After a couple of difficult days trying to keep the card full I ended up at the trial ground with just one place to fill. That was quickly filled by a spare qualified dog. Nearly all competitors, helpers and seven guns were loaded onto 2 trailers provided by the Estate and we were quickly underway.

The day began with a duck drive but it transpired the wild birds had already left so we then moved to 2 fields split by a long hedge. Stubble on one side and sugar beet on the other. Right hand dogs on the stubble with Dermot & Jennifer, left hand dogs with Steve & Gordon in the beet. We walked slowly forward as the head keeper Matt Smith diligently worked his cocker bitch in the hedge row. The little dog worked that well and flushed that many birds into the sky that by the time we got to the top of the field we had almost finished the first round having lost a few dogs. Memorable moment from this session was a pheasant flushed from the beet that went back behind the line down the length of the hedge. The closest guns got off their shots but the bird kept going only to disappear into the hedge. An eagle eyed gun who was forward of the line in the stubble spotted the fall and the first dog was sent. After managing to get the distance the dog failed to get to the fall area. The second dog number 19 was tried and quickly made the estimated 150 metres, found the fall, collected the pheasant and returned to the handler. At the end of the day we had seen some excellent dog work and the judges called twelve dogs to be seen the following day.

Day two began with another bright day. This time the ground was a rough grass paddock bounded on the right by the river and on the left by a large hedgerow below which was a deep ditch. The cocker spaniel was set to work again and quickly started to flush birds. The judges had once again been split by the hedge as we steadily made our way forward there were retrieves on both sides. Unluckiest handler today had got to be Number 9, Tony Parnell who had just completed his fourth retrieve when the gun close by shot a pheasant as it flashed over the hedge. The bird bounced on the plough and hit the dog on the chest & we can all guess what happened next.

After completing this field we were down to five dogs so they were asked to sit through a drive. The guns duly put several birds on the ground and the dogs were sent in order, mistakes were made by the lower numbered dogs till we were left with numbers 17 and 19. For the second time number 17 was sent into an area about 120 metres away where several birds had fallen, the dog quickly completed its task. Number 19 was then sent and after been given plenty of time failed to complete a retriever. Both handlers you can imagine had probably opposite emotions but as the saying goes, it’s not over till the fat lady sings. Sure enough the judges failed to find a bird so Number 19 was given a further retrieve, this time over the river. Quickly completed The judges called that the trial was over.

Congratulations to the winner, thank you to the guns for some brilliant shooting, thank you to all who came to help and everyone who attended to help make the atmosphere at this trial add towards one of the best I have attended. Finally thanks to Matt & his little 4 legged friend.

Graham. Retriever Secretary.