

## Solms, HZP and VGP conducted in High River, Alberta 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> September, 2024

*By Jeff Martin*

A wonderful testing weekend was conducted in beautiful fall conditions an hour south of Calgary. Vito Caramia was the tireless test host organizing behind the scenes, while Randy and Linda Blanchard generously provided the test grounds and their home as the test base. The highly experienced judging team was Francois Aldrich (DE) senior, Mark Peasley (CA) director and long time DD judge Joe Kelly (ID) rounding it out, thank you for your tireless efforts.

This was a trial and tribulations style weekend with not all dogs having a successful test, especially compared to last years program. That's dog testing!! You learn something at every test which will help you and your dog improve for next time. We had an excellent gallery of spectators which judging by there enthusiasm, I'm sure will be entering their dogs next year.

DKGNA president Mark Peasley presented Vito Caramia with the Golden Needle award for his longtime efforts hosting tests, helping entrants prepare and running dogs himself. Well deserved and thank you Vito. Other recipients of the Golden Needle awarded at the annual meeting were Patice Korteum and Madison Losse.

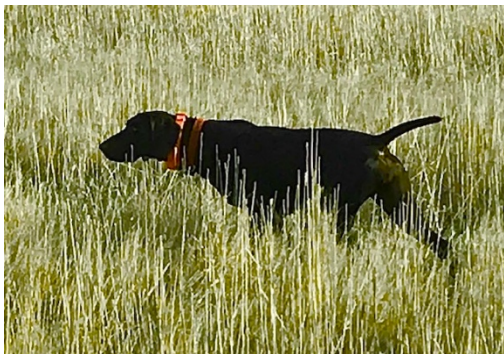


The VGP was held over Friday 13th and finished Saturday 14th with forest work in the eastern foothills of the Rockies. We had a single HZP entrant which tested very capably alongside on Friday.

**HZP entrant** was a 21 month old DD male **Gustav vom Whittinsfield** ( Cowboy vom Whittinsfield x Zita vom Dulwelsbarg). This dog was a lively and confident working dog throughout, ably handled by Emery Crawford, I believe in his first HZP. His scoring was consistent with 10 or very good scores across field, water and drags. His field search and natural cooperation, both natural qualities were rated as excellent scoring 11 in both. Gustav and Emery were very pleased to receive a very solid 182 point HZP, well done.

**HZP and VGP** are both JGHV tests so can be run together as a group. The VGP is a wonderful test evaluating 36 separate ratings in field, forest , water and obedience over two days. Its quite the marathon of versatile hunting dogs as the dog is constantly changing gears and being asked to do separate things. More people should seek the help of an experienced trainer, form a group and **attempt this test** to really appreciate what these dogs can do, there way more than just “ bird dogs”. The details of the VGP testing is available on the DKGNA website under test regulations in English.

**VGP** entrant **#1 Zula vom Trockenbach** is a solid liver 3.5 yo DK female ( Etzel vom Thuringer Zipfel x Uschka vom Trocken Bach) handled by Jeff Martin. She is a lively and confident female and completed day one with excellent results across all 18 field, water and obedience tests. She was rated excellent or 4h in her thorough field search. This is her ninth 4h score in her testing to date.



Her waterwork was strong, searching reeds and cover for 150 m on both sides of the river with only one release command given. Her blinds and live duck search were equally proficient which resulted in perfect scores in all waterwork.

Sunday started out well with 4 scores in 300 metre fox and rabbit drags/retrieves as well as retrieving the racoon over the 1 metre barrier, commonly known as the fox in the box.

She struggled in her blood track compared to normal, as well as dense cover search and independent search at the very end of day 2, which lost her valuable points. This was a surprise because she can do these easily on any given day. You never enter a dog just to make up the numbers!! Its essential to stay calm and conserve energy when doing this test, for you and the dog!! but I think the mental fatigue was starting to get to her. She was awarded a well deserved 299 point VGP prize 1.

**#2 Chief vom Prairieflygel**, this is a strongly built brownschimmel male , 2 years 4 months young, handled by senior trainer Randy Blanchard.

The first test of the day was the field searching and pointing with steadiness which was subpar to Chiefs usual efforts (when without a gallery). This presents an important part to testing, make sure, you occasionally get together with other people to train, so as to simulate a test



day. In VGP preparation make sure once your dog is proficient that you test or train occasionally for a full day constantly changing gears with one test after another.

Chief started slow but completed the field with perfect scores in 200 m feathered drags as well as searching for the downed bird.

Next was the waterwork involving firstly a search without the duck, a blind retrieve then a search to find the live duck. Chief excelled at this, scoring perfect scores across the board.

With remaining daylight we continued to a nearby woodlot to test the obedience subjects. These amount to obedience requirements that could ever be expected in a days hunting in Germany. Subjects include a drive hunt with lots off shooting , heeling on and off lead while stalking game, downstay while the handler stalks duck s and shoots twice out of sight. Chief scored well in these subjects , in the drive hunt where the dog must remain calmly lying down with other handlers and beaters firing multiple shots the whole time, Randy chose to leave the lead on, which drops a point. If the dog runs off this can be an total elimination from the test at this level, so a calculated risk.

The next day at the forest Chief continued doing well in the long rabbit track and retrieve, as well as close cover search and independent woodlot search. Everything was going well until the fox drag where Chief collected the fox but returned without it. Coyotes were heard in close proximity but this was deemed not a reason to rerun at this level of testing. In the VGP a dog must retrieve both foxes but if one is not, it is automatically a prize 3.

Randy completed the VGP with a 242 VGP 3 which is a very commendable result.

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September was the Solms and AZP** with two solms and two AZP dogs participating. The solms is a very important test because it



shows a dog's strength and versatility at a relatively young age. For this reason it's more valuable a reference than an AZP dog that could be much older with more training. In Germany only 25% or 300 of dogs get tested at this level. Note that a dog can enter two solms up to 2 years old, and then two AZP after that, so 4 in total. This means prepare for a solms but never miss the opportunity to run one, you have so much to learn by doing so.

**#1 Aspen vom Blue Grouse** ( Karlos vom Klepeshagener x Nova vom Thuringer Zipfel). This was a 19 mo swarzschiimmel male handled by Edie Stelkovic's. The dog performed well in the field scoring 4's in search and pointing. Next came the dragwork, the first was the 150 metre feather drag. The dog started and tracked with enthusiasm but it got 75% of the way and suddenly returned to the handler. The dog as per the rules was restarted twice more with the dog showing less enthusiasm. Because the dog didn't get to the game and leave it, it was allowed to continue.

The 350 m rabbit drag was next and as expected it was a similar result. In my judging experience this proves to be the toughest aspect of this test. It isn't considered a tracking test, it is a will to apply itself to the track to retrieve and complete the task. If there is any issues with the wiffi connection between the dog or handler or will to return to its handler or simply a lapse of concentration, it will not pass this test. Just a training tip, the dog goes out for itself... coming back happily to sit in front and hold until commanded to release is purely trained. This is why your dog through consistent training, must respect and like you, what I call the wiffi connection.

**#2 Alkali vom Blue Grouse**, this is a female littermate to the first dog. She is an excellent athletic female having received a V rating at her derby. She was handled by her breeder Rebecca Woodman in her second ever solms test. In the field she was impressive receiving a 4h for her strong search. Her fur and feather drags as well as searching for a placed bird were equally confident scoring all 4's. Her retrieving was marred by not sitting or dropping the game so was a 3 overall. Next we moved to the water and Alkali was the only dog still in the test.

The gun sensitivity where a duck is thrown into the water and a shot fired near the duck while swimming was done very well. The next subject was the blind retrieve where the dog is sent 20-25 metres across the river to retrieve a dead duck placed in light cover. Alkali never left the side she was sent from and her test was over. Solms 0 .

While judging this year I have seen a lot of this problem and it shouldn't be, this dog was confident in the water, it wasn't a water problem. In training the game and the payoff is always on the other side of the water. Introduce or ease the young dog into it by throwing a mark on the pickup point on the other side as the dog watches it, lead the dog away out of sight without saying a word, return 2 minutes later and it now becomes a memory blind. Repeat this a couple of times over a few days, then stop using the mark beforehand. Create a couple of other places that always have the dog going across water to find its prize, this creates good habits of always going across water. Only do "cold " or unseen blinds occasionally once the dog is doing memory blinds well. This is the training principle " never ask the dog to do something, you aren't confident it can do " this implies a step by step buildup of experiences beforehand.

**AZP is the solms** test but has a higher expectation of proficiency because of the older age of the entrants.

**#3 Cecilia vom Prairieflygel** ( Astor vom Barlager Forst x Tilly vom Kings Crossing) this is a 2.4 yo brownschimmel female handled by Edie Stelsovics. Her field work was her usual excellent scoring a 4h in her expansive search. Next came the feather drag but as the dog got to the bird she spooked and raced back to the handler, her test was over. It should be noted this dog passed the solms last year and recently the NAVHDA utility both with Prize 1. Edie repeated it, thinking to gain more excellent scores. However just prior to the test the dog was attacked in training with the coyotes trying to steal the rabbit she was carrying. When coyotes lose there fear of humans, encounters like this aren't uncommon, the trick is to keep them cautious! This trauma came back at the test and likely caused this failure.



There is always a positive side with SZR Francois Aldrich rating the dog “ a superior very high quality, powerful V1 female”, he also commented about her excellent movement in the field. She was expertly presented and in excellent condition for the zuchtschau.

**#4 Lebeau vom Hinschenhof** ( Bellini vom Hinschenhof x Zuleyka vom Hinschenhof ) this is a 33 month old large Hellbraunschimmel female handled by Rebecca Woodman. This dog was bought from Germany after finishing her derby. Her field search was very good, a 4 rating while her pointing wasn't as staunch as required at this level so a 3. She did a very good search for the placed bird for a 4 but dropped the bird at the handler for a 3. Next was the rabbit drag where the dog got to the rabbit but refused to retrieve it. Leaving edible game is a cardinal sin in the Greybook rules and her test was over.

Overall it was an excellent weekend of camaraderie and dog testing. Win, lose or draw its always good to renew acquaintances and talk about versatile hunting dogs and training.