

WORLD CUP OF MONDIORING 2009 Virton, Belgium

This year's World Cup took place in Virton, in the region of Luxembourg, the southernmost city in Belgium. Driving up to the stadium where the event was to take place was like stepping into another world. The organizing club, Club de Dragons Latour led by Gerard Mullennders, created a magical setting on the field. The focal point was a pink elephant of enormous proportions. It could be seen from miles away!

Team USA 2009 was comprised of the following dog/handler teams:

Melissa Mims, with Lycos von Donnertal. – Mondioring 1
Steve Garvin with Bogan du Hombres Vallereaux – MR 2
Lisa Geller with Mangouste du Loups du Soleil – MR 3

This was Melissa's third trial....ever. That was a huge leap for her, from total novice to international competitor. She handled it with total confidence. I am sure she did not really FEEL as calm as she looked on the field, but Melissa handled well. She earned a qualifying score and looked quite good out there! I know that team will be back to the international field in the very near future! At one point she was trying to figure out how to sell everything she had and move to Belgium! I know the feeling! It was truly gratifying to see Melissa floating around on Cloud 9 for days!

Steve and Bogan left their mark on the decoys in Belgium. Our good friend Jeannine Coupe had arranged training for Monday and Tuesday. All I heard from the various decoys involved was that the American dog left them black and blue. Steve and Bogan showed well, but a couple of handler issues cost Steve the qualifying score. As he said.....the bar has been set and now he knows how to get there. Steve, also, will be back next year. He too was enchanted with the country, the culture, and most of all with the hospitality shown to us everywhere.

Lisa and Mangouste are seasoned competitors. She placed 6th last year, and 4th in the FMBB in Prague. This year, there were some challenges on the field that kept Mongoose from finishing so well. She was in good company! Many of the very best dog/handler teams finished with far fewer points than they thought they would finish with! It was a very challenging field.

In years past, the program has been split into two days for the level three dogs. This year, it was put back together into one program per dog. Each category 3 dog – 36 in all - went through their entire program. The Chien Blanc, or Dog in White, took place on Thursday night. It was such a complicated program that it took close to two hours to complete. Initially, only Team Captains entered the field, as is the custom at a Championship. Eventually, all handlers were brought

out to go through the program. I have never seen that done! The heeling was complicated. The Defense of Handler was brutally complicated AND boring. The dogs were nearly asleep before the bite actually took place.

Probably one of the most impressive exercises was the Absence. There was a huge tower just on the edge of the stadium. Strung from $\frac{3}{4}$ up the tower was a series of cables that went to the opposite side of the stadium. Fire rescue professionals from the local station climbed up the tower and hooked their safety gear to the lines. At the appointed time, one of them came flying down the cable clanging cymbals and dragging streamers behind to create quite an impressive apparition overhead. Several dogs jumped up and left. Others held their spot but kept ducking until the thing went past. It was not really close to them, but dogs just did not seem to judge distance well.

The Little Wood exercise presented a challenge to many dogs. Near the edge of the field there was placed a statue family of Belgian Boars. The big one had pretty significant tusks and yellow eyes. The others were arranged in a semi circle and represented the boar babies. The little wood block was placed directly under the tusks. Many dogs did not make it to that imposing boar. In addition, the actual crowd – which was numbered in the thousands, was lined up 3 or 4 deep on the fence. Dogs that actually GOT this exercise usually got an ovation!

The heeling exercise took the handler under and around that imposing elephant. Dogs seemed to be relatively unimpressed with that massive creature.

The object for Guard of Object was a potted plant – a tall, thin, cedar sort of plant. The accessory used by the decoy was on the second pass, which is unusual. It was two long link dog collars. The intent was to impress the dog with the noise of the clanking collars. The dogs were not struck with the accessories, but just had to be unimpressed by the threat. Most were unfazed, but a couple had obviously been corrected with throw chains.....

The search location for the Search and Escort was an old hay truck. Decoy was hidden on the back of the truck, shielded by canvas tarps. Many dogs did not find the decoy. Once he was located, dogs needed to jump into the back of the truck and hold that decoy there for what seemed like an eternity. Handlers were FAR away. The escort took up the whole field and many meters were stolen from dogs on the hay bale obstacle and on the podium.

The Defense of Handler involved two decoys and a series of activities centered around the hay truck. Handlers pushed a wheelbarrow, changed positions and helped steady the hay bale, helped unload the bale and put it in the truck. A second wheelbarrow was then used to transport a 'lamb' to the bed of the truck. While the exercise itself was not really difficult, it was long and dogs could easily lose track of the job at hand. There was lots of coming and going, with the decoys keeping up a lively conversation throughout the scenario.

The accessory attack was done by Joaquim Dovat, from Switzerland. Joaquim used a long rope, coiled and ready to fling out at the dogs as they entered his space. He was consistent with each dog, managing to sling that rope at exactly the same point each time.

The field of competition was a work of art, and it will be very difficult for next year's organizers to top this event! The amenities that were provided around the field were great as well. In addition to the traditional food tent where your standard coffee, beer, wine and small food items were sold, there were at least half a dozen different tent/booths serving an assortment of food items and alcoholic beverages from around the region. Vendors set up around the field, and visitors kept up a steady flow visiting those areas. A Mondioring championship field would not be complete without music, and this was no exception. There was a "DJ" managing the music, and selecting music to fit the themes.

The entertainment on Friday night was a Texas style country band. Wow! There was much dancing, including on the tables. I'm from Texas, and I can say for sure that these boys knew how to sing Texas folk/country!! Even Cotton Eyed Joe!! And the Chicken Dance. Oh my!!

Saturday's Gala Dinner was held in a restaurant in a 900 year old castle. Elegant and beautiful! Several hundred persons attended, and it was an event to remember!

To the team members who traveled to Belgium to represent the United States Mondioring Association: Melissa, Steve, Lisa.....hats off to each of you and thanks again!!!!