

Rushmore Farm

Today was my first experience of a shooting day with the Portmans, having only previously been there for social occasions.

Rushmore Farm is in a superb area, surrounded by several prestigious shoots. Al, who is on our Committee, has always insisted that theirs is a modest, small shoot... but what a truly superb ground! Great, natural woodland and planted with the most fabulous cover crops!

Al has been a valuable member of our Cttee for a couple of years now and originally offered the Club a date for this season, in October. Unfortunately, after the heat and drought we experienced this summer, everyone was panicking at the poor growth of the cover crops. The new 'Keeper, Ian, was really pulling his hair out.

The Portmans asked us whether we could possibly move our date into November. Not a problem; a phone call and an extra fee to the KC and it was done.

The day was heavy with fog but spirits were high. We had a Car Park arranged, a reception area, coffee on tap with bacon butties, bowls full of sweeties, homemade cake, a loo and a disinfectant foot dip!!! Nothing had been overlooked by our Hosts. Even an improvised electric car hook up was no trouble to them.

Ian, the 'Keeper, hadn't run a Field Trial before - but the lovely Chris Green (recently retired, local Trial Supremo) was locally on hand to oversee the planning of the day. Guns have to be chosen for safety and accuracy. Stops are ESSENTIAL and military precision in their positioning is key!!! Thank you Chris!!!

We changed this year's Novice Stakes to the 4 Judge system, we have tried them in the past but there is now a new rule *J 5.c.(5)(i)* Personally, I am not the biggest fan of 4 Judges although I understand the thinking behind it.

Carl was judging with Andy. I was judging with Grant.

We moved off in that "hanging" sort of mist that carries sound for miles and isn't too good for seeing through... but, by the time we hiked to the top of the hill, the mist was thinning.

As a Judge, I cannot comment on individual performances of the day's competitors. I CAN say that most of the dogs faced cover when asked. Many of them had very long retrieves and several made extremely brave attempts on runners... **including** whilst some Guns carried on shooting.... Several retrieves were more like those to be expected in Open Stakes.

As the first dogs were cast off, the line moved across perfect cover crops for Cockers, thick in places but not too high. There were birds moving in front at all times, doing their best to disappear into the belts of woodland.

The dogs, by and large, covered their ground well. Only a couple showed little knowledge of working the wind. Mostly the dogs tackled the ground presented to them extremely well.

Ian had ensured the birds were there whilst Chris controlled the moving "Stops". That is an art in itself and Chris is a master of it. I also have to say that Sam Green shot like an absolute demon!

The belts of woodland were fantastic for the spaniels to thrash through. Great to have every type of cover for them to be tested on.

It was a really fabulous day. By the time we got back to the yard the sky was blue and the winter sun dazzling.

Awards and prizes were given and much coffee and cake consumed. Prize sponsors were CSJ Foods and *Gamekeepers (amazing handmade) Goods*

A huge thank you firstly to our Hosts, Michael and Al Portman. Also to Ian Borley and Chris Green... and ALL their Teams. *Guns were Clive Tooth, George Bristol-Burrows, Peter Amor and Sam Green. The eight Stops were Andy, Paul, Ian, Maureen, Frances, Tony, Georgi, and June.* Extra thanks to Fiona Robinson for picking up and to Jeff Roberts for being my right hand man.

Such days make my job an absolute pleasure.