

Swanwick – Metchosin Trial

August 5-6, 2017

By Jennifer L'Arrivee

From 1992-2012, Aileen McConnell and Martha McHardy organized the Metchosin Sheepdog Trial on Southern Vancouver Island. These trials attracted handlers from all over western Canada as well several from the western states. This year was no different. Handlers came from as far south as San Diego and from BC, Washington, and Oregon.

The new trial organizers are the hard working team of Julie Carter and Helen Christison along with the Metchosin Community volunteers. Helen and Julie worked tirelessly both beforehand and during the trial. Helen worked as course director and Julie did all the setting of the sheep.

The new field was located on Swanwick Rd, next to the ocean, and was kindly donated by the Malak family. The field overlooks the Juan de Fuca Straits and the Olympic Mountains. The outrun for the Pro-Novice run was about 300 yards with a decent size drive and pen. The sheep were very challenging to pen and there was only one pen out of 29 runs during Day 1 of PN. For Open, the first day, the dogs ran a 500 yard long outrun that was tricky not because of the length, but because the sheep were set parallel to the let out pens. For dogs that ran deep, the pens were in the way, but it did show which handlers could control and direct their dogs to the correct sheep. On day 2, the sheep were set about 400 yards away and this solved the problem of the set out pen. Many more dogs were successful the second day. I was impressed with the changes the crew made for the second day to ensure the runs went smoother. The rest of the course was a standard drive, shed and pen. The sheep were a challenge to both shed and pen. There were only two successful pens out of 23 dogs on the first day of open.

The Parry Bay Sheep Farm, belonging to John and Lorraine Buchanan, not only provided sheep for the original Metchosin trials, but also for the current trial. For the majority of runs, two ewes and two lambs were used and provided for challenging times for many dogs. For the most part, they moved steadily, but would challenge a dog if sensing either the loss of contact by the dog or if too much pressure was applied. Both handler and dog needed to be sharp and "on the ball" to properly handle the sheep.

Our judge was Sandra Ecker (nee Johnson) from Oregon. Sandra has been involved with sheepdogs for over 25 years and has judged throughout western North America. I appreciated her keen stock sense and ability to discriminate between necessary grips and grips resulting from frustration, as well as her positive, cheerful attitude. I hope she is able to judge other trials in BC.

I am not sure of the exact number of spectators over the two days, but I am guessing close to a thousand. There were times, the stands could have been larger! The audience was very interested in the runs and the dogs providing for a festival type

atmosphere. I sure hope this trial continues as it was a fantastic weekend. I loved the challenging sheep and field, as well as the friendly faces I hadn't seen in some time! Thanks again to Helen and Julie for spearheading this enormous event, your efforts are greatly appreciated.