By now, if you’re like most Beaglers, you’ve run some of your hounds and think they are worthy of competing. I’m sure they’re the best dogs ever and, in your opinion, can beat the pants off any other dog. I have some of the same kind of dogs in my kennel! So now you find the closest club, load all your gear and make all the preparations to compete. Maybe, like me, you give your best hound an extra helping of feed, some extra petting, and a little pep-talk. Morning arrives and you excitedly grab your best hound, just sure you’re going to bring home that trophy. You get to the club and to your surprise there are more people than you expected. While your confidence waivers a little, you pet your hound a few extra times and maybe whisper a prayer. One last pep talk and you walk into the clubhouse to make the final commitment. You transfer money from your pocket to the person taking entries. Now you chit-chat, make new friends, and secretly size up the competition. This is the part where, depending on where you are, you might hear things like, “Those AKC people are all stuck-up!” Or “I tried a trial once and they were rude!” Maybe, “They picked my dog up in two minutes flat!” Even, “Those ARHA people just run grade hounds!”

And, “The last time I tried an ARHA hunt, I swear I ran against a small coonhound. Didn’t even look like a Beagle!” Sound familiar? It does to me.

You see, I run in AKC SPO and ARHA Gundog Division. I have double-registered dogs. While some aren’t real pretty, none look like small coonhounds, yet! My wife’s dog, Boomer, was also double-registered. He lacked a few points from being an AKC Field Champion. He had his AKC CHB title, and was a ARHA Gundog Brace Grand Rabbit Champion, a Gundog Pack Grand Rabbit Champion and Progressive Pack Rabbit Champion. He is also in the ARHA Hall of Fame.

I had another female, Twain, who was so polite she’d step off the line so the faster dog could move up, then she’d fall in politely and bring up the rear. She always had a 4th in AKC, and in ARHA Gundog Brace she had a whopping 450 points, but not a single win! Honestly, I counted all her placement slips. Unlike Boomer she just lacked that “killer instinct” required to drive to the front of the pack. Are there differences in AKC and ARHA? Sure, that’s why there are two different registries with different running formats. Is one better than the other? Well, that depends on your perspective. From my point of view, I don’t think there is a difference, none that matters to me anyway. For the most part, the bloodlines are familiar whether you run AKC or ARHA. I have In-Line Black Jack, Deer Park
What Twain thinks of going home

Spike, Crank’s Chicken, Hay Chicken, Narron’s Cadalac Jack, and Haymaker bloodlines. I run across those bloodlines, and many more, all the time whether at an AKC or ARHA trial. There are differences in formats and in rules, but you know what? If we’re all breeding from the same thing, aren’t they going to run pretty much the same?

I actually favor starting my dogs in ARHA Gundog Division. I think the Gundog Brace format is excellent for introducing a young dog to the experience of field trialing. In Gundog Brace, you run against one other dog. Despite the name, it is NOT walkie-talkie dogs. It just means you run against one other dog, that’s it! Your dog is probably used to that at home; therefore it’s non-threatening to the hound. I think the format is ideal for a young hound. I’m a firm believer that you can ruin a good dog by throwing it into any competition too soon. It’s a ton of stress to travel, stay in a box or trailer for several nights and then run in a foreign place with strange dogs. That’s the equivalent of dropping you by parachute into the middle of some foreign country with a map, no Smartphone and saying “Good Luck!” The ARHA Gundog Division’s Gundog Brace format is great practice and a great way to introduce the trialing experience to a young hound. Don’t believe me? Find the closest club and go check it out. A lot of clubs offer you the ability to “try it for a day” for a reduced price. You still have to register your dog with the ARHA, which you can do at the trial, but then you pay a reduced fee to enter your dog. Try it with a young dog, I bet you’ll be back.

For those with experienced trial hounds, the format I like is the Gundog Division’s Gundog Pack trials. This format is run almost identical to the AKC SPO format. You get a pack of no more than five dogs in all series except the winners’ pack. The winners pack is run with no more than 7 dogs. You are guaranteed to be judged on a rabbit. What I like, and feel AKC could improve on, is hunt-in-the-dogs is one of the main things judged. It’s amazing how many Field Champions these days can run the fur off a rabbit, but wouldn’t run anything if another dog didn’t do the hunting first. ARHA is dedicated to preserving the HUNT in the hunting hound. The Gundog Pack format tests a hound’s ability in a pack situation, just like you would run at the house or rabbit hunting. The dogs are fired over using a blank pistol, and the distance the judge fires is equivalent to firing at a rabbit while hunting. ARHA Gundog Pack showcases what the Beagle was made for, hunting in a pack situation and keeping the rabbit accounted for at all times.

So to answer the question, can a dog run both AKC SPO and ARHA Gundog Division? My answer is absolutely yes! Certain dogs are better equipped to run both, such as my Boomer, or my friend Larry’s dog, Ruby (pictured here). Ruby lacks one win to be an AKC Field Champion, and just recently placed first in the ARHA Gundog Pack 13” class at Mid-Arks October trial.

Now do your part, take that great dog you know is the best Beagle around and find your closest Gundog Division trial. Check it out at: www.arha.com or on the board at: www.rabbit-dogs.net or easternkansasbeagleclub.blogspot.com. You can follow me on Twitter at the handle @OKIE DOG SUPPLY or email me at mike@okiedogsupply.com. You can also contact the Gundog Division Chairman, Freddie Beavers, at 501-259-1251. He’s always ready to hear from you, too.

I challenge you to get that dog out, get your gear, and go check out an ARHA Gundog trial. You’ll make more friends than you can friend on Facebook, and you’ll be hooked. You’ll have such a great time watching your dog do the best it can, in a format it was bred to run in, that you won’t care that I beat you! I look forward to seeing you at the next Gundog Division hunt. Run It and Leave No Doubt (I Cor 9:24).