

GUNDOG FEATURE

illusions: this was not going to be a light hearted affair... women do not do light-hearted when it comes to a competing against men!

The tests would be based around a picking-up day, but unlike a normal working test, the judge, Paul Harper of Redbeards Gundogs, would be not only looking at the dogs but also how the six individuals worked as a team. He would consider how each team captain organised their colleagues, especially during two of the tests, which involved sweeping through an area of woodland to collect a number of dummies against the clock.

From the outset it was obvious that the ladies really meant business. They had been practising together every week for over a month and had even co-ordinated their clothing. To be fair, they looked more professional than the men, who, although they had an air of quiet confidence about them, didn't quite have the cohesion of their female competitors. The dogs were a mixture of spaniels (both cockers and springers), labradors, plus a golden retriever. These were not working test or trialling dogs, they were dogs that do their job in the shooting field every week from September to the end of January.

Generally the standard was good and it made a change to see dogs that are not being judged on their style or pace



Simon Turner and Woody picking up some points for the men

but on simply getting on with their job. One challenge in particular really did test the dogs. A dead pheasant had been dragged to create a line some 100 yards from the handlers, and then a dummy was hidden in some rough grass along a fence line. It was interesting to watch the dogs go out on the 'blind' then hit the scent line and follow it on to the retrieve. As was to be expected, some dogs did it better than others and one in particular really did impress: Ellie, handled by David Lintot, went straight out and unlike many of the other spaniels ignored the brambles along the fence line. She hit the scent line from around 20 yards out and it was like she was on a railway track as she followed the line to the dummy – it was really impressive to watch, and a well thought-out test.

The other test that I had not come across before was a team event where a number of dummies were hidden in open woodland and the team captains had to organise their colleagues to collect the 'fallen birds' as quickly and efficiently as possible. The test was against the clock and it was credit to both teams that all the birds were picked very quickly. In this instance it was the men from Knebworth who triumphed.

However, as the day progressed, I think it was clear to everyone that the ladies from Kimpton Hoo shoot had comprehensively thrashed the men from Knebworth. Luckily, it was all done in good humour – and I wouldn't be surprised if by the time they have their proposed return match next summer, it's a very different story. ■

GUNDOG TRAINING: A FRESH APPROACH

THE PET GUNDOG "A COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO DOG TRAINING"



I've always said that for many of us, gundogs are both shooting companions and pets, so I'm delighted to see that Lez Graham's new book *The Pet Gundog* takes this fully into account.

Lez Graham works full-time as a canine behaviour practitioner and gundog trainer, she works for the Guild of Dog Trainers and is a tutor with the Cambridge Institute of Dog Behaviour & Training. By bringing the behaviour element into her training, her handlers get a deeper understanding of why we train gundogs the way we do. She encourages play and touch to facilitate a strong bond between dog and handler.

Howard Kirby, *Sporting Shooter* gundog trainer, says: "The majority of gundogs are kept first and foremost as pets, secondly for their abilities as working dogs. This is a book which has been needed for a long time, and it does exactly what it says on the cover. Lez Graham has blended traditional training with the latest behaviourist views and methods, encouraging the reader to understand how their dog thinks, behaves and reacts in all sorts of situations.

"This book will give the pet gundog trainer a much deeper understanding of day to day management of this breed type."

Priced £15.50, *The Pet Gundog* is available directly from Lez at: www.thepetgundog.co.uk

PICTURES: NICK RIDLEY

It was clear to everyone that the ladies had thrashed the men from Knebworth

Rev Ward's dog Cracker delivers a dummy