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Elam's skill as bird dog handler rewarded

By Brian Meadows May 31, 2014



Photo courtesy of Rob Scharepg

Ed Elam is pictured here with his Brittany spaniel, Roy, whom he raised on his farm since the day the dog was born. Roy was inducted into the National Upland Classic Hall of Fame. The National Upland Classic is a division of the National Kennel Club that recognizes outstanding achievements of competitive bird dog handlers.

A little more than 10 years ago, Harmony's Ed Elam got his first real taste as a competitive bird dog handler during a field trial in northern Iredell County.

His intrigue became a passion.

" I guess you get suckered in when you go your first time and do really good at something," Elam said with a chuckle. "My very first trial and I won. That kind of hooked me."

Elam excelled as this form of sportsman. So much in fact, he was recently inducted into the National Upland Classic (NUC) Hall of Fame. The NUC is a division of the National Kennel Club. The hall of fame induction recognized Elam's achievements as an elite trainer and competitive handler of bird dogs.

" It's an organization I've been involved with about 14 years and, to me, this is the highest honor you can get," Elam said.

More than 10 of the bird dogs Elam worked with achieved National Champion status. There were also Grand National Champions and Super Grand National Champions.

Competition took him all over the country. Not a cheap venture by any stretch of the imagination, but he found satisfaction in his craft, as well as a lot of success.

" It's nothing that you can buy," he said. "It doesn't matter, rich or poor. You have to be able to work with your dog and win. It is a team effort. My dog has to find the birds, and I have to shoot the birds. So if I miss the bird, the dog and I both lose, and if he doesn't find them then I lose, too. You are a team."

The events he participated in typically took place in a field covering between eight and 12 acres. Three birds are scattered around, their locations unknown to the competitor and the dog.

In 20 minutes or less, the dog must find each bird and point it out while remaining steady. Then the competitor flushes the bird and shoots it. The dog must retrieve the dead bird and bring it back to the shooter's hand.

Time is stopped once the third bird is recovered and returned. For every minute under 20, three points are awarded. For each of the six shotguns shells not used, 10 points are awarded.

"The competition is so tough now, if you don't get three birds in five minutes you're probably going to lose," Elam said.

When Elam captured his first national championship in Missouri, he averaged 5 minutes, 37 seconds during four runs. One field featured three quail, another field three chukars, and another field three pheasants. Those scores were recorded and added to another run that included each kind of bird. The final competition included the top-10 dogs from across the country.

Born and raised in Harmony, Elam grew up on his family's farm on Rimrock Road. He attended Harmony High School and then Wilkes Community College before being drafted into the military during the Vietnam War.

His military service didn't take him to the front lines in Southeast Asia, though. He spent two years in Germany, where he served as part of the NATO guard units protecting nuclear missile silos in that area. Upon returning home, he worked 20 years as a dairy farmer.

Now Elam runs Rimrock Hunting Preserve, a popular destination for North Carolina and Virginia bird hunters. Fitting, because he knows a thing or two about the sport.

"The hard part — and gratifying part — is starting out with a young puppy and working with that puppy all the way through to get him where he'll go out there and compete, not only locally, but nationally against some of the best bird dogs in the country," Elam said. "It's pretty gratifying."