

## FROM THE INVITATIONAL TO THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP AND BACK AGAIN



Nancy and Zeus at the show

by Lon and Nancy Mantooth

Back in 2002, after many ups and downs, our Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, Gunny, earned her UT Prize I, 192 pts. The thrill of that event was coupled with the realization that we only had the summer to teach her to honor and back before going to the Invitational. The temperatures here and the Griff's heat intolerance pretty much decided for us that we were not going to endanger Gunny by stressing her just for a hunt test. We did attend the Invitational that year, to meet other Griff owners and see the action. One of the things we realized was that just a little more training would have prepared Gunny enough to test well. She may or may not have passed for the VC, but we (and she) would have had the experience of a lifetime. What a mistake.

Fast forward a couple of years and we decided to breed Gunny. After finding a stud in Canada and making the appropriate connections, she had a litter of six pups - 1 male and 5 females. We kept the male, known to most members of the Lone Star Chapter as Zeus (usually spoken in a very loud volume). Again, after many fits and starts (more fits than

starts), Zeus earned his NA Prize II, 106 pts. Looking for more training opportunities and trying to expand his abilities, we entered him in AKC Hunt Tests, where he earned his Junior Hunter title in 4 qualifying legs.

We also started showing him in conformation classes. A friend explained his philosophy that it is important for a hunting dog to have the testing to prove his hunting abilities and equally important to evaluate the dog for his conformation and breed type. Zeus won his breed classes in two shows and earned his way onto the breed Top 25 List for show dogs. This month, he was invited to the National Championship. Not wanting to make the same mistake of passing up an event of such magnitude, even though we knew he was #25 on the list, Zeus was entered to compete for the big prize.

We went to Tampa with a mixture of determination to show and win as much as Zeus could, and resignation that we would have a good time regardless of the outcome. Zeus showed well, but did not win the breed class or advance to the Sporting Group. The good time came at the Meet the Breed booth that was manned by NAVHDA people. Talking hunting and testing brought the disappointment back into perspective and reminded us of Zeus' real purpose in life. Other dogs he showed against were also Junior Hunters, but their (professional) handlers admitted they only received the title to say they were hunters. They would never actually consider hunting their dogs. We're taking Zeus out into the woods looking for woodcocks this weekend.

Our next step is actually a two-step (Texans are good at that, right?). When possible, we will continue to show Zeus until he gets his Champion title. Most of his time, however, will be spent training for his Utility Test since that's where he will prove his mettle. Hopefully, he will earn his UT Prize I. This time, we will train for the Invitational all along so that he will be able to compete when invited. We won't make the same mistake again. After all, hunting is much more important than standing and looking pretty.