

American Water Spaniels Do It All!!!

by Rick Butler, Idaho Falls, ID

The American Water Spaniel Club National Specialty Show and Hunt Tests were held Aug. 18 - 22 in Afton, Wyoming. Afton is a wonderful little town set in Wyoming's scenic Star Valley near the Idaho-Wyoming border. Afton has some little known tourist attractions of its own, and is also a great jumping off place for Yellowstone and Teton National Parks, and the tourist mecca of Jackson Hole to the north. This year's National turned out to be a busy weekend for us, as there were dinners practically every night and numerous activities throughout the almost five day weekend.



With everyone arriving on Wednesday, it was a great night to have an opening social at the Homestead restaurant in Afton. There was Canine Good Citizen and Delta Pet Partner testing on Thursday and then our Awards banquet Thursday night. Our annual meeting and Buffet Dinner was held Friday and then our hosts, the wonderful people of Burton Trout Ranch, the site of our hunt tests, cooked up a wonderful wild game feed and fish fry for us on Saturday.

All of our hunting events were held at the Burton Trout Ranch along the Salt River near Afton. This turned out to be a nice spot for a Hunt test. There is a nice campground where some of the people stayed during the weekend. We had several fields available to us for the tests, some with natural vegetation and some with alfalfa.

Even though the place is a trout farm, most of the water is in narrow canals, which made it tough to get in some of the longer retrieves. The AWS should be capable of some long water retrieves and was historically used in the cold Midwestern waters of late fall and early spring. Although this mountain water was fairly cold, there was not as much water as I would like to see for water work for an AWS. However, we were able to have long enough retrieves to make it work.

Friday was our Roustabout and Water Derby. The Roustabout is a timed event with teams of one dog and two gunners. Three birds are planted in a field for each team and they are given 20 minutes to find, flush and bag the three birds. Each gunner is given 3 shot shells and

they may share the shells if needed. Ten points are awarded for each bird flushed, 15 for each bird shot, and 15 for each bird retrieved. Birds need not be delivered to hand but must be retrieved to within approximately 6 feet. No points are awarded for the retrieve if the bird is rendered unfit for the table or if the hunters move to the dog during the retrieve. If all three birds are bagged, one point is given for each remaining minute and three points for each unfired shell.

With an entry of 15 dogs, we had to use two fields. I had the wonderful opportunity to judge in one of the fields and our judge in the other field was Tim Malik

from Afton WY. Both of us had a good time and enjoyed watching the dogs work.

For consistency, we decided to use the alfalfa fields we had access to. In places the cover was dense and at times all you could see of the dogs was the movement of the alfalfa as the dog moved through it. But it was enjoyable to watch all of the dogs work, and all of the dogs worked very well despite the tough cover and difficult scenting conditions presented by the alfalfa.

It was a warm day even for the 6000+ feet elevation of Afton and I noticed that many of the dogs slowed down a bit after 10 or 15 minutes. Perhaps that was the dense heavy cover as much as hot August sun we had for a good part of the day. But, with its dense brown coat, the AWS does occasionally overheat in the warm summer sun.

We had some meteorological excitement in the afternoon as a thundershower moved through the area. So, for safety, we stopped the competition for an hour or so. None of us cared very much for being a human lightning rod in the middle of a hay field. The stoppage also made for a bit of excitement when we came back to the field. We had planted the fields with Chukar just before the lightning shut us down. After the storm, we planted more birds. My field also had some birds that had been missed earlier. When the next dog went out he found and flushed a bird almost immediately. With the first shot, a bird flushed next to one of the shooters, flying in the opposite direction. Then another bird flushed as the dog went after the first. It seemed like birds were everywhere and had the dog quite excited.