

AKC at the Grand American. The AKC Coonhound Events Management Team had a great weekend in Orangeburg at the 45th Grand American Coon Hunt. Jimmy, Lyndell and I were the guests of Chad Beard and Curt Ahring at the annual barbecue on Thursday night and always enjoy the phenomenal food and fellowship we find there. It was good to see the American Cooner crew, Terry Walker, Tammy White and Amy Kovac-Thomas as always. The abnormally cold temperatures kept a lot of folks away from the Grand American this year but the Saturday crowd was large and approximately 550 entries went to the woods in search of the big trophy in the two-night event. We enjoyed talking with everyone that came by the booth and were happy to serve your AKC needs and answer your questions. All the vendors that I talked to reported strong sales. I helped the cause along with a few purchases of my own including a new pair of boots. Mike Kelley of K-Light sent me home with a new LED head that he is marketing. All in all, the Grand American is a good place to kick off the New Year and I can't imagine not attending.

What's cooking at AKC? Watching television at this time of year is a necessity with most nights being too cold for hunting. There's not much in the news that I enjoy but I do like to watch the reports that feature new products coming out of the trade shows. Manufacturers are rolling out new electronics to tempt us and the automakers in Detroit are building new models to compete with the imports. I like to window shop but can't imagine buying most of what is offered.

We've been busy putting together sponsorship deals and also preparing some new programs for the coon hunter for this year. One of the most important is our new youth program. Youth participation in the sport of competitive Nite Hunts and Bench Shows is vital to the future of our sport. We at AKC are intensely interested in providing fun, fair and feasible events for young hunters and show enthusiasts that are interested in coonhounds and coonhound activities. We built the youth program on a collegiate theme and call it Coonhound U. Education is the key to success and we believe combining the appeal of collegiate sports, associated logo items, and competition will be a winner with the youth. The program will consist of a curriculum based on youth casts at Nite Hunts, special licensed Youth Events, State Youth Championships and a series of special Youth seminars in which young hunters and show persons will receive special award certificates. Clubs that charge no entry fees for these events will not pay the AKC license and recording fees.

Youth will "graduate" by winning hunts and shows and will graduate with "honors" by making the Top 16 nationally in each of several divisions. There will be a special Coonhound U Championship at the AKC World Coonhound Championship for youths that qualify each year and additionally, we will have an AKC Youth World Championship this summer that will be open to all youths that satisfy the age requirements. No further qualification is necessary.

We are preparing flyers to send to the clubs and will publish the entire program next month in American Cooner. With the Black Gold – Gold Medal Championship and the AKC World Coonhound Championship deadlines upon us, we just couldn't get it ready for this issue.

We also are working hard to present a new event series for Supreme Breeders Club pups that will provide a competitive program for those SBC pups that are being born and enrolled in ever-increasing numbers. As the designer of the Zone system that is used successfully by another registry, the plan is to put together an annual event that will bring national recognition to SBC pups while keeping to our fun, fair, and feasible format and that being, holding the events close to home so that your investment in time, travel, and money is manageable for anyone that seriously wants to participate.

We also took a look at our very successful state championship program and have made some changes in terms of the numbers of events we will hold. We will be consolidating some of the states with lower numbers and have condensed our list to 18 events instead of the 35 events that were held in 2009. We are especially glad to have each of our state championship sponsors; Garmin, Valley Creek Supply, Bright Eyes Lights, Black Gold Dog Food, Wildlife Materials, Tri-tronics, and Zepp Coon Squallers back for the 2010 season. We will continue to offer the excellent award packages that we offered in 2009 including trophies to the State Hunt and Show Champions prepared by Imperial Trophies and Awards. Watch for the listing of states on the AKC coonhound website, www.akccoonhounds.org and in the advertisements right here in American Cooner each month.

AKC World Championship! The World Hunt with no leaves takes place this month in Orangeburg, South Carolina. You can expect the top dogs in the nation to enter and this year we'll accept walk-on entries provided the dog is qualified and provided we have guides to accommodate them. The entry fee for walk-on entries will be \$250. So, if you missed the January 15th deadline and still want to enter your qualified dog, come on down to Orangeburg on either the 15th, 16th, or 17th and we'll try to accommodate you. You can expect a quality nite hunting experience with all the pomp and flair of a World Championship. The South Carolina Coon Hunters Association is our host and can be expected to do their usual excellent job in providing guides that will put you in coon. I look forward to seeing you there.

It was a very good year! The year 2009 was another very good year for coonhounds at the world's largest purebred dog registry. We saw increases in each of the important areas of this effort; clubs, events, entries and registrations. We owe a debt of gratitude to each of you that made this possible and we look forward to the opportunity to grow with you and your clubs in 2010.