

Twelve countries, ten tests, two days of Bank Holiday weather and we have a winning team...

The Skinners World Cup Retriever Event, now in its seventh year, is widely acknowledged as one of the most prestigious gundog working tests in the world. This year twelve teams took part, arriving from: Denmark, England, Germany, Italy, Scotland, Austria, Holland, France, Switzerland, Sweden, Wales and, for the first time, Hungary.

During the first four years of its life, the event took place in the beautiful grounds of Sherbourne Castle. Then, in 2006, it moved to Highclere Castle in Berkshire, the home of Lord and Lady Carnarvon. The estate offers the perfect combination of different types of cover and its open meadows and woodland, lakes and streams make it the ideal setting for a challenging working test.



Victorious German team: (left to right) Eveline Schloesser with DRC Ch Stonehunter Dartmore Connor. Anja Moller with FTW Gunsight's Bracket. Wolfgang Koehler with DRC Ch Stonehunter Canon and Joerg Brach with Ambertrail's Canadian Rocket

SKINNERS WORLD CUP RETRIEVER EVENT 2008

'The weather made scenting conditions quite tricky, notably on the marked and blind retrieve'

ALL PICTURES: NICK HOLEY

German dog DRC Ch Stonehunter Canon completes a difficult marked retrieve from the water meadow

118 Sporting Shooter

The test is a team event for retrievers only. Each team consists of four dogs and their handlers representing their respective countries. The standard required to represent your country is very high and each and every team member consider it a great honour.

This year there were 10 working tests, designed by test organisers John Birkett and Rupert Hill to challenge the dogs and handlers. The four judges – Jim Gale and Phil Parkins (England), Robert Kaserer (Austria) and Gilles Testard (France) – have all judged at international level and have competed themselves in working tests and field trials, so they have first-hand knowledge of the high standards expected from the competitors.

Bad weather stops play

To be successful in any sport, you have to be consistent – and this year, the one thing that was consistent was the awful Bank Holiday weather. Last year saw the competitors dealing with bitterly cold winds, this year it poured down for most of the two days – in fact, on the Monday morning, one test was abandoned and an early finish called as the weather deteriorated. The weather made scenting conditions quite difficult and this was most notable on test number three, which consisted of a marked and a blind retrieve.

Most of the dogs marked the first retrieve perfectly and took an arrow straight line through the water meadow, but as they got to the fall some of them literally ran over the dummy and had to be called back into the area to hunt and even then they had some difficulty locating their retrieve.

Jamie Bettinson from Wales takes a retrieve from his dog FTCH Levenghyle Peacock





The 2005 highest placed dog Skywalker d'Aspe et d'Ossau makes a powerful outrun during a very rare glimpse of sunshine



The only flatcoated retriever to run in the event, Denmark's Reltub Black Velvet

'It just goes to show that scent is a funny thing and I don't think any human really understands it'

Interestingly most of the dogs managed the blind, which was located in a ditch some 100 metres away – it just goes to show that scent is a funny thing and I don't think any human really understands it.

The ground by the lake had grown plenty of cover over the past few months; last year the area resembled the ground during the Battle of the Somme. This year, the dogs had two long marked retrieves into the lake. The European teams always do well in these kind of tests (I guess they shoot a lot of wildfowl). At the end of the first day, six teams had completed the water test, but on Monday the weather was so bad the dogs had difficulty seeing the dummies on the water. It was decided the test would be

abandoned and none of the scores count towards the overall result.

Wales restores pride

Since 2002, the home teams have dominated this event, but this year it wasn't to be. Wales were our best placed team with 877 points and they took third place. A joyful Italian team took second with 887 points, and a stunned German

team took first place with 909 points. It is credit to the European teams that they did so well. Many of them travel hundreds of miles with their dogs to compete, and anyone spending time with the teams can see how passionate they are about their gundogs, and how much they enjoy this unique event. The camaraderie between the competitors is very evident, especially during the event dinner, and this was particularly obvious when the cheers went up for the Highest Placed Dog (M Mulch from Holland and his dog Mulholland Skipper of Upperclaws).

They beat us in football, and now they've beaten us in gundog working tests – the gauntlet has been well and truly thrown! ●

RESULTS

Top dogs

The European teams may have triumphed, but next year we'll be ready to rise to the challenge!

2008 winning teams

1st	Germany	909 points
2nd	Italy	887 points
3rd	Wales	877 points



M Mulch with highest placed dog Mulholland Skipper of Upperclaws