

SAVERNAKE - 10 NOVEMBER 2023

I have known Paul Howard for many years, since he was at Faccombe. Great guy, huge experience with all aspects of shooting. I was really excited when he drove me around his "new ground" near Marlborough... it would, indeed, be fantastic for Trials and the Meon Valley were the first spaniel Trial booking for *Savernake Field Sports & Savernake Estates*

That's a few years ago now. Savernake is popular with very many Clubs these days. It's such good spaniel country with birds presenting brilliantly, making perfect retrieves.

Unsurprisingly we attracted a large entry of forty dogs by the 2023 closing date, with quite a few late ones. People were keen to run on the ground itself and also, hopefully, wanted to qualify as early as possible for the Championships.

The Kennel Club get a fair bit of flack for allowing so many Trials to be held in November - but, as Secretaries, we could choose to have our days later in the season. Especially as we're usually buying the birds / shooting.

Here I go again with my rose tinteds... in the old days the Meon Valley was GIVEN all their Trials by supremely generous Hosts. The Club was grateful for **whenever** that date might be. We regularly held nine or ten Trials per season all through the 90s and 00s. We only ever had one day cancelled due to lack of entries, at Dale Park, and people moaned like mad when I pulled the plug on that one. I remember another was cancelled at Eynsham, but that was due to lack of rabbits.

There are so many more Trial Societies nowadays and people can treat trialling the same as any other sport, to be dipped into and out of depending on funds or any other commitment they may have. If I was still regularly trialling myself I'd be just the same. Picking my grounds, my judges and where I might spend my hard earned cash. It's up to us, the Clubs, to do our very best for the competitors in order to give them all a fair crack.

Soapbox moment over. Sorry. Back to our Open A/V...

Andrew Marsden had travelled down from Cumbria as our senior Judge, Kevin Shapland was officiating at his first Open Quailfier. It's a while since I've seen Andrew although he's judged for us before.

We had an overseas guest, Martin Hawthorne visiting from NZ, who I put with a Steward so he was able to observe as close as possible. He used to Trial over here before he emigrated and is very active on the NZ FT scene over there.

As usual there were several people attending to spectate, asking if they could help in any way. Morwena McNally was one. After assuring me she would be a great Steward... as in she was definitely NOT one of those that dropped back for a chat every five minutes or forgot to have the next dog ready or take the birds from the Judge. As it turned out, Morwena trumped all those things by only 10.30a.m. Announcing she was leaving the ground as her friend was already out and they were going home. **Thanks.**

Paul, as usual, had his day planned to the enth degree; the line was being managed on his behalf by Simon Blackman. Juliet Howard was in charge of picking up and was Queen of the Stops. I was only the red flag so didn't often get to see up front and personal too much. Not a problem. I got to have all the de briefings as people came back to the gallery. Some were happier than when they went forward. Some were not.

As over half today's handlers were A Panel Judges, and all were very experienced at this level, today should have been excellent. It just goes to prove that everyone can have off days. A few dogs, by their own handlers' admission, went out for silly errors. Bit more training then?

We were finished by lunchtime and our prizes and Trophies awarded in the Beaters Hut as per the results page. The Open A/V Shield went to the winner along with a Trophy kindly presented by Glynn Smith. The Shield has dogs' names engraved dating back to 1990. Worldsend Trophy was presented by Robin Cox for the Best Hunter.

James Luxford, our winner, was as pleased as punch. Good luck at the Championships, James!!

The top dogs were, as the Judges said, really excellent. No run off had been required. Andrew did comment on some of the basic errors he'd seen but also expressed how much he and Kevin had both enjoyed the day.

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