

By Bruce Gabrielson, nationally recognized judge and Beagle authority

### Beagles and Field Trial Beagling

The sport of Beagling, using small hounds to track rabbits, goes back to the early English sport of fox hunting. Fox Hounds were too big for rabbits, so a smaller hound was needed which could be followed on foot, and could keep up with the twists and turns of a rabbit either in heavy brush or open areas.

Beagles, the pleasant little hound with long ears and a big heart, were developed to fill this need.

As the breed grew in popularity both in the U.S. and elsewhere, the resultant interest in which Beagle was best gave rise to the sport of Field Trial Beagling. At a field trial, from two to five hounds at a time compete against each other on their ability to follow the scent left by a moving rabbit. This is called carrying the line. Judgement points are given on how well the line is followed, according to a set of rules specified by the American Kennel Club. The hounds rarely even see a rabbit, and must rely on their training and natural scenting ability to keep the line going. Contrary to bird dog trials, no guns are used and the game is never caught.

The first field trial for Beagles in the U.S. was held in 1890 by the National Beagle Club near Hyannis, Massachusetts. Since that time, hundreds of clubs have sprung up throughout the country, with fourteen in California, one in Arizona, and six more in Oregon and Washington. There are six clubs in the L.A., Orange County, and Riverside/San Bernardino areas. California's largest club, San Fernando Valley Beagle Club, is located just off Richards St. between Perris and Lake Elsinor, south of Hwy 74.

The club moved to the Perris area several years ago, and most members live in or near the Perris Valley. However, due to an American Kennel Club rule preventing name changes, the club has retained its original name.

Field trials in this area are held between September and June, with the larger clubs holding usually one per month. Currently, clubs can hold AKC licensed trials where championship points are awarded once each year. A Beagle must win three trials (licensed) and accumulate 120 points to gain the title of field champion.

Besides licensed trials, there is a state championship trial, two association winners stakes, and the Far Western Federation Championships held each year in California, plus several national level events are held across the country. The Far Western Federation is held in Perris at the San Fernando grounds sometime in early March. The International Beagle Federation Championship is held near Pittsburg, Pa. in May.

Except during the summer months, Beaglers can usually be found every weekend at a trial, out in the field starting a pup, or just exercising their older hound to keep it in shape. San Fernando's licensed trial, expected to draw Beaglers from throughout the U.S., is scheduled for February 13th and 14th, starting around 8:00 am. The trial is open to the public, and interested spectators are welcome to come out and watch.