

MALSHANGER 13th DECEMBER 2023 Judges Steve Bates & Mike Leflay

We first had a Trial at Malshanger back in 1998, by kind invitation of Sir Michael and Lady Colman. The judges were Andrew Marsden and John Crawford. Peter Jones came 1st and 2nd. Guy Croft was 3rd with another Maesydderwen. 4th was Claire Guest with a Whitlocks dog. Claire was, back then, co-founder (with Andrew Cook) of Hearing Dogs but is more recently known as founder and CEO of Medical Detection Dogs.

Tim Healey, Peter Combes, Mick Rock, Steve Wanstall also judged for us that season. Gentlemen that are no longer with us but that I have many happy memories of (and many others) at Trials up and down the country. I genuinely forget how old I am... until I start getting looks of astonishment as I recollect Keepers and Hosts long gone from this world to chase pheasants in the next. I digress..

It only takes me 30 minutes to get to Malshanger as a rule. At 0800 there could've been a hold up at the busy M3 junction so I would sneak through the villages of Easton and Kings Worthy. As I took the turn off the A31... why were so many people going the same way?

I ground to a halt within half a mile of leaving the main road. I could see a Calor Gas Tanker in the distance where I knew there was absolutely no room to get past anything coming the other way. There we sat. For ages. Hmmmm. No kids in the cars so not on the school run. Quite a few people in shooting gear with 4WD. Several suited sorts in commuter type cars.. Just so many vehicles, all trying to go in both directions.

Some people were getting shirty and red faced. Even honking. What was the point? It is a single track lane with very few passing places.

The night before had been flipping awful trying to get my computer to communicate with my printer. Wifi? Are you joking? David Walliams voice please *Computer says nooo!* I ended up taking photos of the card, that I'd only just typed that evening, with my *far from smart phone*, then going off to sit outside somewhere in Alresford, in my car, where they DID have decent internet... That was so I could at least send emails of the aforementioned Card to the competitors.

If my printer was sulking now it could quite easily put on it's best "cocker head" and continue sulking for days... hopefully the competitors would have a card, on their own *extremely smart phones*, on the day. Emails were sent. Half of them bounced. I can't put emojis on here but, if I could, it would be the one of the monkey covering its eyes.

Oh well... it looked like I was going to be late for the Trial. I had better start phoning some key people. Everything was organised in advance at the Trial ground. I could soon ask someone to deputise as Chief Steward? Phoning had been a good idea in principle, but there was no phone reception in those lanes. Not to be beaten - I sent WhatsApps. They might at least "send themselves" if we managed to pass through anyone's unsecure wifi.

After what seemed an absolute age the traffic finally trickled through into Kings Worthy and I hit the dizzy speed of 30mph. Suddenly, my phone rang, it was Anita Jones, answering one of my WhatsApps. I told her that I now hoped to be at the ground by 0920 - phew.

You should never moan about traffic hold ups. You don't know what might have caused them. Today a motor biker had lost his life on the A34, by the M3 junction. Hence all the unusual, diverting, traffic. Poor soul.

Sorry about all this typing. A simple Trial write up is turning into War and Peace.

The meet at Malshanger's Social Club was as jolly as usual. The Keeper, Ken, and his wife Joan have looked after us since our first visit. Ken keeps us in order out on the shoot whilst Joan makes fantastic tea and coffee at the start and end of the day... with an endless supply of cake.

The Guns and Stops haven't changed much over the years. Everyone knows everybody else. There are regular faces in the Trial Card, too. Malshanger is a great favourite far and wide within the cocker community. It is a modest shoot, not a huge commercial concern, hence we have a 14 dog only stake; you'll appreciate this is the minimum for an Open. Happily, we had 19 entries by the closing date and received 8 late ones. I watched with trepidation how many FT Secs had taken to Facebook to plead for their entries. I didn't need to phone around for Malshanger, thank goodness. Several of the competitors had kindly offered to bring second dogs with them, in case someone broke down en route. Nobody did. The card was, all but a couple, filled with Open dogs, which was great.

As the morning's announcements were made and people prepared to move off, Mike Leflay asked "Who is your Picker-Up?" I smiled and was about to say "Me"... when it suddenly dawned... I'd forgotten my flipping dogs! *Insert here another one of those monkey emojis. Perhaps with an expletive for good measure?*

Ken to the rescue. He had a great picking up dog that would work for anyone! So off we popped to his house, collected the dog - and a few bottles (as I obviously hadn't brought enough) - and joined everyone up at the big wood.

As you can see from the photos, the cover was excellent for the dogs, not so good for viewing. I had my red/white hat on, in my capacity as Red Flag, plus a good sized lemon/white cocker as picker up.

Ken's knees were being painful so, mid morning, he offered his gun to Paddy Williams. Paddy, who had come only along to spectate, obviously didn't hesitate, beaming all over his face. Ken took back control of his dog who, to his delight, did get a bird to find towards the end of the day.

I didn't see everybody's dogs run but, the ones I did, all faced cover brilliantly. All had flushes and retrieves, mostly pheasants with several hares. The game really had to be worked for and the Guns shot extremely well. Ken kept everyone in order via radio when necessary. There were no glum faces, it was a super friendly day.

A quick break was had for snacks and a warming Port / Sloe Gin (or two). Joan had supplied the little "tot" glasses, something else I'd forgotten. Yet another emoji.

And, so, the last few runs were completed by 2.00p.m. and it was back to the Clubhouse.

Judy Colman, our beloved President, joined us to give out the awards. Both she and Sir Michael haven't been well recently. Age creeps up on all of us. Today, however, Judy looked radiant and happy as she sat chatting to the competitors. She has, after all, known many of them since our early Trials at Malshanger. Back then, she had competed alongside us, with her own cockers.

We are so grateful to the Colmans. Such wonderful supporters of this Club and the countryside in general. If the world had more folk like them within it, it would be a far happier place...

1 st	FTCh Caerfyrddins Eira Tempest - Lindsay Corbett	also Guns Choice
2 nd	Jarailstar Optimist - James Starkey	
3 rd	Nettlebridge Solar - Mark Burr	Best Hunter Nettlebridge Pearl - Mark Burr
4 th	Craiwarn Tinkers Lad - Natalie Cannon	
Com	Taffswell Roberta - Matthew Warren	
Com	Misselchalke Phoenix - Ann Kedward	