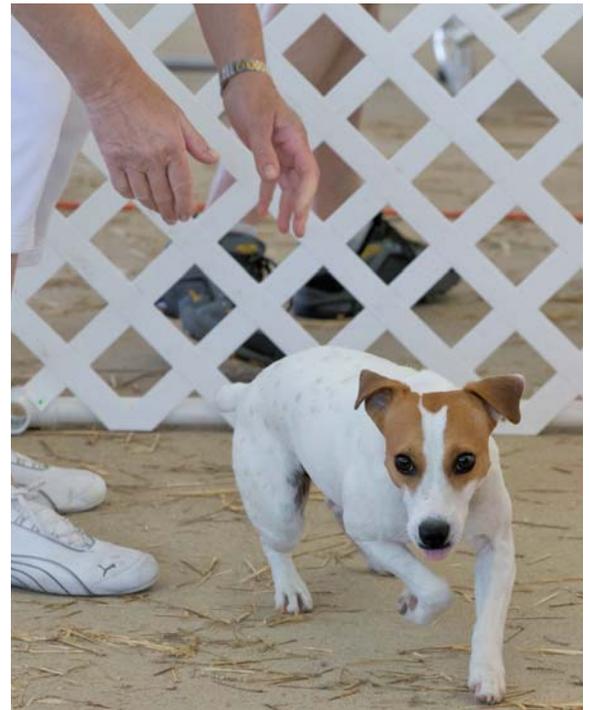


Barn to Run

BY BARBARA FAWVER

A 4-year-old Jack Russell Terrier named "Scout" was one leg away from becoming a Senior Barn Hunt ratter. His slim, white body, quivering with excitement, flattened out as soon as he jumped on the hay bale and began tracking the scent straight to the tube with the rat. His owner, Mary Daly, of St. Louis, equally excited, shouted to the judge, "Rat! Rat!"

In two minutes and 30 seconds, Scout added the RATO (Open Barn Hunt) title to his name. "Scout is a rescue dog," Daly explains. "I adopted him about three years ago. He is an incredible little dog who loves life and everything we try. He does lure coursing, flat racing, hurdles, nose work, earthdog, dock diving, and terrier racing."



"Scout," a Jack Russell Terrier owned by Mary Daly, of St. Louis, uses his instinct to track scent on the Senior Barn Hunt course.

"Lexi," a Weimaraner, was the first dog to become a Barn Hunt Champion.



Barn Hunt Trivia

Q: What breed of dog was first to earn a Master Barn Hunt (RATM) title?

A: An English Cocker Spaniel named "Otter" (Nohea River Otter, VCD1, AX, MXJ, OF, MH, TDX, RA, RATM), owned by Danae Steele, of Neenah, Wisconsin, earned the title Dec. 28, 2013, in Cumming, Georgia.

Q: What breed became the first Barn Hunt Champion (RATCH)?

A: A Weimaraner named "Lexi" (RATCH Lexi, JHA, CAA, THD, CGC, NW2, ETD) owned by Andrea Dugger, of Marietta, Georgia. Lexi finished her championship on May 4, 2014, at the Danville, Virginia, Barn Hunt.

Q: What breed recently earned a Barn Hunt Champion Excellent (RATCHX) title?

A: A German Shepherd Dog named "Jake" (RATCHX Jake von der Alte Baum, CGC) owned by Laurel Stone, of Winchester, Wisconsin, earned the title July 27 at the Great Lakes Barn Hunt in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Daly and Scout were one of 70 teams participating in the action-packed Barn Hunt Association four-trial weekend in May at Purina Farms in Gray Summit, Missouri. Sponsored by the Gateway Terrier Association and Dachshund Club of St. Louis, the Barn Hunt had a spirit of camaraderie and stress-free, noncompetitive environment.

Barn Hunt founder Robin Nuttall, of Columbia, Missouri, who ran the Open course with her Miniature Pinscher "Zipper," says, "A lot of people are hooked on this. Because it is an instinct sport, there is not a lot of training involved."

Opposite page: Carol Cagle, of Hortonville, Wisconsin, follows her 10-year-old German Wirehaired Pointer, Pryor Creek's Gracie Mae, on the Master level course.



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Chris Baumann, of St. Louis, watches intently as her Shih Tzu "SweetiePie" takes her turn at the Barn Hunt trial.

Waiting their turn for the timed event to begin were go-to-ground breeds like terriers, Dachshunds and Miniature Schnauzers. There also were unlikely vermin-tracking breeds, such as an Icelandic Sheepdog named "Skuggi," German Shepherd Dogs "Magic" and "Bren," a Shih Tzu named "SweetiePie," and a German Wirehaired Pointer called "Gracie."

Two 400-square-foot courses were set up side by side under a pavilion on a concrete slab. Hay bales

were laid out to match the judges' maze designs, with increasing complexity based on the competition level. Tucked in the stacked hay bales were PVC tubes — some empty, some with rat bedding, and some with bedding and rats. Rat wranglers ensured the safe handling of the rats, and the tubes ensured their protection.

At the start of the Open division competition, judge David L. Brown, of Wildwood, Missouri, gathered the dog-handler teams together. "You have to tell me where you think the rat is, so I will understand that you believe that is where the rat is," he said. "One tube will be elevated. You are all veterans at this. Does anyone have questions?"

"Annie," a West Highland White Terrier, and owner Cristiane N. Dornbusch, of Carbondale, Illinois, were ready to go. Stepping into the 4-by-4-foot start box, Dornbusch removed Annie's collar and lead and handled them to the leash runner.

She looked at Brown and shouted, "Ready!"

Wagging her tail, barking excitedly, Annie worked

Coming Soon: 1st Barn Hunt Nationals

BHAT The inaugural Barn Hunt National Championship will be held Sept. 6-7 at Purina Farms in Gray Summit, Missouri. To be eligible, a dog must have earned a Barn Hunt Novice (RATN) title by April 30, 2014. Entries for the National are limited to 200 dogs. For information, go to: <http://www.barnhunt.com/bha-events/2014-national/>



Cristiane N. Dornbusch, of Carbondale, Illinois, motions with a flat hand where she wants her West Highland White Terrier "Annie" to look for a PVC tube.

the scent like a pro. "I love this!" Dornbusch said later. "I got into Barn Hunt because of the teamwork. I must read Annie's mannerisms on the rat. I love seeing her do what she was bred to do."

Two dogs took their turns on the Master level course, the most challenging, with 10 tubes, one to five containing rats. With four minutes and 30 seconds allowed, it was up to the handlers to let the judge know when their dogs were finished.

Master judge Jennifer Riess, of Columbia, Missouri, the first official Barn Hunt judge, says, "You must really trust the dog at this level because you don't know how many rats there are."

Carol Cagle, of Hortonville, Wisconsin, and 10-year-old Gracie, the German Wirehaired Pointer, stood waiting. The gate opened, and Gracie took off into a tunnel.

Barking and digging, Gracie found a tube with a rat. Cagle shouted "Rat!" to the judge. Gracie kept going, and Cagle encouraged her, shouting, "Find it! Find it!"

Three tubes with rats were included on the Master course, and Gracie found them all. "Gracie will be the first Wirehair to become a Barn Hunt

A Gateway Sport

Barn Hunt founder Robin Nuttall envisioned that the sport where dogs hunt rats by maneuvering through tunnels and climbing on hay bales would become modestly popular. The thrill of the hunt has exceeded even her expectations.

"Barn Hunt is quickly becoming a gateway sport, a place where people without any dog sport experience can get their toes wet," Nuttall says. "I hope that once they try Barn Hunt, they may then try other sports."

The inspiration behind Barn Hunt is Nuttall's 9-year-old red Miniature Pinscher, "Zipper," who at 9 months old showed a natural ability to hunt vermin. At the time, Min Pins were not recognized by the American Kennel Club as an earthdog breed — that changes Aug. 28, 2014 — so Nuttall and Zipper had few trial options.

The graphic designer and owner of DD Graphix in Columbia, Missouri, set out to develop a noncompetitive sanctioned sport open to all dogs regardless of size, type or breed, as long as they fit through the tunnel that is 18 inches wide and as tall as a hay bale. Today, more than 7,000 dogs are registered and eligible to compete in Barn Hunt Association events.

Long before she invented Barn Hunt in 2012 — the first trial was in April 2013 — Nuttall was a dog sport fanatic. She enthusiastically trained and titled several Doberman Pinschers, her first breed, in obedience, rally, agility, Schutzhund, lure coursing, and dock diving. She continues to compete in agility, rally and obedience, as well as Barn Hunt.

"Barn Hunt is an instinct sport that tests a dog's ability to do what he was bred to do," says Nuttall. "It also has the very important component of human-animal communications in which the handler must understand how the dog works scent and prey. I think people get the most enjoyment seeing their dogs turning on and getting into the hunt."

Robin Nuttall and "Zipper" (Sch Regatta It's About Time, BN, RE, MXJ, MJS, RATN)



champion," Cagle says. "She is so eager to come and do this. She also is the first Wirehair to get a tracking title from the American Kennel Club."

At the end of the day, some teams advanced to the next level, and others added another qualifying leg. It was easy to see how Barn Hunt can become an addictive good time for owners of dogs who like to hunt vermin. ■