

WOW!

RETRIEVER CLUB SWITZERLAND MAGAZINE | No. 2, 2026



P. 5 World Dog Show 2026

P. 15 IWT 2026

P. 31 30 years of RGZ

News



The IWT volunteer crew

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Once again, our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped make this beautifully organised event such a success!

Another highlight of our 40th anniversary year will be the Work & Show event in Erlinsbach and Aarau on 12 and 13 September. And do not forget our monthly competitions, where correct answers are rewarded with lovely prizes.

Next issue

The next issue of wow! will appear in December 2026. Editorial deadline: 31 October 2026.

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IWT 2026 – WHEN EUROPE’S BEST RETRIEVERS TAKE ON THE ALPS

Text: Ann Cathrin Solbakken | Photographs: Thore Brockhoff



work with as little handler influence as possible earns the maximum score of 20 points.

When every retrieve counts: flawless

The piercing whistle of a dog whistle cuts through the clear mountain air. A black Labrador works purposefully towards a dummy almost 200 metres away. Between dog and handler, an ice-cold mountain stream roars. High above, spectators on a rocky outcrop follow every movement intently.

If the dog takes the bridge on the way back, it scores no points. If it chooses the direct route through the water, hopes of a high mark remain alive.

We are at an altitude of roughly 2,000 metres, in the furthest reaches of the Dischma Valley near Davos. Surrounded by the snow-covered peaks of the Alps, Switzerland's mountain landscape is at its most impressive. Spring-green pastures, yellow alpine anemones, pink alpine roses and deep-blue gentians add splashes of colour to the dramatic high-alpine scenery.

Europe's largest team competition for retrievers

In the midst of this spectacular setting, 40 teams from 15 nations gather for the International Working Test (IWT), Europe's largest team competition for retrievers. Over two days, the continent's best retriever partnerships tackle demanding, shooting-field-style tests. Accurate marking, long-distance handling, focused hunting and, above all, perfect teamwork between dog and handler are required.

Each country may enter up to three national teams, each comprising three partnerships and a reserve. Numerous free teams also compete. This year the tests are judged by the British judges Terry Prentice, Neil Appleton, Andrew Slingsby and Andy Mutimer, together with the Finnish judge Miso Sipola.

Before sunrise

It is not yet seven in the morning when competitors assemble by the shuttle buses in the centre of Davos. Rucksacks are hoisted, water bottles stowed, whistles checked and dummy vests adjusted. The dogs lie quietly beside their handlers as the first rays of sun bathe the Alpine peaks in golden light.

Some teams have travelled all night; others have crossed Europe. Around the buses, Dutch, German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Estonian, Italian, Finnish, French and English blend into a multilingual hum.

What unites them is the same aim: to produce their best performance when it matters most. As the buses climb the narrow mountain roads towards the test ground, the landscape opens out, with snowfields, flowering alpine meadows and steep slopes alternating along the route. Switzerland is showing its finest side.



Ready for another day: competitors and dogs travelled into the Dischma Valley by shuttle bus each morning.



Interested spectators followed the tests from excellent vantage points around the ground.



Team spirit: Switzerland Team 3 celebrates after a successful test with judge Terry Prentice.



Ready for action: the concentration is palpable as Germany Free Team 4 prepares for the next test.



A magnificent setting: the Swiss Alps at their finest during the IWT in the Dischma Valley.

Long distances, tiny errors

This year's tests bring together everything that makes the IWT special. Dedicated volunteers throw or place dummies behind rocks, over dry-stone walls, in juniper scrub and on steep slopes. More than once the dogs disappear completely from their handlers' sight. Then there is only one option: trust the training and hope the dog reappears exactly where it is needed.

The distances are often considerably greater than in an ordinary Working Test. Some handling exercises extend to nearly 200 metres through demanding ground with stones, dense vegetation and natural obstacles.



Full attention: Switzerland Team 1 listens closely as Terry Prentice explains the test.

On Saturday, teams can largely decide which dog undertakes which test. On Sunday, however, the judges determine the order. The IWT is therefore about far more than good dogs: strategy, team spirit and the ability to make the right decisions under pressure are essential. At this level, one small error can separate jubilation from disappointment.

The ever-present possibility of a zero

Those fine margins are part of the IWT's fascination. In one Saturday test, several teams demonstrate retriever work of the highest order. Labradors and Golden Retrievers complete long marks and demanding handling lines with remarkable precision. Yet the championship also shows how quickly fortunes can change.



Behind the scenes: after months of planning, Lucretia Mettler and her team find a rare moment to watch the action.

One dog finds the dummy perfectly but loses its grip on the return. Another is influenced by the terrain and leaves the line during a long handling exercise. Tiny details, barely visible to spectators, can cost several points—or every point—on a test. That is what makes the IWT the ultimate examination of cooperation between dog and handler. Success is never guaranteed, regardless of experience, titles or previous results.

The Champions League of retrievers

"This is the Champions League of retrievers," says the local gamekeeper with a smile. He has come into the mountains especially to ensure that the event takes place without disturbing the local wildlife.

All around, little can be heard beyond dog whistles, the rush of the stream and the laughter of old and new friends. Teams exchange experiences, stories and advice across linguistic and national borders.

The dogs show no interest in the marmots—or in one another. No barking. No growling. Only concentration. These are elite athletes on four paws.

The river that decided the points

In the furthest part of the Dischma Valley lies one of the weekend's most discussed tests. The dogs must retrieve a dummy from the opposite side of a roaring mountain river. Between dog and handler is a bridge—apparently the easier way back.

But a dog that chooses the bridge receives no points. More than one handler holds their breath as the dog returns with the dummy. Will it take the direct route through the water or use the bridge? Again and again, dogs plunge decisively into the icy water and swim purposefully through the current. Every successful crossing is greeted with applause from the bank.

These are precisely the tests that make the IWT unique: realistic challenges that put the dogs' courage, training and independence to the test.



A rushing challenge: to score, the dogs had to cross the cold mountain stream. Choosing the bridge on the return meant zero points.



Sounds of Switzerland: traditional alphorn music set the mood before the prize-giving.

More than points and placings

That is the IWT: joy and disappointment, tears and celebration, outstanding performances and unforgiving margins. Above all, however, it is about community.

When the final points have been totalled at the Dürrboden mountain inn, Netherlands Team 1 are confirmed as winners. Germany Team 1 take second place, while Free Team Germany 2 secure third.

The Swiss teams also perform strongly on home ground: Switzerland Team 1 finish an excellent ninth, closely followed by Switzerland Team 2 in eleventh. Switzerland Team 3 finish 32nd and the Swiss Free Team 37th.

Two days of sunshine, high mountains and top-level retriever sport draw to a close. Clouds gather again over the Alps and the rain returns. What remains are memories of long handling lines, impressive retriever work and friendships that cross national borders. The baton now passes on: next year Europe's best retrievers will meet in Norway.

The experience of Germany Free Team

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Text: Thore Brockhoff, Jana Oettel, Barbara Reppermund and Anne-Marie Viereckl (Germany Free Team 4). Photographs: Thore Brockhoff, Claudia Nett, Nicole Mettler, Michèle Meier and Tatjana Zamorskaja.



The organising committee—an incredible achievement. From left: Lucretia Mettler, Andreas Gautschi, Michaela Hermann, Hans Döbeli and Antonella Bottelli.

Anyone who travelled to Davos at the end of May experienced far more than an international Working Test. Between mountain flanks, torrents and alpine slopes, 40 teams from 15 nations gathered for the highlight of Europe's retriever calendar: the 2026 International Working Test.



Judge Andrew Slingsby (UK), focused at work.



Judge Terry Prentice (UK) in discussion with steward Oliver Engels.



Judge Miso Sipola (Finland): the test can begin.



Judge Andy Mutimer (UK).



Judge Neil Appleton (UK) explains the test.

Switzerland is already well worth a journey; the IWT in Davos takes it to another level. To put it casually, but with absolute respect: the region is outrageously beautiful and the terrain in which the IWT was held is extraordinary. Eyes wide. Mouth open.

The IWT organising committee can only be congratulated on securing access to such an impressive venue. Unique.

The two years of preparation were evident. If we German guests are said to be thorough, that would be a gentle comparison with Swiss precision in this instance. Everything ran like a perfectly synchronised clockwork mechanism throughout the weekend—from registration and logistical challenges to the prize-giving. Even Sunday's rain arrived at exactly 6 p.m., just as forecast. (Admittedly, that particular display of precision was not strictly necessary.)



Good luck!

But let us begin at the beginning

Germany Free Team 4—Barbara, Jana and Anne-Marie with their bitches Tara, Yule and Charlotte—were fortunate enough to secure one of the coveted starting places. It was their first competition in this combination, and before trying it one can never be sure how well a team will gel. To give away the ending: it was like a dream. Taking part, working together over the two days, the harmony within the team, the dogs' consistency—and, as the crowning achievement, fourth place in a genuinely strong international field. The team was completed by Thore. Originally intended as kennel assistant and cheerleader, Thore had the honour of joining the official photography team and recording the IWT in pictures. That, too, is far from an everyday experience: standing close to the teams, observing and documenting first-class dog work, sharing the excitement, sensing the tension and concentration, experiencing disappointments and celebrating every retrieved dummy together. The atmosphere is exceptional.



Found—and on the way back!

Yet it was not only the teams' performance that impressed. Behind the scenes, around 50 volunteers and more than 40 sponsors made the weekend possible.

The IWT's rules and procedures will be familiar: five tests had to be completed on each of the two days. Even for the people, working at 2,000 metres was challenging at times. What the dogs achieved on this ground was remarkable. Dry meadows, mountain streams, slopes, walls, scree and rocks were only some of the terrain's features. Two days of performance at the limit.

The dogs and handlers probably paid less attention to the alpine roses, gentians and anemones beside the paths. They may not have affected the final result, but their presence enriched this extraordinary corner of the world—as did the occasional whistling marmot.

It was close for the team. After day one they were sixth, without a zero, and the dream of a European top-ten finish seemed within reach. But if the first day's five tests were already demanding, the second day raised the bar again. For all their extremely appreciative manner, the judges gave nothing away. Every point had to be earned.

Test 6: nerves are tested

- First dog: "Call her in." — Zero.
- Second dog: "Call your dog." — Zero.
- Third dog: YES!

What must have been going through their minds? The tension mounted. Before the prize-giving, a top-ten finish no longer seemed certain: deductions there, perhaps not full marks here. But the final result? Indescribable: fourth place.

In conclusion

- Warmest congratulations to the winners from the Netherlands and to the German teams in second and third.
- The greatest respect for the organising committee.
- Thank you to everyone who made the IWT such a success.

And one more thing: for three days, we felt so thoroughly welcome that leaving on Sunday evening was painful. Thank you for your hospitality. We will not forget these days!



The richly laden prize table, with prizes from Filzlädchen, Vogt Waffen, Hermann Weine, Everdog, Panorama Knife and Skinners—our heartfelt thanks!



A team at work in the demanding alpine terrain.

Editorial note

This English edition translates all German and French editorial text from the original feature. Where the source printed the same content in both languages, it appears once in English. Names of teams, people, sponsors and locations have been retained in their original form.