minutes

Tuesday, September 15 2015
8:00 p.m. Eastern Time

Members Present: Deb Strohl, Mike Schroeder, Vicky Thomas, Robert Griffin, Keith Meissner, Joe DeMarkis,
Pete Rizzo

- I. A call to order was made at 8:06 pm EST
- II. An approval of the agenda was amended to include a discussion regarding Entry Express and the effect of the site going down would present for upcoming trials.
- III. 2015 NCC Update. Jim Karlovec was unable to make the meeting. Joe reported he had previously contacted Jim and was assured that everything for the trial was on track. Jim is meeting this weekend with his committee chair people to go over last minute details. Jim is working to secure a donation of ammunition because B & P (our prior supplier) is in a restructuring phase. Mike suggested that if B & P can't supply the ammunition we contact Federal as they have supplied ammunition in the past. Joe will forward the info to Jim.
- IV. Calendar deadline reminders
 - a) September 19, 2015 is the deadline for returning 2016 NCC judges ballots.
 - b) November 15, 2015 is the deadline for ECSCA Board Nominations, however Joe has been in contact with the nominating committee chair, Chereen Nawrocki and they have worked out an extension. The FTC discussed the importance of continuing to have 2 Field Trialing Community Members on the ECSCA Board of Directors. Rumi Schroeder's term ends in 2015 and Kim Wiley's term ends in 2016. We noted the ECSCA nomination committee did not select a field representative for the slate. The FTC decided they would proceed with a "write-in" ballot to have Rumi Schroeder nominated as a Board Member. Joe will be collecting the 20 signatures needed for a write in nomination at the NCC and forward them to the corresponding secretary, Shannon Loritz. This nomination will be sent out along with another planned mailing by the Parent Club.
All ECSCA members in the field community should look for this mailing shortly after the NCC if they are interested in voting for Rumi. Keep in mind that this election vote is available to all ECSCA members, from all sides of the parent club. It is important that you place a vote
- V. Bixby Award Vote. The FTC would like to thank those who sent in nominations for the Bixby Award. There was a lengthy discussion about the nominees. All of the nominations were highly qualified individuals that exemplified the spirit of the Bixby Award and were well respected by both the FTC and the Field Trialing Community. A vote was taken and a unanimous decision was determined. The Bixby Award will be given out at the 2015 NCC.
- VI. Unfinished Business
 - a) NCC Judging Criteria was discussed and we will continue discussion in an upcoming FTC meeting. The FTC has spent considerable time appraising the current Judges Criteria as well as

the several changes proposed. However, the FTC decided we had other issues we wanted to address before the end of this year and that there was sufficient time to examine the Criteria in the future as well as getting more information on the number of judges that would meet the criteria standards which is being assembled by Dawn Schuster.

VII. New Business

- a) Dogs The committee is concerned with the increasing emergence of artificial patterning at Springer Trials. While we do not often see Cocker Judges favoring flat patterns, we wonder if the popularity it's gaining will begin to have an effect at Cocker Trials. Vicky said she has seen several dogs that are trained to "NOT break pattern" while questing for game. These dogs run a very flat, robotic pattern, from gun to gun, regardless of the wind. They are typically hard charging dogs that are flashy. They generally work close to their handler. The problem is often the dog does not break pattern when he winds a bird and then the bird is bumped and the dog must be handled to the retrieve. The performance of the dog is pleasing to the eye, but it does not replicate a "Dog Hunting in a More Perfect Manner". It is a performance.

For the sake of this conversation, we decided to call it "Board and Barrel" training which gained popularity at competitive Labrador Retriever field trials. It is said a Labrador will NOT take a placement at their field trials if he doesn't run in a straight line for his retrieve. Therefore, you won't see Labradors running downwind and then using their nose to scent a bird. Many people suggest the Labrador Retriever field trials have morphed away from looking for a "Hunting Dogs" to something more akin to a "Field Trial Performance." Around mid 2000's this method was adapted to train Springer Spaniels.

We don't see this as an immediate problem and agreed we can't dictate how people train their dogs. However, there is a concern because of our reliance on the Springer Spaniel community for judges. It was agreed that there was nothing as beautiful as a finely trained Cocker, working the wind, swinging his head into scent and then following the scent to flush a bird. We keyed in on a few key phrases such as "breaking pattern when winding a bird" or "breaking pattern to locate a bird." We determined we valued "a good find" regardless of how the dog had been trained to pattern. We wanted these traits to endure in Cocker Field Trials.

Robert stated that with less and less hunters taking to the field and less and less field trailers with a hunting background, we find dogs that hunt with natural ability are being replaced with dogs that have one consistent pattern no matter the wind direction.

Vicky feels the overall effects of Board and Barrel training needs to be weighed as it does offer a method for many people to steady their dogs and therefore become competitive at trials, which is a benefit. But, those dogs that are not completely trained, those that rarely break pattern for scent and continuously bump birds and then need to be handled to the retrieve, should be penalized when judging them. This is artificial.

Mike felt that dogs should use the wind and adjust their pattern accordingly and a flat windshield wiper style pattern should not be promoted. Pete suggested when judging a dog you would look at the dog's entire body of work not just one find, but if a dog continuously bumps birds than it should not be allowed to continue. The fact that judging is very subjective makes all of this very difficult to enforce, different judges like different aspects of a dogs work. A good judge should be able to see the differences between artificial patterns and a natural pattern as well as use of the wind.

Both Pete & Keith urge our club to be very careful when selecting their Field Trial Judges because many clubs are picking judges that are close, cheap or friends. We need to bear in mind to utilize judges who know our dogs the best. Pete noted that many new, inexperienced Springer Judges are

being used as Cocker Judges to gain experience for clubs and we are seeing bearing the ill effects of being a “testing ground.”

Robert stated that he feels that we need to do more to educate judges, just because a dog is flashy and eye catching doesn't mean it's the most efficient bird finder. He also stated that a good field trial dog should mimic a dog on a good days hunting. Vicky and Robert will both work on refining a statement about this topic that we might be able to amend into the Green Book. The FTC feels that clubs should pick judges that understand natural ability and natural patterns rather than a mechanical dog with a flat windshield wiper pattern that doesn't use the wind. The FTC has been discussing and will continue to discuss artificial patterning and use of the wind and we would like to hear feedback from Cocker Field Trialers with their thoughts on Wind, Bird Finding and Patterns.

- b) Review of gunning qualifications was tabled until the next meeting
- c) Creating an ECSCA program to promote and/or support our 20-30 year old handlers was tabled until the next meeting
- d) 2017 ECSCA Board Nominations was tabled until the next meeting
- e) Entry Express. The Entry Express website has been down and this has caused some problems for several of the upcoming trials that use Entry Express for their entries. Deb has contacted Entry Express and they are extending the closing date for the Fox Valley trial. Several other trials that close soon have worked to correct the problem using paper entries and a combination of Entry Express running orders. Joe and several others have been working on correcting and dealing with the problem. Nadine has also posted info on the fieldcockers website regarding entry info as well as the yahoo discussion page.

VIII. Adjournment – 9:29pm EST Next FTC Meeting October 13th 2015 8:00 pm Eastern time

POST SCRIPT:

Patterning and Bird Finding

The FTC would like to draw attention to the running pattern some participants in the Spaniel world are using. By definition, when a spaniel is hunting, he should be using his nose and running a pattern with respect to the wind. We are beginning to see some dogs being trained to run a windshield wiper pattern from gun to gun without consideration to the wind direction. Watching a fast, high-powered dog running a perfect windshield pattern can be quite seductive. However, if he is running this style without regard to the wind direction, he is not hunting. What you are witnessing is a nicely trained animal running a robotic race that ultimately will lead to poor finds and bumped birds.

A questing dog running a pattern properly should have its nose to the wind much the same as a weathervane. The pattern a dog should run would look quite different if he is running downwind versus a crosswind or into the wind.

In order to run a pattern for any length of time, one would have to find oneself in a big patch of homogenous cover such as a grass covered CRP field. As objectives such as tree rows, shrubs, or crops are encountered, Cocker Spaniels would be expected to break their pattern and explore these bird holding areas before resuming their quest.

We believe a dog winding a bird and then breaking its pattern to flush game is a key element of a good hunting dog and should continue to be highly valued. Often we see dogs that run an artificial pattern bumping bird after bird rather than breaking the pattern to flush game.

This is not an attempt to dictate any particular training routine that handlers may opt to employ. However, we believe there is nothing so beautiful as a well trained hunting Cocker that uses his nose to cover the field, not needing to put his feet where his nose has already covered, picking up a scent of a bird, throwing its head and making a good find and flush.