



THE DOG WAGONS COME UP.

## FOLLOWING A FIELD TRIAL

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*Illustrated with Photographs by the Author*

IN this country, though the time has been short, the energy expended in producing the best bird dog has been enormous. It is a fair presumption that the English, from whom came our first dogs, have been surpassed, so far as the making of classy dogs goes, because they are importing our dogs and those same dogs are winning in their trials. That is enough.

Among our field-dog men the greatest stake of the year, coming at the end of a long season, is the National Championship. It means much to the winning dog, much to his handler, much to his owner. The owner has the pleasure of possessing a great dog. The handler gets personal profit and future business. The dog's point of view is unimportant, perhaps, but on the presumption that there is some truth in the most stylish animal literature, we will hope that he

has some appreciation of the fact that a number of good men have adjudged him the best bird dog of the year. In any event he becomes of great weight in future breedings, not alone because of his winning performance in the greatest of bird-dog stakes, but also because of the exceptional advertising given him by such a win.

Winning the National Championship is always an uncertain and never an easy thing. Few owners come to the grounds with more than strong hopes and a knowledge of much money spent. The handlers view it in much the same way, though one or two of the latter usually think they have the right dog—enough of them, anyway, to make rather vigorous discussion at night of what will be settled, once for all, on the morrow. One may carry the proverbial rabbit's foot tied to his whistle cord for it is an



THE CONTESTANTS ARE LET GO AT A WORD FROM THE JUDGES.

almost unfailing rule that the handler who loses blames the fates or the judges, rather than give credit to any other handler or any other dog.

As a matter of fact, this stake, more than all others, is free from the element of luck. The three-hour periods which all the dogs are required to run almost preclude that possibility. The judging is uniformly fair, and practically the only matter of chance is in the variance of the judges' conclusions as to the merits of different kinds of work.

Among our best judges in this country this difference of opinion exists, perhaps not concretely enough to be put into words by them, but sufficient in itself to make some divergence of conclusion as between two or three excellent dogs. One man may put tremendous speed above every other quality; another may prefer an attractive way of going; the third may value great ability to find birds. Any dog to win must have all of these qualities to some extent, but the proportions vary widely in each dog, so there is room for difference of opinion. Nevertheless, one thing must always remain true, that on whatever basis he does

his work the winner is a great bird dog, and luck counts for little. In a thirty-minute heat a dog may be lost until his time is up. In one of three hours this cannot happen unless he bolts clear out of the country, in which case, of course, he has no chance to win.

In the short heat one dog may be luckier than the other in getting to birds, but in the longer race every dog has plenty of birdy opportunities and it only remains for him to make the most of them. In this year's Championship a pointer of great but somewhat uncertain reputation was running against what is known as a great dog on birds. In the two hours, which was all the former dog was able to run, he uniformly outranged and apparently outhunted his brace mate, but, nevertheless, the latter found seven or eight bebies of quail and several singles, while the faster dog achieved only a couple of false points and one divided point on a single in high sedge where it was impossible to see which dog was entitled to the credit of the find.

This is not luck, for the slower dog showed that the birds were there. It is either inability to find birds or lack of the

desire to do so. Perfect training counts also, but in any dog worthy to start in this race, where real ability of some sort is presumed, perfection and triumph come from perfect racing condition. Many shooting dog men in reading reports of field trials fail to understand why any dog cannot hunt for three hours. Their premises are wrong. Any dog can. But the question in the Championship is which dog can hunt the faster for this length of time. The result is that the competitors are trained to start at a tremendous rate of speed, to do their bird work in the same rapid way, and to finish as fast as when they began. Few can do it.

One dog this year was taken up by permission of the judges at the end of a few minutes because he was manifestly out of condition and unfit to continue. Another lasted two hours and ten minutes and quit to a walk. Others finished their three hours but at such a slow pace that their chances of winning were badly hurt. Only one or two finished as strongly as at the start, and among these was the winner, and also the dog which did the best bird work.

Monora won, Powhatan was the run-

ner-up, Cowleys' Pride stood high on general bird work, but perhaps failed of a higher place because of a certain lack of fire and determination, due again to lack of perfect condition.

The spectators, the owners, and the handlers come from all over the country to the Championship, some from Canada, some from the East, some from near-by shooting or training grounds. The trials of the United States Club are run the previous week, but the real interest centers at this time in the Championship stake to follow. Every train for several days in advance leaves two or three men at the little way station of Rogers Springs just west of Memphis and north of the Mississippi line.

Then there are reunions of old friends who see each other but this once a year, repetitions of old stories, renewal of old controversies, and always the question of which dog is going to prove his worth the coming week. There is some dog trading and a little betting over an idle rainy day. At last comes the announcement that the start will be made in the morning and the drawing will take place this night.

The drawings have some importance



POOR SPORT FOR ONE WHO WILL NOT TAKE CHANCES ON A FALL.



THE HANDLER SWINGS HIS HORSE TO TURN HIS DOG TO THE FRONT OF THE JUDGES.

at times as affecting the result. The method is simple. The names of the starters are put into a hat and taken therefrom, one by one, each two names pairing those dogs for competition in their relative order. There are two elements of chance in this matter, one concerning a dog's immediate brace mate and the other as to whether he starts in the morning or in the afternoon.

In three-hour heats only two brace of dogs can be run each day. If the weather is cold and frosty overnight, as it was this year, steadily growing warmer toward the middle of the day, the morning course is not the one to be desired, for the fresh dog must start his heat when the birds have hardly begun to move and when the going is exceptionally hard, while, as his time draws to a close, the steadily rising sun does not help him any in the matter of endurance. The dog which starts after dinner has, on the other hand, a perfect freshness to meet the heat of early afternoon, and the cool of the evening coming on helps him to sustain his range and speed. Also the birds have been moving and feeding and the opportunities for striking

scent are correspondingly increased. This is probably the reason that many more birds were uniformly found over the afternoon course at Rogers Springs this year than could be located on that used in the morning.

The other item in the drawing touches the matter of dog individuality. A pointer man with a confirmed trailer would prefer to be drawn with a dog thought to have little independence in his work, so that his trailing dog might be subjected to the least temptation. A man with a dog that is poor on game doesn't care to go down against one famous for his bird work. The contrast is apt to become vivid. A man with a dog lacking courage is not anxious for an early start if the ground promises to be covered with frost and ice in the morning.

Most men take the luck of the draw without complaint, however. Indeed, there is no help for it if the rules of the club are enforced. Sometimes a little diplomatic argument ensues and a brace of dogs may be shifted by mutual consent, each handler possibly hoping to reap some advantage.



AT FIRST IT IS A FOOT RACE BETWEEN THE COMPETITORS.

The drawing over, all but four of the handlers present prepare to rest over the following day; the four who are down to start are soon in bed, to be in condition for hard and exhausting work on the morrow.

Following field trials is poor sport for a lazy man or for one who cannot sit a horse or will not take some chances of a fall. Six miles the crowd drives from Rogers Springs, across the line into Mississippi, over roads well-nigh impassable for deep ruts, deeper mud, and unsuspected morasses in a creek bottom or two. It is cold at this early hour of the morning and when the north wind is doing its best the eight or ten men huddled in each big wagon have little spirit to laugh at the constant flow of picturesque and pointed oratory used by the cornfield dorky to cheer on his four mules which he handles with wonderful skill.

When the teams draw up in the yard of the big country barn in the midst of miles of cotton and sedge fields there is much flapping of arms and stamping of feet when the passengers have climbed gingerly to the ground. Then comes a

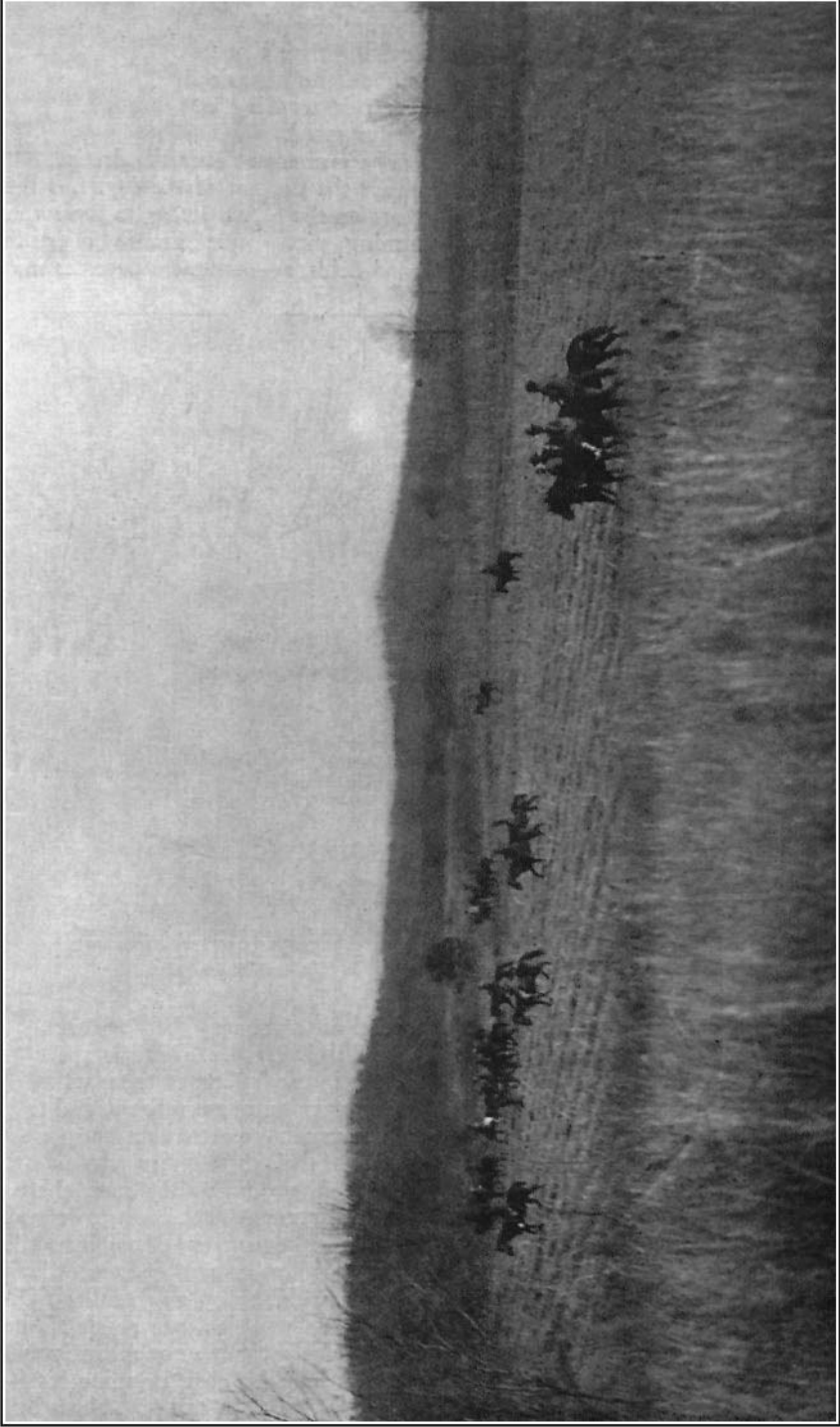
hurried search for the saddle horse of yesterday, occasionally a short dispute when a keen observer who has had a poor horse the previous day beats some luckier man to the barn, or when some private and particular saddle has been commandeered by no particular right except speediness in grabbing at the pile in the harness room.

Everything is soon settled, for there is small time to waste. A short gallop beyond the barn, a wait while the dog wagons come up, each with a negro driver astride a crate, then the handlers bring out their dogs, lead them to the edge of a broad field, they are let go at a word from the judges, and the game is on.

At the start it is a straight foot race between the competing dogs, but each has birds in his mind, and presently one will swing aside into a likely piece of sedge, while the other is racing up the wind toward a plum thicket half a mile away. When the dogs become separated the judges also part company so that each dog is always under the eye of at least one of the three officials.

It is soon possible to tell that the dog which has gone ahead is not going to find birds on this cast and his handler, riding in front, swings his horse conspicuously to the left so that the dog may see and turn back to the course. The judges will note this work and draw their conclusions from the manner in which it is done. In the meantime the other dog has gone out of sight into the sedge, taken the edge of the gully, swung into view ahead, and then dropped out of sight into another patch of sedge whence he does not emerge.

The keen-eyed handler sees all this and putting spurs to his horse goes through gullies and across ditches at a gallop to the edge of the yellow grass, stops for a moment, throws up his hand,



THE CROWD FORMS PICTURESQUE GROUPS OVER THE BROAD FIELDS.

and there reaches the crowd that most exciting of all sounds at a field trial, "Point, Judges!" The effect is immediate. Judges and spectators join in a helter-skelter race toward the handler, who leisurely dismounts and takes a gun from its scabbard next his left stirrup.

The crowd gathers along the edge of the cover a little to the rear of the judges and watches the dog up to his ears in the tall grass, head and tail high, rigid,

singles, unless both dogs get to them together, for single work affords a dog a resting time that he is not entitled to gain at the expense of his brace mate which is working out big country at greater speed.

The excitement over the first point is always the greatest of the day. As time wears on the crowd straggles somewhat, forming picturesque groups over the broad fields, and comment becomes more



POWHATAN, THE RUNNER-UP, STARTING FROM A DROP AT HIS HANDLER'S COMMAND.

his head turned a little to one side to catch the scent of his game coming to him down wind. His handler steps ahead of him a pace or two, there is a whir as the bevy gets up, a shot, in the result of which the handler takes small interest his eye being on his dog, and the judges order the dog out and on again.

The dog having been steady to shot, the wise handler takes him by the collar and leads him some fifty yards from where the bevy was found unless they have gone in the general direction of the course, for the dog has marked them down and will be sure to follow in their wake if he is not well and surely turned in another direction.

Little time is wasted in working on

general as to the way the dogs are keeping up their speed. There is apt to be lagging in the boldest of them when the last thirty minutes are reached, and when the command comes to take them up at the end of their three hours, whatever the courage shown during the race, there is usually a perfect willingness to come to the handler at the word of command.

The dog wagons will be near at hand, and where these stop the handler or his kennel man will sit down beside his dog and carefully comb or pick every burr or briar from his coat, examine his feet for possible injuries, and give him a brisk rubbing all over before putting him back into the crate. He remembers that this is only the first series and that his dog

will be called upon to run again if he is to win the stake.

Luncheon is a pleasing and welcome event. The horses are tied about among the trees of some sheltered little pine grove and a steaming hot meal, brought out in a wagon from the hotel, is spread on the ground. At some period during the trials it is customary to invite all the people of the countryside over whose land the riders go to join in this meal,

tired horsemen dismount and climb into the wagons, and the procession starts for the hotel to prepare for another day.

Fourteen dogs started in the Championship this year, nine of which were setters. The pointers, as has always been the case with the exception of last year, failed to distinguish themselves. Tony Mooring ran a birdy race, finding many bebies, but lacked style and was deficient in pace and range.



THE FARMERS WHO OWN THE LAND ARE INVITED TO LUNCHEON.

and they come in every conceivable conveyance and enjoy themselves hugely, a few always remaining to follow the dogs during the afternoon.

In this region, where trials have been held for years, the farmers are as familiar with the game as the English farmer is with hunting. In newer field-trial territory this manner of welcoming them to take part in the sport goes far toward making it easy to gain permission to ride across their fields, even where the shooting privileges of the land used are not under lease to the club.

After luncheon the second brace is put down and worked back toward the barn through a different country. When they are taken up it is near dark, the

Cord's Lad of Jingo ran a good race, but was outclassed by several other dogs. He is a likable dog in his work, high-headed in his manner of going, and good on his birds. Masterpiece and Manitoba Frank did nothing, and neither could go the route, the former giving it up after two hours and the latter in an hour and a quarter, a sort of competition for the booby prize which Frank possibly won.

Among the setters, Monora, the winner, outlasted and outranged every dog in the stake. She found her percentage of birds, handled them well, and made an impression on field trial men to be long remembered. She possesses all the qualities necessary to win, chief of which is undying determination to get to game





THE HANDLER OR HIS KENNEL MAN CAREFULLY COMBS THE BURRS OUT OF THE DOG AFTER THE RACE.

without regard to natural difficulties or physical discomfort. In the last analysis this is all that makes speed and range in a bird dog worthy of the name. Powhatan, the runner-up, Cowley's Pride, and Chit Chat all did clean and consistent bird work, but were unable to keep out and at it with the winner.

The race between Monora and Powhatan in the second series was one not to be forgotten. It was here that the winner and the runner-up were meeting, though which would hold the premier place no one could tell when they were put down after lunch on the last day of the trials. Powhatan is much the larger, a handsome dog, perfectly trained. He is one of the few dogs in field trials that can be trusted to drop to command and to break at the word of his handler, who rarely gets off his horse to start him.

Monora, much the smaller, was his equal in speed on the breakaway to a likely looking piece of woods where they swung in opposite directions, Powhatan finding the first bevy in good style and Monora backing. Monora got to the singles first, then was lost and found on

a bevy point far away, and Powhatan, off to the right, also had a bevy.

When the dogs were brought together again Powhatan was a little slower on his breakaway, but seemed dangerous until Monora thought it time to commence reaching out from him, which she did in a series of sweeping casts, taking her farther and farther, picking up two beves brilliantly on the road, then swinging across the top of a distant hill and out of sight. She was so far away and going so fast that the spectators gave her up for lost, but they came to her in due time pointing a bevy.

Powhatan got up to her here and backed. This was the last of Powhatan. He became slower and yet more slow, while Monora with every added bevy seemed to find more speed. She was crazy for birds. They started them off together once more, but Powhatan was done and the judges ordered them up. There was nothing left in the National Championship of 1910 but Monora. Her name takes its place in the rôle of winners with that of her sire, Mohawk II. Like sometimes produces like.