

Novice A/V Spaniels - 3rd January 2024

Judges - Paddy Williams & Mike Berresford

CLARENDON PARK

A couple of years ago, Michael and Al Portman were shooting on this beautiful, 4,200 acre Estate. The lovely Al immediately homed in on the Keeper, Lee, as he was working some very nice cockers. Apparently he'd owned spaniels for many years and, in the past, had held posts on Estates where spaniel Trials had been run. Obviously, Al wondered whether Lee might consider a Meon Valley Trial at Clarendon?

Now... he might just have been being polite that day... but Lee said "Maybe". That was a couple of years ago.

This year, having kept in touch from time to time, Al had a really positive reply to one of her messages. The Club was invited to visit, in order to have a chat and a tour of the ground.

So it was that she and I met up with Head Keeper, Lee. I have to say, the Estate is breathtaking. So many drives. So much beautifully maintained woodland. A date would be set and all we then had to do was ask the KC for confirmation.

Security is strict at Clarendon. We had to give assurances about who and how many would be attending. All entrances are individually, remotely controlled. Nothing was too much trouble as we pulled up and "phoned the number" as per the sign's instructions. The gates were opened for all attendees, as they arrived.

Once allowed in, there was a long drive along beautifully maintained tarmac surfaces, the woodland and grassland was magnificent. We were so close to Salisbury and yet this could have been a different, private planet. Beautiful.

As we reached our meeting point, at the Shoot Lodge, we were waved in with a wide smile and given our parking instructions by non other than the owner of this lovely place, Marc Jonas.

I managed to drop one of my front wheels into one of the only areas of soft ground, and I intended to perhaps abandon my car there for the day, seeing as it wasn't actually blocking any thoroughfare. There were so many helpful boys though, that insisted on pushing/shoving the car out of the mud, aided by my buddy Jane. Sorry, sweetie, I didn't mean to spatter you with mud. (*Ever wondered why the boys weren't on THAT corner - ha ha ha*)

Today had dawned beautifully bright and dry. Yesterday had been absolutely horrendous. The poor pheasants had been blown to bits in the wind and torrential rain for days! Normally you would have expected to see pheasants everywhere picking and poking about. Today we hadn't seen a single bird all morning as we drove in. Announcements and introductions were made, then we loaded ourselves back into our vehicles and were escorted even deeper into the Estate.

Our 'Keeper knew exactly what he was doing. He'd already told me we weren't using the areas of cover crops he'd planned for us. We were starting in the woods, where the birds would be.

The line set off in a wide wooded belt, with patches of bramble, and we were immediately into game. The birds were tucked well in and keeping themselves secure from the awful conditions that had been thrown at them earlier in the week. Every dog had great cover and the opportunity to shine. Plenty of flushes and retrieves. The Guns were super fun and there was much banter between shots.

It was great having so many supporters / spectators out with us... including Lee's family. Such a very happy day!

We were easily finished by lunchtime, awards were made by the Shoot Lodge as opposed to in it. We had use of all the facilities there... I reckon some of the members simply didn't want to risk taking their boots off to expose holey socks? Just a thought..

Remembering back to how I had been reprimanded at Malshanger, for not having enough *bottles*, I made sure the Meon Valley Booze Basket was well stocked today. Hardly anyone touched a drop. Neither did they have any pork pies.. Never mind. More for next time (*I have a big freezer*)..

This had been my first full day with Head Keeper, Lee, and it had been his first Trial at Clarendon. He could not have given us a better show of game or from better ground. His Guns were first class, accurate and safe, and the whole occasion had been brilliant and safe sport! Thank you, Clarendon!

The weather had done it's utmost to test everyone's metal upto the eleventh hour. Today's Trial was definitely one to remember as one of the best.

So, as we were all departing there was a sea of happy faces.. competitors, spectators, Guns and supporters. Lee called out to me across the car park, "If you come next season, let's make it in October!"

Yes please, Lee!!

Results

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|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 st | MEREBROOK KIWI OF BREWERYFIELD | Matthew Harry |
| 2 nd | SPERRINSIDE MC GREGOR | Alex Badger <i>also Guns Choice</i> |
| 3 rd | MARKETGATE INDEX OF SARNHILL | Rob Lewis |
| 4 th | BRONBERLLAN OWENA | Jeff Roberts |
| CoM | FFRWDGRECH SAFFRON | Kevin Shapland |