

# Muskrat Love

*By Priscilla David, TX*

Several of my Texas friends decided to attend the Missouri Earth Dog Trial this year which was being held at the Purina facility in, of course, Missouri. I had never made it to this trial before, mostly due to the distance, but when I saw in the flyer that they were offering Muskrat Racing, I decided to caravan along with the Fowlers and the Wallwins.

I had always wanted to try my dogs at this, but it is not an event that is offered often for obvious reasons. Not all of our clubs have a pool/pond available.

What a great facility Purina has and what a lucky club MOE is to be allowed to use it! We got to the site early and landed one of the primo setup spots under some big shady trees.

Purina has a pool and dock setup to accommodate the Dock Diving dog events. In case you haven't had the good fortune to observe this event it started out as a competition for Labrador and other retriever type dogs. The dog sits at the farthest end of the dock away from the pool while the handler is on the end closest to the pool. The handler throws a dummy type toy that floats, far out into the pool, and then gives the dog the command to fetch. The dog runs down the dock and dives out into the pool. Dock Diving dogs are judged on how far away from the dock they jumped, or in another version, how high they jump into the air to catch a dummy hanging from a pole hanging over the pool.

Muskrat Racing is done on the same premise, but of course, adjusted to the Jack Russell personality. The Missouri Earth Dog club did a great job on this event, and Bonita Knickmeyer was a great race Chair.

A regular 6-hole race box was setup on the dock on the farthest end from the pool, but only 2 dogs were run at a time. A regular lure on a string was used, but instead of it being wound up on a lure machine (which would have meant wet string being wound up) a very energetic (and fast) young man pulled it while running down the side of the pool. This system worked quite well except when one of us owners was watching our dogs and not him. Two young girls were in the pool to assist if a dog should need help.

I had practiced all my dogs jumping into our pond at home so that they would be prepared for this event. We stood on the bank, I threw a floaty toy out and let them wade in and swim out (I did this with them tethered to a 30' line). All four of them had been successful and enjoyed this game.

Just before the Muskrat racing began my friend Jean came over and told me that Bonita had made an announcement for everyone to empty their pockets of cell phones, keys, wallets, etc., in case anyone ended up in the pool. OK.

The first of my dogs to compete was my littlest, youngest, Spinner (a little over a year and a little over 10"). Several dogs in previous races had gotten to the end of the doc and put on the brakes and refused to jump in. Looking down into a clear pool of water with the evening sun glistening on it was very

different than wading or jumping into a pond (which was what most of the competitors said was their dogs' only experience at swimming).

Spinner ran so hard down the dock that she didn't have time to apply the brakes before she went off the end, but from the look on her face as she hit the water it was clear she was very confused as to what had happened. She usually goes all out without ever slowing down long enough to think about what she is doing if she has to stop for any reason she will spin circles (hence, her name). She has done this since she was 3 weeks old. I knew when I saw her frantically dog-paddling in one spot that she was going to wear herself out and never move from that spot. Without thinking I jumped in. (Thanks, Bonita and Jean, for the advice!). I would also like to take a moment to tell the young girls doing dog-lifeguard duty that they were great and I know if I had asked they would have gotten to Spinner, but (like my Spinner) I don't always slow down enough to think.

I was added entertainment for the audience watching and I would do it again.

Next of my crew to run and Anjouil (Annie – Spinner's mother), and she didn't fare any better. She did almost the same thing that Spinner did, but didn't panic, and the girls got her out (I think they didn't want to see me in the pool with them again).

Pylit (Spinner's dad) jumped in without much issue, but lost sight of the lure and swam to the side of the pool where someone in the audience pulled him out.

The last hope I had was the infamous Thumper! My true wild child. The Thumpster ran down the doc, sailed off the end and hit the water swimming. He never lost sight of the lure and stayed focused. The catchers were at the end of the pool and grabbed him up.

After it was all over Thumpy had won the Over dog Championship and MOE group had come up with one of the best prizes that suited the event so well. One of them went online and found copies of the single 45 record "Muskrat Love" by the Captain & Tennile. They mounted the records in glassed frames with a nameplate and picture of a muskrat. These were the prizes for the Under and Over Champions. Mine is proudly hanging on my staircase wall.