

Open A/V Stake 10th November 2022

The Trial's meeting point is only a few miles away, straight up the road, from the HQ Hotel in Marlborough. Anyone staying there the evening before can be sure of having had plenty of local restaurants and Pubs to choose from for their suppers.

If you haven't been to this ground before, I really do recommend that you use the What3Words app, it's location is a well kept secret! The ancient Savernake Forest covers about 4,500 acres. Six of it's historic oaks are named, it is THE most beautiful area and very popular with the public. One could wonder how it could be possible to run a shoot with so many of the general public wandering about? One word? Superbly.

Paul Howard has many years of keeping under his belt. He knows exactly how a pheasant's mind works, he knows how spaniels work, he has an incredible team of beaters and helpers, along with a network of shooting and keeping friends all over the country. His team of Guns are personal friends and are safe and deadly accurate.

It's a long drive along the track from the main road, through the Forest, to the meet point. Everyone was there early, even those who were worried they might be late. As we drove into the forest there was an abundance of birds feeding on the rides, they were all ready for us....

The weather was perfect; mild and dull with a light breeze. The chance of drizzle later didn't materialise. The Guns were in high spirits, some had already been stalking that morning and their breakfasts were being finished by their cars.

Our modern day requirements mean we have to have our KC License to hand, J Regs for each Judge, an Incident Book, Health and Safety "Risk Assessment", First Aid Kit et al... thank goodness we have got rid of Track and Trace! Julie had ensured that we had our own foot bath with disinfectant – just in case. Bird flu is absolutely devastating!!

Compared to years gone by we'd had only a modest entry by normal MV standards, but our card was strong with all qualified dogs running, except for one novice dog that had only gone in the afternoon before. There were three handlers with two dogs each.

Once we were off, I have to say, I didn't see any dog do it's entire run. I saw lots of "bits of runs". Dogs facing bramble well and finding / pushing up birds. Lots of shooting, making many retrieves. I like a dog that gets about and there seemed to be several that did just that.

Some of the dogs came into pockets of birds, especially if asked to retrieve from well forward of the line and they had to keep their heads screwed on. Over all there were very few failures and only one eye wipe to my knowledge.

The stops were controlled, by radio, with military precision, moving forward all the time, holding the birds up perfectly.

The Guns were fantastic and didn't miss much all day. If there was a shot, there was a retrieve (unless a tree happened to be in the way). Paul modestly said there were 34 birds accounted for at the end. It seemed like far more - thank you!

The Trial was over by 1.00 p.m. and, once the Judges' books were closed, we headed back to the Beaters Hut for refreshments. Awards were given out and speeches made. The top dogs had been very close but Nicola's dog came out victorious. She owned the only unqualified dog in the card, having been offered a run at the very last minute.

Nicola was rendered almost speechless - as you can see from the photos. Handler, Carl Colclough, was also chuffed to bits... he had only been partnered with this dog for a few weeks. Seems to work!

A brilliant day was had by all. Everyone was happy, even those that were out...

Our next Trial is our Novice Cocker on 30th – I'm looking forward to it already 😊