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**JUDGES & HANDLER'S  
SEMINAR MANUAL  
2025 - 2026**

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AFFILIATED WITH  
UNITED KENNEL CLUB, INC.

*"Conceived by hunters for hunters"*

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# HUNTING RETRIEVER CLUB, INC.

WELCOME TO THE HRC

JUDGES/HANDLERS SEMINAR

Dear Fellow Members,

We want to welcome you to the HRC Judges/Handlers Seminar.

We are committed to helping our judges maintain the highest testing standards and improve handler success by assisting them with a better understanding of the rules and guidelines governing HRC tests.

Development of this program is made possible through the generous donations of the National Sponsors and the HRC Foundation.

HRC's dedication to the comprehensive and continued education of its members is evident in the continued improvement of this program.

Your dedication to HRC and participation in this seminar is what makes us unique. Reward yourself through active participation in our programs and most of all, HAVE FUN!

*Sincerely,*

*Your Executive Committee*



# FOREWORD

The idea of HRC judging seminars was originally conceived and begun by founding president, Omar Driskill. He understood that realistic hunting tests, judged fairly and consistently, would produce better hunting retrievers. Over the past few years, the seminar has evolved into a comprehensive judge training program using multimedia presentation equipment to enhance the learning experience. The seminar also welcomes handlers wanting to understand the judging process.

It is our hope that everyone attending will benefit from the knowledge and information shared, discussed, and presented in the seminar. The Hunting Retriever Club, Inc. continues its strong commitment to a quality judges' program. Thank you for your support and participation.

## *About the seminar manual....*

The purpose of the manual is to supplement "*Official UKC/HRC Policy and Running Rules for Hunting Retriever Tests*" (our Policy / Rule Book), not supplant or replace it. While the seminar manual contains several direct quotes from the Rulebook (in italics), it also contains valuable judging recommendations and judging tips not found in our Rulebook. The seminar book offers explanations of judging terms and concepts to help judges set up realistic tests that properly evaluate retrievers and avoid problems. It will closely follow the slideshow presentation.

We hope this manual helps you to become a better Hunting Retriever Club, Inc. judge and/or a more knowledgeable handler.



# OVERVIEW

Hunting Retriever Club, Inc. is committed to helping our judges continue to set up quality tests and make good decisions that fairly evaluate the performance of our retrievers. This seminar is designed to help HRC judges:

- Develop an understanding of the HRC purpose and philosophy of testing hunting retrievers.
- Develop an understanding of why we evaluate specific traits of a hunting retriever, the need to use realistic test scenarios, and to judge consistently.
- Explain and teach guidelines and recommendations for evaluating hunting retrievers.
- Explain and teach guidelines and recommendations for setting up and executing hunt tests.
- Offer “judging tips” to help judges avoid problems that may cause difficulties in their tests or in evaluating retrievers.

## Chapter 1

# SAFETY IN A HUNT TEST

Matters that assure the safety of retrievers, handlers, judges, spectators, and other people at the hunt test are addressed in this chapter. Topics addressed include gun safety, lightning safety, and the condition of the actual test site. When judges set up their hunt test, there are several safety issues they must take into consideration:

- The test site must be safely negotiated by the retrievers. There should be no fences, wire, holes, ditches, roads, underwater obstacles, or debris in the water.
- The area coming to and from the retrieving line, including the area around the line, must be safely negotiated by both the retriever and the handler.
- The gallery area must be safe for all spectators.
- The testing scenario should not contain any unsafe elements.

## JUDGING RECOMMENDATIONS

- The grounds should be explored to discover any hidden safety issues that may cause the retriever to trip or fall as it performs test tasks.
- All involved should be cognizant of where any firearms will be used during the test and the direction the firearm will be pointed.
- Some type of remedy must be available in the event the area around the line becomes a slip/trip hazard during the test.
- The setup should ensure that pathways are clear for the retriever and the handler as they travel to and from the line never having two retrievers so close as to create an unsafe condition.
- In an honor situation, it is best to never have the working dog crossing in front of the honor dog.

## GUN SAFETY IN HRC TESTS

The HRC program revolves around the hunter, the retriever, and the gun. Without the gun, there would not be a hunter. Gun safety is critical to the continued success of the HRC program. Judges must complete a hunter safety course. Handlers are encouraged to take a hunter safety course. Gun Safety includes more than just how to handle a shotgun. The following pages explain gun safety in more detail with the *HRC Firearm Safety Policy*:

## **HRC FIREARM SAFETY POLICY**

Hunting Retriever Club, Inc. adopts the policy of the International Hunter Safety Association. HRC strongly recommends that all participants at an HRC/UKC Licensed event have an approved Hunter Safety Course Certification.

**BASIC SAFETY RULES:** Safe handling of firearms begins with the four basic rules listed below. An easy way to remember these rules is to **ACTT** responsibly around firearms.

- **A**ssume every gun to be loaded. Consider any firearm you have not just unloaded to be loaded and treat it accordingly.
- **C**ontrol the muzzle – point guns in a safe direction. You must decide what the safest available muzzle direction is and keep your firearm pointed in that direction. Never point a firearm at yourself or others.
- **T**rigger Finger – keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire. The natural instinct when picking up a firearm is to put your finger in the trigger guard. **DON'T!** This could cause an accidental discharge if the gun is loaded.
- **T**arget – be sure of your target and beyond. Never point your firearm at something you do not intend to shoot. Make sure you positively identify what you are shooting at and know what lies in front of and beyond it. Do not use telescopic sights as a substitute for binoculars when identifying persons, animals, or objects.

**ACCEPTING A FIREARM:** Any time you pick up or are handed a firearm, you must **VERIFY** it is unloaded and safe to handle. Grasp the firearm with both hands, keeping the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and **VERIFY** or **MAKE** it safe.

### **All HRC Judges are required to PROVE each firearm used in their Hunt Test.**

- **P**oint the firearm in the safest available direction. Normally this is at the ground in a direction away from others including you. Maintain constant control of the muzzle direction.
- **R**emove all ammunition. If the firearm is a semi-automatic with a detachable magazine, remove the magazine from the firearm first. Open the action to remove any cartridges from the chamber. Removing the magazine first prevents a semi-automatic from chambering another round if the action closes. For virtually all other actions, open the action to remove any cartridges from the chamber(s) first. Remove any detachable magazine and all other cartridges from the firearm. If your firearm does not have a removable magazine, it may be necessary to activate a latch button or other device or work the action several times to remove the ammunition. Once all ammunition has been removed, leave the action open and, if possible, locked.
- **O**bserve the chamber. Check your firearm's chamber to ensure no ammunition or empty casings are present and if so remove by hand or by working the firearm's action.
- **V**erify the feeding path. A firearm's feeding path is the route by which ammunition stored in its magazine is moved to the chamber where it will be fired. Only repeating firearms will have a mechanical feeding path. To verify it is free of ammunition, you must work the firearm's action and visually check the feeding mechanism and magazine.
- **E**xamine the bore. If rust, excessive oil, or any obstructions are present, the firearm must not be fired until it is properly cleaned.



## **LOADING FIREARMS**

*Keep in mind that a firearm should not be loaded until you are able to discharge it safely and legally. Follow the steps below to safely load a firearm:*

- 1. Make sure there is no ammunition in the firearm or any obstructions in the barrel. **PROVE** it is safe.*
- 2. Point the firearm in the safest available direction. Know the location of other persons or dogs around you.*
- 3. Determine if the firearm can be loaded with the safety on. If it can, apply the safety.*
- 4. Make sure to use the correct cartridge(s) or shell(s) for the firearm by matching the data stamp on the firearm with the head stamp on the ammunition.*
- 5. Load the firearm. How you do this will be determined by the type of firearm you are using. As a general rule:*
  - a. Single shot firearms: place the ammunition directly in the chamber and then close the action.*
  - b. Lever action firearms having a tubular magazine: make sure the action is closed, load the magazine, and then cycle the action to bring a round from the magazine to the chamber.*
  - c. Firearms with a removable box magazine: load the magazine first and then insert it into the firearm. Close the action to load the chamber.*
  - d. Firearms with a non-removable box magazine: load directly into the magazine and then close the action to load the chamber.*
- 6. If you were not able to do so before, **PUT THE SAFETY ON.***
- 7. **ALWAYS** keep your safety on until ready to fire your gun.*

**THE FIREARM IS NOW LOADED AND READY TO USE.  
IT REQUIRES CONTINUOUS CARE AND ATTENTION UNTIL UNLOADED.**

During an HRC test, when placing the gun in a gun stand or handing the firearm to an approved designated person, the individual must ensure that the safety is on, and the breach is open. It is strongly encouraged that after ensuring the gun is safe, the individual announce: “the gun is safe” or “breach open; safety on” or “open and on.”

The **judge** is the person primarily responsible for gun safety at the test site. Handlers are being judged on gun safety **any time they are using a shotgun** as part of the test. If a handler in Started shoots the gun, he/she will be evaluated for gun safety by the same criterion as handlers at the advanced test levels. The judge must warn handlers and/or gunners of potential problems before they occur. If a handler or other participant initiates an unsafe action, **the judge must attempt to stop it before it occurs.**

The Rulebook states (all levels): *Mishandling of firearms will result in immediate disqualification of both the handler and the hunting retriever.* (Rule Book – Shotguns/Gun Safety at every level).

The “... handler must shoulder the shotgun, aim, track and shoot at the top of the arc of the thrown bird.” (Rulebook – Shotguns/Gun Safety at every level).

The safety is to be disengaged when the birds are thrown. No handler shall hold or operate a shotgun **if he/she is also holding a dog on lead** in any portion of the hunt test.

If the handler is disqualified for gun safety, the handler will not be allowed to run any more dogs during the hunt that day. A disqualified handler’s other dogs may be run by someone else provided it does not exceed the per dog handler limit printed on the premium.

Proper gun safety is not only important for the handler, judges, and gallery, but is of critical importance to the health and safety of the retriever. If the retriever is in front of the muzzle when the gun is discharged, serious injury to the retriever may occur. **For example:**

If the retriever creeps out in front of the handler when a mark is thrown, in attempting to track and shoot the bird, the handler shoots too close to the retriever. This action should disqualify the handler for gun safety. This will be addressed more under control later in the seminar.

Handlers should be instructed to shoot up into the air when the retriever has crept beyond the muzzle of the shotgun.

### **Three Important Parts of the Gun**

There are three parts of the gun judges recognize as critical to the safe handling of the gun.

- **THE MUZZLE**
- **THE BREECH**
- **THE SAFETY**

The **MUZZLE** is the most important part of the gun from a safety standpoint. Nothing can be harmed by an accidental discharge if the muzzle is never pointed at anything except an intended target.

The **BREECH** is the second most important part of the gun from a safety standpoint. If the breech is open, a gun is unable to discharge any load.

The **SAFETY** is the least important part of the gun from a safety standpoint. This is because the safety is a mechanical device and is subject to failure.

### **When to Disqualify a Handler for Gun Safety**

There are two circumstances associated with disqualification of a handler for a gun safety violation:

- If, during any portion of the test, the handler points the muzzle of the gun at any person or dog, the handler and the dog are immediately disqualified.
- If the handler returns the gun to the judge or to the gun rack with both the safety off and the breech closed, the handler should be immediately disqualified.

**If a handler is disqualified for gun safety, he/she will be told before leaving the retrieving line.**

If the handler returns the gun to the judge or to the gun rack with the safety on and the breech closed or the breech open and the safety off, the handler should be **warned**. Any further incident involving gun safety would be grounds for immediate **disqualification**.

### **Popper Policy**

“Popper” policy, under **Shotguns** (at all testing levels):

*“To minimize the possibility of an accidental discharge of a firearm while handling a dog during a U.K.C./HRC test, handlers should not be given more poppers or permitted to load more poppers into the shotgun than are required to complete any given segment of a test. More poppers may be provided and/or loaded at a Judge’s discretion if they are required by the logistics of the test.”*  
(Rule Book – Shotguns/Gun Safety at every level)

HRC clubs can now elect to use safety poppers, described as a new unfired primed hull. Clubs must use the same type of popper at all testing levels for the hunt test.

## **HRC UKC Policies and Procedures (Firearms Safety Policy):**

**SAFETY - AMMUNITION** – *The HRC Board of Directors has voted to allow individual Clubs to choose whether to use Factory-Loaded Poppers OR Factory-Primer (only) shells. All categories at the Hunts must use either ALL Poppers or ALL Primer only shells. Gun Safety is of utmost priority to HRC, Inc., HRC Clubs and HRC members. Clubs may load their own Primer Only shells using new (unused) hulls which must be rolled.*

### **Approved Guns at the Hunt Test**

*“Only authorized guns will be allowed in the test area. Authorized guns are those shotguns inspected and found to be in proper working order and approved for use at the test site(s) by a hunt official(s).” (Rulebook – Shotguns/Gun Safety at every level)*

Prior to the test, judges and/or the hunt test marshals should inspect each shotgun to be used for proper operation and magazine plug. Handlers wishing to use their own shotguns may do so for legitimate reasons (such as gun stock length) with permission of judges. Such use should be requested prior to the start of the test, and guns should also be inspected for proper operation and magazine plug.

It is not required, nor recommended, that judges ask handlers to leave personal guns at the hunt site for the duration of the test.

### **Gun Stands**

Place a gun stand close to the area in which the handler will control the retriever. It is unreasonable to expect handlers to handle their retrievers and hold a shotgun. Remember to give handlers adequate time to pick up a gun and load for the diversion.

The following applies to ALL CATEGORIES OF TESTING:

### **Gunners**

*“If a designated gunner is used, the individual should 1) be at least 16 years of age; 2) have completed a certified Hunter Safety Course; and 3) be approved by the Judges of the Test where the Gunner is being used.” (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers - Gunners)*

## **Gun Safety Checklist**

Please review this Gun Safety Checklist located prior to judging:

- Inspect and approve all guns to be used in hunt test (and for proper plug).
- Keep popper and live ammunition (if any) separated.
- Advise handlers that they are being judged on gun safety anytime they are holding a gun during the test.
- Provide adequate gun stands and encourage handlers to set gun down after shooting when handling retrievers during the test.
- Remind handlers to open breech and put safety on before setting gun down.
- Instruct all gunners in proper gun safety procedures and requirements.
- Be aware of gallery, bird throwers and other personnel at hunt site when planning shooting sequences during the test.
- Do not require handlers to carry gun down steep bank or into boats, etc.
- Be aware of gun safety when guns are being carried to and from retrieving line or during walk-ups.
- Instruct all handlers to shoulder, aim, track and shoot the bird at top of arc.
- Instruct handlers not to take safety off until birds are thrown.
- Instruct handlers to stand up or do not shoot when conditions warrant.
- Instruct handlers to check their hunting clothes for live ammo before running their dog.
- In the event of a no-bird, or other test disruptions, recognize there may be unfired shells in gun.
- Follow Rulebook guidelines about number of poppers provided and gun loading instructions.
- Give handlers adequate time to load shells for diversion birds. The test should not be set up to see how fast handlers can load and operate a shotgun

## **HRC LIGHTNING POLICY**

A judge should also be very aware of the HRC Lightning Safety Policy and how it applies to the test location. Lightning strikes are a very serious concern when participating in outdoor activities. A judge, along with the Hunt Committee, should be familiar with the "Flash-To-Bang Method" found in the HRC Lightning Safety Policy (Appendix C/See Below).

### **HRC POLICY REGARDING LIGHTNING SAFETY**

The Hunt Chairman, in consultation with the Club's Hunt Committee, will make the final determination to suspend, continue or resume a Hunt based on the following guidelines:

#### **FLASH TO BANG METHOD**

Be aware of how close lightning is occurring. The flash to bang method is the easiest and most convenient way to estimate how far away lightning is occurring. Thunder always accompanies lightning, even though its audible range can be diminished due to background noise in the immediate environment, and its distance from the observer.

To use the flash to bang method, count the seconds from the time the lightning is sighted to when the clap of thunder is heard. Divide this number by five to obtain how far away (in miles) the lightning is occurring.

For example, if an individual counts 15 seconds between seeing the flash and hearing the bang, 15 divided by five equals three; therefore, the lightning flash is approximately three miles away.

Lightning awareness should be increased with the first flash of lightning or the first clap of thunder, no matter how far away. This activity must be treated as a wake-up call. The most important aspect to monitor is how far away the lightning is occurring, and how fast the storm is approaching, relative to the distance of a safe shelter.

1. As a minimum, HRC strongly recommends that by the time a flash-to-bang count of 30 seconds is reached, ALL INDIVIDUALS should have left the test site and reached a safe structure or location.
2. Safe structure or location is defined as:
  - a. Any building normally occupied or frequently used by people, i.e., a building with plumbing and/or electrical wiring that acts to electrically ground the structure. Avoid using shower facilities. DO NOT USE showers or plumbing facilities during a thunderstorm.
  - b. In the absence of a sturdy, frequently inhabited building, any vehicle with a hard metal roof (not a convertible or golf cart) and rolled-up windows can provide a measure of safety. A vehicle is certainly better than remaining outdoors. It is not the rubber tires that make a vehicle a safe shelter, but the hard metal roof which dissipates the lightning strike around the vehicle. DO NOT TOUCH THE SIDES OF THE VEHICLE!
3. The existence of blue sky and the absence of rain are not protection from lightning. Lightning can, and does, strike as far as 10 miles away from the rain shaft. It does not have to be raining for lightning to strike.

4. If no safe structure or location is within a reasonable distance, find a thick grove of small trees surrounded by taller trees or a dry ditch. Assume a crouched position on the ground with only the balls of the feet touching the ground, wrap your arms around your knees and lower your head. Minimize contact with the ground because lightning current often enters a victim through the ground rather than by a direct overhead strike. **MINIMIZE YOUR BODY'S SURFACE AREA AND MINIMIZE CONTACT WITH THE GROUND! DO NOT LIE FLAT!** If unable to reach safe shelter, stay away from the tallest trees or objects (such as light poles or flag poles), metal objects (such as fences or bleachers), individual trees, standing pools of water, and open fields. Avoid being the highest object in a field. Do not take shelter under a single, tall tree.
5. Anyone who feels his or her hair stand on end, or skin tingle, should immediately crouch, as described in Step # 3.
6. Avoid using a land-line telephone, except in emergency situations. People have been struck by lightning while using a land-line telephone. A cellular phone or a portable remote phone is a safer alternative to land-line phones, if the person and the antenna are located within a safe structure or location, and if all other precautions are followed.
7. When considering resumption of activity, HRC recommends everyone should ideally wait at least 30 minutes **AFTER** the last flash of lightning or sound of thunder before returning to the field.
8. People who have been struck by lightning do not carry an electrical charge. Therefore, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is safe for the responder. If possible, an injured person should be moved to a safer location before starting CPR. Lightning-strike victims who show signs of cardiac or respiratory arrest need emergency help quickly. Prompt, aggressive CPR has been highly effective for the survival of victims of lightning strikes.

***REMEMBER – SAFETY FIRST & FOREMOST!***

## Chapter 2

# TESTING RETRIEVERS

The purpose of a hunt test is to assess the usefulness of retrievers as hunting companions. Desirable traits of the hunting retriever assessed in a hunt test are:

- 1. HUNTING STYLE**
- 2. HUNTING DESIRE**
- 3. NOSE**
- 4. CONTROL**
- 5. MARKING ABILITY AND MEMORY**

Subsequent chapters are devoted to the process of evaluating the hunting retriever on each of the desirable traits. This chapter addresses aspects associated with test set up, test explanation, and the actual execution of the test. Sportsmanship and the concept of “judging accordingly” are also addressed in this chapter.

## TEST SET UP CONSIDERATIONS

An important element in the evaluation of retrievers at all levels is the “test setup.” The term “test setup” is associated with the actual site where the test is conducted, and the logistics associated with completing the test tasks. An important element of test setup is safety. Is this site safe for retrievers, handlers and others associated with the hunt test? If the site is not safe, another location must be used. Below is a list of questions that judges might consider when setting up a hunt test. Most of the questions apply at any of the three categories of retrievers:

Is it LEGAL and SAFE?

Where will the retrieving line be and where does the test begin and end?

Does every bird thrown or retrieved serve a well-defined purpose?

Will the dogs see the marks thrown? (sun, shadows, splash, etc.)

Will Started dogs see the marks hit the ground or water?

Will the dogs be able to find the birds after reaching the area of the fall?

Will anything interfere with the dog’s ability to successfully complete the marked retrieves (wind direction, gallery, and other distractions)?

At Started, how can judges be assured of getting the required 90-degree separation between marks and thrown so the dog won’t run down the bank to retrieve or return with the bird?

Will the set up create training problems or de-train the dog?



Are the gun stand(s), bird drying rack, holding blinds, decoys, and designated gunner properly placed?

Is a pickup dog readily available if needed in a water test? Is there a plan to keep the line free of old birds?

Are the wingers and bird throwers well hidden?

Will the handlers see their dog if it overruns the fall area?

Are there any terrain safety hazards (fences, wire, holes, ditches, roads, underwater obstacles, debris in water) that need to be neutralized?

Is the proximity to parking area or busy roads problematic? Will the gallery location interfere with the test?

Is there an element of REALISM in the test? Does it look like we are hunting? Is the test set up more like hunting and less like a training session set up?

Will the test set up let judges evaluate the retrievers properly?

**\*\* JUDGING TIP \*\***

When setting up a test, judges should pay particular attention to cross winds and how this may affect a dog's ability to cleanly retrieve multiple marks. A test may require a retriever to run past an old fall or scent area. The retriever should not be penalized for honoring its nose.

## **TEST EXPLANATION AND OBJECTIVES**

For each category of retriever tested, judges are expected to provide an explanation of the hunt test objectives. This expectation is cited in the Rulebook for each category.

Each required portion of every test has a specific objective which the retriever and handler are trying to accomplish, in order to demonstrate an acceptable performance. Clearly explaining these objectives gives the handlers an understanding of what they and their dog are expected to accomplish during each portion of the test.

Suggested test briefings are provided in the appendix portion of the manual to facilitate clear and concise communication at the handlers meeting before the test begins. Appendix A is the Started Test Briefing; Appendix B is the Seasoned Test Briefing and Appendix C is the Finished Test Briefing. Appendix D is the Upland Test Briefing.

Judges are encouraged to duplicate the Test Briefing and use it as a guide when meeting with handler before the test begins. If the Test Briefing is followed in the sequence printed in

the appendices, judges welcome the handlers and introduce themselves and the test marshal.

Following the introduction, handlers can be advised that attire harmonious with the hunting condition is required. Gun safety is explained. In this portion of the briefing, judges clarify expectations in using the shotgun in the test and consequences associated with unsafe operation of the shotgun.

Next, the purpose of the test is communicated. For example, "This test is designed to evaluate the performance of a Finished Retriever in a waterfowl hunt such as would occur along a river." Following the statement of purpose, "mechanics and logistics" are explained. Mechanical and logistical elements addressed should include the location where judgment begins, where and when the lead is removed, the sequence of the test elements, where the marks come from, when the diversion will be thrown, where the retriever is cast from to complete the blind, and protocol for dismissing the honor dog.

Objectives are communicated after the mechanics and logistics. This portion of the briefing clarifies what the judges are expecting to observe in the dog's performance. For example, the objective associated with Finished Control (manners and obedience) could be articulated as, "The dog should walk obediently at heel to the retrieving line, exhibit an attentive attitude, and sit obediently at the line until commanded to do otherwise." The objective specific to control on the blind might be presented as "Dogs are expected to demonstrate prompt and precise response to voice, whistle and directional commands." Undesirable traits are cited following objectives.

A test dog is run following the test briefing. The Rulebook provides clear information regarding the "test dog":

*"Use of test dogs is required at all UKC/HRC LICENSED events. This will enable Judges to see how smoothly the mechanics of the tests will be executed, to give handlers a view of the test, will cause bird and drag back scent to be on the ground for all dogs, and will verify the usefulness of the test. Test dogs should be at the same level as the test, but may be at a single level higher than the test, provided they are not titled at a level higher than the test; i.e. a retriever with Finished points can be used as test dog for Seasoned as long as they do not have an HRCH title or a retriever with Seasoned points can be used as a test dog for Started as long as they do not have a HR title. A Judge may run his or her appropriately qualified dog as a test dog only in the class and flight they are judging." (Rule Book – Running Rules, Section 3, Test Dogs)*

After the test dog has run, judges should invite handlers to ask questions about the test. It is generally wise to ensure that all handlers hear all the questions. It may be necessary to have handlers who have dismissed themselves to return to the test briefing area to hear the questions and the responses to the questions.

## EXECUTING HUNT TESTS

The following are recommendations that generally assist judges in the evaluation of retrievers in hunt tests. Most of the following items will apply at all testing levels:

- Placement and accuracy of wingers – Wingers should be placed so they do not startle or distract the retriever. The target area should be big enough to minimize no-birds.
- Signaling for throws – It's strongly recommended that all HRC judges signal for each throw, preferably by radio or a quiet hand signal out of sight of the retriever. Controlling timing of the throws provides a more consistent test for retrievers and can help eliminate no-bird situations. Especially at the Started category, judges should make sure the retriever is ready before signaling for the bird.
- Stopping a test – Advise handlers that only a judge will stop a test in the event of gun problems, bird problems, or interference issues. If a problem occurs that will adversely affect a retriever's performance or the judges' ability to evaluate the performance, the test should be halted.
- Calling no-bird – Advise handlers that only the judges will call a no-bird. If the dog does not see a bird they can stay at the line.
- Re-runs – When a test is stopped or a no-bird is called, the judges should follow the Rulebook recommendations:  
  
*“Reruns should be placed at least three dogs down the line instead of being brought back to the line immediately.”* (Rule Book - Guidelines for Judges and Conducting Hunts)
- Handlers pointing to bird throwers - Handlers should be advised that they cannot point out the bird throwers before the birds are thrown.
- Releasing the retriever – In most cases judges should not call for release of the dog when it is time for the dog to retrieve. The dog may be distracted by a judge's voice, or the judge may forget to call for the release. It's recommended that handlers be told that they may send their dog when the bird (or last bird of multiple marks) is on the ground. Advise handlers that if the dog goes before then, or before it is verbally sent, it must return to heel.
- Watching the dog and the test - Before a test begins, it should be decided which Judge shall signal for birds and watch for no-birds while the other Judge watches the dog for manners, marking, etc.
- Bringing the retriever to the holding blind – Handlers at all levels will bring their retrievers to the holding blind **ON LEAD**.

- Bringing the retriever to the retrieving line – The path from the holding blind to the line should be free of spectators, birds, and other obstructions. Judges should have a clear view of the dog coming to the retrieving line.
- Where judgement begins and ends – The judges should define the location where judgement begins and where judgement ends when the test is completed.
- The gallery – Keep the gallery a reasonable distance from test so that movement of persons in the gallery does not interfere with the dog's performance. The Rule Book clarifies acceptable attire for persons in the gallery:

*“Gallery and spectators should not be in white or light-colored attire that might interfere with the dog's performance.”* (Rule Book – Clothing)

## **INJURED DOG**

*“In the event, if judges suspect a retriever is injured while running a hunt, they should allow the handler to evaluate the retriever as to its condition to complete the test. If it is determined the retriever can continue, it should be moved back three positions and given a rerun.”* (Rule Book – HRC Policy)

## **SPORTSMANSHIP**

Relatively little is reported in the Rule Book on the topic of “Sportsmanship.” The topic is mentioned in the section entitled “Judging Retrievers”:

*“The Judge is to assess the retriever not the Handler, but there are numerous things that fall under the heading of unsportsmanlike conduct and should result in either failure or a major mark down. They include but are not limited to:*

- 1. Carrying exposed training equipment to the line (except whistle), or threatening the retriever;*
- 2. Permitting the retriever to preview the test;*
- 3. Deliberate blocking by the Handler, so a retriever will not see all birds and falls; and*
- 4. Pointing out the bird throwers and/or gunners to the retriever by the Handler prior to birds being thrown.*
- 5. Interfering, intimidating, threatening, or fighting with the Judges are grounds for disqualification.”* (Rulebook – Running Rules, Guidelines - Judging Retrievers – Sportsmanship)

Handlers should be failed for engaging in unsportsmanlike conduct. Handlers will be asked to leave the test grounds if the handler interferes with the test, judges, marshal, gunners, bird throwers, UKC/HRC officials or any other participant.

## JUDGING ACCORDINGLY

Almost everyone at one time or another has heard HRC judges say, “We’ll judge it accordingly” when faced with “what if” or “what are you going to do about that” type questions from the Hunt Committee or a handler. Sometimes the test is underway, and a problem will surface. The judges respond, “We’ll judge it accordingly.”

Should they? No, it should be fixed. Test problems that can be avoided or resolved with a simple change in set up ought to be implemented. Consider the following “problem and solution” examples:

Problem: Hard to see mark because of trees or sun.

Solution: Move the mark!

Problem: Throws are inconsistent – some splash, some hit bank.

Solution: Move the winger to increase the target area.

Problem: The ducks are sinking and hard to find.

Solution: Move the mark target to dry land.

**It is better to stop a test even if a few dogs have run and fix a problem, rather than to go on “judging accordingly.”**

“Judging accordingly” should only be acceptable in these circumstances:

1. A test changes due to factors totally beyond the control of the judges (usually weather related).
2. An isolated incident, unique to one specific dog occurred (e.g., blind not planted).

The above examples suggest how to fix a problem that has already occurred, so what about the dogs that have already run the test before it gets changed? What would you do??

It is suggested that those dogs that have already run and received a pass should not be put under double jeopardy and run again on the modified test. Only run the dogs again with marginal or failed scores.

There are other scenarios where good judgment is needed and would fall under the heading of “Judging Accordingly”. Consider the following examples:

1. An honor dog interferes with the working dog. What should you do?  
**STOP THE TEST.** Move the working dog back 3 positions and rerun. During the rerun, any portion of the test that has been completed maintains its previous score. For example, the rerun would not be judged for coming to the line again.

2. During the test, while the dog is running, a mark gets accidentally thrown and distracts the dog. What should you do?  
**STOP THE TEST.** Proceed in the same manner as explained in #1 example.
3. A working dog stumbles and rolls badly in the field. It appears it may be injured or you just can't tell. What should you do?  
**STOP THE TEST.** Our rules allow for the handler to evaluate the retriever and decide if it can proceed or should discontinue the test. Again, you should proceed as stated in #1 example. If the retriever has successfully picked up 2 of the 3 marks, then those 2 marks should not be judged again during the rerun.
4. After picking up the marks, while running the blind the retriever finds a mystery duck along the way. What should you do?  
**STOP THE TEST.** This dog should get a rerun. It is important to require the dog to rerun the entire test, not just the blind because the marks, in a finished test, should have some influence on the blind. During the rerun, the marks or any other portion of the test that has been completed will not be scored again.

## Chapter3

# EVALUATING RETRIEVERS

In this chapter, the evaluation of retrievers based on the five desirable traits of a hunting retriever will be introduced.

### The FIVE DESIRABLE TRAITS at all levels are:

1. HUNTING DESIRE
2. HUNTING STYLE
3. NOSE
4. CONTROL
5. MARKING AND MEMORY

It is the judges' responsibility to observe and evaluate these five traits with an impartial and educated eye. We will explain how the standard associated with these traits vary for each testing level as we progress through the manual. In this chapter, three traits – hunting desire, hunting style and nose – are addressed. The traits of control and marking and memory will be addressed in later chapters.

## HUNTING DESIRE

A useful hunting companion is eager to hunt and will persist in hunting rather than retreat from difficult terrain or water. Judges are expected to judge retrievers on the trait of desire. The Rule Book provides judges with useful information about the trait of desire which applies to each portion (Started, Seasoned, and Finished).

### *“HUNTING DESIRE”*

*Included in this category would be courage, desire, determination, and perseverance.  
A test may be failed if a retriever:*

1. *Stops and gives up hunting:*
2. *Refuses to enter rough cover, water, ice, mud, or another situation involving difficult or unpleasant going after being commanded to do so:*
3. *Shows no interest in hunting a bird or picking it up.*

*“A retriever should be marked lower for reluctance to enter unfavorable terrain or water or hunting in a disinterested, lackadaisical manner”*

(Rule Book -Judging Retrievers-Hunting Desire)

When judging desire in a retriever, at every level, it is recommended the judges look for the following:

- The retriever should want to go get the bird when released.

- The retriever should not run out to the bird and refuse to pick it up or act disinterested.
- The retriever should not refuse to get in the water to retrieve a bird it clearly saw fall.
- The retriever should not run or swim out to a duck only then ignore it, then pursue something else.

## **HUNTING STYLE**

*“Each breed has its own manner afield and retrievers from different parts of the country or world also are characteristically different. The judge must view the retriever’s entire performance before scoring on style.”* (Rule Book - Judging Retrievers - Hunting Style)

When evaluating style, the judge should look for a retriever who is happy and enthusiastic. A stylish retriever is one who leaves the retrieving line with energy and confidence. Regardless of the retriever’s age, breed or speed in the field, the judge can see that the retriever wants to be afield hunting with its handler. The stylish retriever works confidently with the handler as a team. The stylish retriever is a pleasure to watch work in the field.

The retriever who leaves the line with its tail between its legs and its ears laid back does not demonstrate style. A retriever should not leave the line looking as if it has been intimidated or pressured to perform the task. These retrievers should receive a mark down for lack of style.

It will be very difficult to fail a retriever on style alone and is not recommended. Usually, a retriever’s performance will suffer due to its lack of style.

## **NOSE**

The ability to scent downed game birds is one of the primary reasons for hunting with a retriever. The retriever who effectively uses its nose in hunting possesses this desirable trait. The Rulebook includes one paragraph on nose:

*“A sharply tuned nose is obviously a desirable characteristic of a hunting retriever; however, it is a difficult attribute to specifically test. Judges should be on constant alert for this trait during all tests. Judges should be careful however and not be quick to mark down a lack of nose on a particular test as scenting conditions can vary considerably from test to test.”* (Rule Book – Judging Retrievers – Nose)

### **JUDGES TIP**

Judges should be aware of fall areas as they relate to multiple marks and blind as associated with scent and wind direction.



## Chapter 4

# CONTROL

In this chapter, the evaluation of retrievers' control is addressed. In order to be a useful hunting companion, a retriever must be under some degree of control. Control is essential, not only while trying to retrieve downed game, but also when sitting in a duck blind, riding in a boat, sitting quietly at a dove bucket, or quartering the field searching for a pheasant. When hunting with a retriever, it should be an asset to the hunt rather than a liability. This will ultimately be determined by the amount of control we have over our working companion.

As a result of our desire to hunt with a trained retriever, we judge control in more areas than just a blind retrieve. The following statement from the Rulebook should be the first lesson we learn about how to judge control:

*“A retriever must be under some degree of control if it is to be a useful tool in retrieving downed game. At the Started level, a good deal of leeway is given to the retriever, but at the Seasoned, Finished, Grand and Upland Hunter levels, control must be considered with increasing importance. Judges must ask themselves if they would spend time in a blind or boat with this retriever.”*  
(Rulebook – Judging Retrievers – Control)

There are **four basic portions of Control** which covers most of the trainable attributes of a dog's performance. They are as follows:

1. **MANNERS AND OBEDIENCE**
2. **STEADINESS**
3. **DELIVERY**
4. **RESPONSE TO DIRECTION**

Each portion of control is discussed in relation to each level of retriever tested.

## MANNERS AND OBEDIENCE

Good manners and obedience are the fundamental building blocks for all successful retriever training. If a handler cannot control a dog at arm's length, then it would be foolish to think it can consistently be controlled at 100 yards and beyond.

Based on the Rulebook, having control of a retriever begins with good manners and obedience (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers – Control). This covers such things as walking at heel, sitting, excessive noise (disturbing the hunt), and honoring another dog. These are all judged at the line.

## Evaluating Noise

Judges must determine whether or not the noise level made by either the handler or the retriever is at a level that would flare incoming game, disrupt the hunt, or intimidate the retriever. If the judges determine that the noise level is excessive or that the retriever has been verbally intimidated, the test may be failed. Language in the Rulebook provides clarification:

*“Failure may result from...“**excessive noise** at the line by the retriever or the Handler.”* (Rule Book – Judging Retrievers – Manners and Obedience).

*“Hyperactivity, wildness, jumping about, **barking**, excessive disobedience, lethargy or lack of interest are undesirable.”* (Rule Book – Guidelines – Judging Started Hunt Tests)

The Rulebook language that follows applies to every testing level on the matter of **noise** and **verbal intimidation**.

*“Hand signals, voice and whistle commands may be utilized by the Handler to encourage the Retriever to perform. However, should excessive handling or **noise occur**, which in the opinion of the Judges, would disturb the hunt, the Judges may declare the test a failure.”* (Rule Book – Guidelines – Judging Hunt Tests)

*“The **Handler** shall not **intimidate** the hunting retriever at the retrieving line. ...Handlers are expected to conduct themselves in such a manner that they do not disturb game or the hunt.”* (Rule Book – Hunt Tests --Handlers)

## Evaluating STARTED Manners and Obedience

While we are primarily testing Started retrievers on their natural marking ability, we still evaluate some elements of control. As stated earlier, the level of control we expect from retrievers progressively increases with each testing level.

The Started retriever **will be** brought to the retrieving line on-lead. It may wear a **non-metallic collar** while at the retrieving line, be on lead and held by the handler. If the handler elects to shoot the shotgun, he/she may not hold the dog. At this point the handler will be judged on gun safety and the dog will be judged on steadiness.

**We are not judging the Started dog coming to and from the retrieving line; however, it is being judged for manners and obedience while on the line, as evidenced by the following from the HRC Rulebook:**

*“The Judges should evaluate the dog’s temperament as displayed in its spontaneous behavior in order to assess its suitability as a hunting companion. Hyperactivity, wildness, jumping about, barking, excessive disobedience, lethargy, or lack of interest are undesirable.”* (Rulebook – Guidelines – Judging Started Hunt Tests)

What does the Rulebook say about a Started dog “sitting”?

- No specific reference is made to the retriever being required to sit at the retrieving line.

## **Evaluating SEASONED Manners and Obedience**

The Rulebook provides clear language about judging Manners and Obedience:

*“Seasoned, Finished, and Upland Hunting Retrievers should walk quietly at heel off lead, sit quietly in any position designated by the Handler, and honor (when required), in a quiet manner in either a sitting or standing position. These retrievers should not require frequent and noisy restraints by the handler. Failure may result from:*

1. *A Handler touching the retriever after they signal ready*  
☆ *(Except at the Started level),*
2. *A retriever out of control,*
3. *Breaking, or*
4. *Excessive noise at the line by the retriever or the Handler.*

*The retriever can be marked down for poor line manners, creeping, and requiring numerous commands at the line to steady.”* (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers – Control – Manners & Obedience)

*“...poor obedience and poor manners should be noted and when excessive or repeated, should be cause for failure”* (Rulebook – Guidelines – Judging Seasoned Tests)

**Coming to the retrieving line.** The Seasoned dog will be brought to the retrieving line on lead. Judges should advise handlers that the dog will be under judgment when coming to the line and at what point judging begins. Rulebook language provides useful clarification:

*“The judges should look for the dog that walks obediently to the line, sits obediently, and exhibits an attentive attitude”* Rulebook – Guidelines – Judging Seasoned Tests).

Beginning at the Seasoned level, dogs will not be allowed to wear a collar of any type. The retriever should walk with the handler, not drag the handler to the line on a tight lead. A Seasoned retriever may be marked down or failed if, in the judge’s opinion, it is not under reasonable control walking to the line.

The “sit” command is a commonly used obedience command. Based on the Rulebook, Seasoned dogs are to “... **sit** quietly in any position designated by the Handler ...” (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers – Control). Elsewhere, Rulebook language prompts judges to “*look for the dog that walks obediently to the line, sits obediently...*” (Rulebook – Guidelines – Judging Seasoned Hunt tests).

It is **recommended that** judges should show discretion when the retriever is given a “sit” command while at heel in muddy conditions.

## **Evaluating FINISHED Manners and Obedience**

All elements of Manners and Obedience previously discussed carry forward to the Finished level. As expected, Finished retrievers will be held to a higher standard.

**Coming to and from the retrieving line.** The Finished dog in contention will be brought to and from the retrieving line off lead. It will not wear a collar. Judgment begins when the dog comes out of the holding blind or other designated spot indicated by the judges. The dog remains under judgment throughout the entire test unless told otherwise. There should also be a designated location where judgment ends, and the dog is put back on lead. Rule Book language provides clarification:

*“The Judge should look for the dog that walks obediently to the line, sits obediently, and exhibits an attentive attitude.”* (Rule Book – Guidelines – Judging Finished Tests)

The Finished retriever should walk with the handler under control. A retriever should be marked down if it requires frequent and loud commands to stay under control. The dog and handler should arrive together at the retrieving line. A dog that breaks away from its handler and runs up to the retrieving line is not under control. This lack of control is grounds for failure.

A Finished dog should be able to watch another dog work while remaining quiet and under control. This will be discussed next under “Steadiness.”

A Finished dog not in contention shall be on lead, while the test is being run.

## **STEADINESS**

A retriever who exhibits good Manners and Obedience is well on its way to showing proper steadiness at the retrieving line. However, good Manners and Obedience is no guarantee that a retriever will be steady.

But why is steadiness evaluated? A dog that leaves the line early is not under control. At all levels of testing, breaking (when a dog leaves before it is sent) may adversely affect a retriever’s ability to mark multiple falls and is a **SERIOUS SAFETY ISSUE**. An unsteady retriever may inadvertently place itself in the blast cone of the shotgun. **The retriever will be failed for breaking at all levels of testing.**

To properly evaluate a dog’s steadiness, judges must have a good understanding of the terms associated with steadiness or, more accurately, lack of steadiness. Terms associated with steadiness are described below, applied at each level of testing, and penalties for lack of steadiness reported.

## **Steadiness Terminology**

**Steady** - A dog is “steady” when it stays where it is placed by the handler and does not leave the position until released. When a dog is not steady, it should be given a markdown, and depending on severity, it can fail the test.

**Repositioning** - A dog moves to swing with the gun, to follow the movement of the handler or moves to get in a better position to see a bird. A retriever who is repositioning itself will often move between throws as the handler moves to shoot another bird. After repositioning itself, the dog will stop on its own volition. Test mechanics may lead to dogs repositioning.

**Repositioning is not penalized at any HRC testing level.** Judges must be able to recognize the difference between repositioning and movement by the retriever that should be marked down such as creeping.

**Creeping** - A dog creeps when it moves forward, usually as a bird is thrown, shot, or released. When a dog creeps, 1) it is not steady, 2) the movement is not warranted as repositioning might be, and 3) it can find itself in a very dangerous position. A dog that is creeping stops itself.

**Recommendation:** Creeping should be considered excessive when the dog moves out beyond the muzzle of the gun. Handlers should be advised in the briefing that they must re-heel a creeping dog prior to releasing it to retrieve.

**Controlled Break** - The dog leaves the retrieving line before being released. It is “breaking” and is **not going to stop on its own accord** but stops and returns to heel on the handler’s command. The dog is not steady, but by returning on command, shows some degree of control.

### **Controlled Break “Line”**

The concept of controlled break line appears in the Rulebook.

*“...A controlled break (Judges must decide distance prior to running the test) will result in a markdown at the Seasoned and Finished levels I...”* (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers - Steadiness)

**Recommendation:** When deciding the distance to the controlled break line consideration should be generous enough to allow the handler to stop the dog. Do not penalize a fast dog, a slow handler or a handler who is properly swinging the gun and shooting the marks. Using the edge of the water, the edge of a dog stand, or an orange stripe painted on the ground as a break line is not recommended. Evaluate if the dog stops when commanded and promptly returns to heel without intimidation or excessive verbal commands.

The amount and degree of creeping, or the number of controlled breaks, which are allowed, might vary from test to test depending on several factors such as:

1. How close the retriever is to the fallen bird;
2. How many shots have been fired;
3. If the retriever is in an honor situation; and
4. Is there a type of blind or platform on which the retriever is placed?

**Break** – The dog leaves before being released and does not stop of its own accord and return to heel. This is a failure at all levels of testing.

## Evaluating Steadiness at the STARTED Level

The Started Test Rules state:

*“The hunting retriever is required to be steady at the retrieving line. The hunting retriever may be handheld at the retrieving line to achieve steadiness.”* (Rule Book – Started Hunt Tests – Test Rules)

As mentioned earlier, the Started retriever may be held at the retrieving line to encourage steadiness. If the dog is handheld at the retrieving line, the handler is not permitted to shoot the shotgun. However, if the handler elects to shoot the shotgun, the retriever then comes under judgment for all degrees of steadiness and the handler is judged on gun safety.

A controlled break at the Started level is a markdown, not a failure.

## Evaluating Steadiness at the SEASONED Level

Based on the Rulebook, *“Seasoned ... Retrievers are required to be steady at the line without physical or excessive verbal restraint.”* (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers -- Steadiness).

Seasoned is the first testing level where a dog is expected to be steady at the retrieving line on its own. Seasoned dogs are not run with a collar, nor are they restrained by a leash, line or hand-held. Additional language about steadiness appears in the Rulebook.

*“At the retrieving line, the hunting retriever may be touched to steady but when the handler signals “ready” the hunting retriever should not be touched again.”*  
(Rulebook – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Test Rules)

*“Steadiness should be judged according to the degree that it would interfere with a normal day’s hunt.”* (Seasoned Guidelines)

Unsteadiness among Seasoned Retrievers may be manifested by breaking, controlled break or creeping. As mentioned previously, the retriever that **breaks** from the retrieving line is **failed** at all testing levels. A **controlled break is a markdown** at Seasoned; however, the Rulebook provides clarification in the event of **excessive and repeated controlled breaks**:

*“If a Seasoned Hunting Retriever leaves the retrieving line before being signaled to do so, it must be stopped and returned to heel. Controlled breaks... should be noted and when excessive or repeated, should be cause for failure.”* (Rulebook – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Guidelines – Judging Seasoned Hunt Tests)

The Rulebook also provides clarification on the evaluation of **Creeping** at the Seasoned level:

*“Excessive or consistent creeping by a Seasoned Hunting Retriever will be treated as a controlled break and the retriever must be brought to heel on the Judge’s command.”*  
(Rulebook -- Seasoned Hunt Tests – Test Rules)

**Note:** A retriever can be marked down at any testing level for requiring numerous commands at the line to steady it. Creeping one time or one controlled break should be a markdown at Seasoned. The dog may be failed if it consistently creeps or has multiple controlled breaks.

A dog that displays this behavior is not under reasonable control.

**Seasoned Walk-up.** A required element of the Seasoned Hunt Test that intends to evaluate control is the seasoned walk-up. This is a test to evaluate if a Seasoned hunting retriever can remain under reasonable control when it is walking into a hunting scenario. The Seasoned hunting retriever must display manners and obedience as well as steadiness to pass the walk-up portion of the test. At either the land or water test, a bird is thrown while the dog is walking at heel. The handler shoots the bird; the dog is released once the bird is on the ground; the dog should pick-up the bird easily then promptly deliver it to hand.

As stated in the Rule Book, “*Seasoned ....Retrievers should walk quietly at heel off lead...*” (Rule Book — Judging Retrievers –Manners and Obedience).

The Rulebook also provides clarification on the verbal reminder to sit: “*A quiet unobtrusive verbal reminder to “sit” is acceptable as the bird flushes or is shot. Great care must be exercised by the judges that this is not abused to the extent of intimidation.*” (Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Walk-up)

### **Walk-up Gun Safety Considerations**

- A single popper only should be loaded, and handlers admonished to carry the firearm in a safe manner, i.e., safety on, muzzle up and pointed forward.
- Handlers should be advised that when the bird is thrown, they should steady their retriever and only then take the safety off the firearm, aim, track, and shoot the bird.
- Handlers may be holding the gun when the dog delivers the bird, so they should be reminded the gun should be safe (safety on, breech open) with the muzzle pointed up and down range as they accept the bird.

### **Setting up the Seasoned Walk-up**

- This is a separate test so a primary consideration when setting it up is the walk-up bird **should be thrown where it will have no influence** on any other part of the Seasoned test.
- The dog should **walk a sufficient distance** before the walk-up is thrown so the judges are satisfied they can properly evaluate its ability to remain under reasonable control while walking off lead.
- The handler should know when the walk-up bird will be thrown. It is suggested a line (better yet – a double line) be marked and handlers informed that the walk-up will come when the dog has reached the line (or thrown at some point when it is between the lines).
- Judges should find a way to call for the bird without having to loudly yell “there goes one” from behind, which might startle the dog.

- There should be sufficient distance from the dog to the bird so as not unfairly entice the Seasoned dog to break.
- The bird should be thrown high enough to give handlers a chance to steady the dog, then shoulder, aim and shoot the bird.
- The handler and dog should be walking toward the walk-up bird when it is thrown. Handlers may have difficulty watching the dog and seeing a bird thrown from the side. Birds that fall well to the side of the dog and handler's path may encourage the dog to reposition itself and promote unsteadiness.
- The dog should see the walk-up bird hit the ground or water! Young dogs will want to move forward if the bird falls over a hill or bank.

### **Evaluating the Seasoned Walk-up**

- Judges must decide if the retriever is demonstrating Seasoned level control. If the dog was off-lead walking into a dove field or into a duck or goose hunting scenario, it would be expected to stay with the handler without noisy or frequent restraint.
- Look for the dog that attentively walks at heel.
- Handlers may talk to the retriever without verbally intimidating it or disturbing the hunt. They may use the whistle or voice commands to steady the dog.
- The retriever will be evaluated for steadiness exactly as it would be on the retrieving line. A dog will be failed for breaking and marked down for a controlled break. Handlers should be reminded that if the dog moves forward, it must be called to heel before being sent.
- It is recommended that judges not call for the release of the dog but advise handlers the dog can be sent only after the bird is on the ground (or water).

### **Evaluating Steadiness at the FINISHED Level**

Judging steadiness at the Finished level is basically the same as judging steadiness at the Seasoned level except more emphasis is placed on creeping and there will be a markdown or failure for a controlled break. The hunting retriever may still be touched until the handler signals "ready."

### **Finished Walk-up**

There is no specific wording for the placement of a walk-up at the Finished level. It is left to the judge's discretion as to when and where a walk-up may be useful. All marks in a Finished test must be seen from the same, stationary line. Control will be judged at the Finished standard.



## **Evaluating the Finished Honor Dog**

At the Finished test, the honor shall be associated with the marks.

*“The hunt will have at least four (4) tests. These four tests shall consist of the following: (1) a triple marked water retrieve, (2) a triple marked land retrieve (either or both the marked water retrieve, or the triple marked land retrieve must include an honor...”)*  
(Rule Book -- Finished Hunt Tests -- Description).

The Rulebook also specifies under Manners and Obedience that the honor dog should:  
*“Sit quietly in any position designated by the Handler, and honor (when required) in a quiet manner **in either a sitting or standing position.**”*

Many times, when hunting, a hunter will be in a field with more than one retriever. While one retriever is working, it will be necessary for the other retriever to hold its position and quietly watch another dog retrieve. The honor dog is evaluated under the same standards of control as the working dog.

A controlled break by the honor dog is not necessarily a failure.

*“The Finished Hunting Retriever may be failed for a “controlled break...”*  
(Rule Book -- Finished Hunt Tests -- Test Rules)

The Rule Book makes no distinction between the working and honor dog when it comes to line manners.

## **Interference in the test**

Interference, whereby another dog interferes with the performance of the working dog may occur in the honor portion of the Finished Hunt Test. The Rule Book provides a guideline for judges if interference occurs:

*“If another dog interferes with a working dog and causes a bad performance, the dog interfered with should be given a rerun.”* (Rule Book, Guidelines for Judges & Conducting Hunt Tests)

Judging Tips associated with the honor portion of the Finished Hunt Test are reported below:

- Safety is a major concern with the honor.
- Keep retrievers working far enough apart so as not to encourage fighting and/or interference.
- Judges should control when the honor dog is excused from the retrieving line.
- One judge should watch the honor dog.
- If another dog interferes with the working dog, stop the test and give the working dog a rerun.
- It is **strongly recommended** that an out of contention dog should be on lead.

## **DELIVERY**

Delivery is the act of returning the bird to the handler. It begins as soon as the dog picks up the bird. There are several aspects associated with this feature of control:

- Delivery of the bird to hand
- Delivery to the immediate vicinity of the handler
- Switching from one bird to another (specifically, dropping one bird and picking up another)
- Excessive mouthing
- Continually dropping the bird
- Hard-mouth

All aspects of delivery apply to all levels of testing except for one exception at the Started level and one at the Seasoned level. The Rulebook states:

*“A retriever that finds the game but either eats it or runs off with it is sometimes worse than no retriever. A retriever should promptly return to the Handler (Handler area in Started) with the bird and deliver it in such a manner as to not risk losing it if it were a cripple or damaging the meat.”* (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers)

The following judgments are made at all levels, beginning with Started:

- A retriever should be marked down for repeated dropping or mouthing of the bird and can be failed if dropping or mouthing is “excessive.” (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers)
- Reluctance to deliver may be considered excessive if, in the Judges opinion, the retriever would not complete the retrieve without continual coaxing from the handler.

### **Delivery at the STARTED Level**

Started Test Rules state:

*“The bird must be delivered to the immediate area of the Handler. It is not necessary to deliver to hand. The Judges should define “immediate area” of each specific test.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Tests – Test Rules).

Started Guidelines go on to state:

*“...Delivery to hand is desirable. Consistent failure to deliver or consistent reluctance to deliver can result in failure.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Tests – Guidelines)

## **Delivery at the SEASONED Level**

Better control is expected at each higher testing level. Evidence of a higher standard for delivery at the seasoned level is made clear in the Rulebook:

*“The bird must be delivered to hand.”* (Rulebook – Seasoned Hunt Tests -- Test Rules)

Some verbal encouragement at this level to get a dog to hold and properly deliver a bird is reasonable. On occasion a Seasoned dog might drop a bird to get a better hold, and the delivery usually continues promptly without handler intervention. Judges should note on their sheets, however, when a dog drops a bird for reasons other than to get a better hold and note the extent the handler has to get involved to get the dog to complete the delivery.

## **Delivery at the FINISHED Level**

The Finished retriever should be willing to pick up each bird and return promptly with it. Little verbal encouragement should be needed at this level to get a dog to hold and properly deliver the birds. The Rulebook includes language regarding delivery:

*“The bird must be delivered to hand.”* (Rulebook -- Finished Hunt Tests --Test Rules)

If a dog drops a number of birds in the tests, it has a delivery problem, and the dog should be marked down. Excessive and consistent lack of delivery should be grounds for failure at the Finished level.

## **Switching**

We evaluate switching because if a retriever drops the bird in its mouth, there is always the possibility it will be lost. The diversion portion of the hunt test is where switching is likely to occur. A definition of “a switch” appears in the Rulebook:

*“A switch is defined as the dog dropping one bird and picking up the other bird.”*  
(Rulebook – Seasoned Hunt Tests -- Guidelines).

## **Seasoned Diversion Bird**

The purpose of diversion portion of the Seasoned test is to require the retriever to demonstrate a reasonable degree of control on the return from a retrieve. Rulebook language regarding the Seasoned diversion bird is cited below:

*“A diversionary bird can be thrown after the walk-up, blind, or last retrieve of a double mark. If a Seasoned Hunting Retriever switches to the diversionary bird, it will not fail but will be scored lower by the Judge. The hunting retriever shall retrieve the diversionary bird.”* (Rulebook – Seasoned Hunt Tests -- Guidelines)

The diversion bird should not be thrown such that it lands too close to the retriever. It is unreasonable to expect a hard driving dog to ignore a bird thrown in its path. The dog should have to go out of its way to switch to the diversion bird. Based on the Rulebook, “*The*

*diversionary bird should be thrown where the dog can see it, but not in its return path.*”(Rulebook – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Guidelines) Other **recommendations** regarding the diversion birds include the following:

- When a diversion is used, it should be thrown where it has the least influence on other parts of the test.
- Judges must make sure there is adequate time for the handler to load the gun and swing to shoot the diversion bird.
- Judges should use more than one diversion bird to discourage bad mouthing habits and flag each bird to help identify it from other birds in the test.
- Handlers should also be advised of the objective of the diversion bird and that it is not judged as a mark. It is acceptable to handle to this bird.

### **Finished Diversion Bird**

The purpose of this test is the same as the Seasoned diversion. However, the Finished retriever must demonstrate more control when a diversion is thrown:

*“...a diversionary bird will be thrown as the Hunting Retriever returns to the retrieving line. If the Hunting Retriever switches to the diversionary bird on the return, it shall fail the test”* (Rule Book – Finished Hunt Tests – Rules).

*“The diversionary bird can be thrown as the dog returns from any retrieve.”* (Rule Book – Finished Hunt Tests – Guidelines)

Recommendations regarding the placement and timing of the Finished diversion are the same as the Seasoned diversion.

### **Hard-mouth**

A retriever who locates down game but either eats it or runs off with it is not a useful hunting companion. Hard-mouth is when the dog willfully and purposely damages the retrieved bird in a manner that renders it unfit for the table. Procedures for evaluation and penalties associated with hard-mouth are reported in the Rulebook:

*“Hard-mouth at any level is grounds for immediate failure; however, a Judge must carefully consider the situation, examine the bird and discuss the matter with the Co-Judge. In any event, the bird in question must be removed from the pool of usable birds. If the retriever is failed for hard-mouth, it should be done at the time and the handler notified. The bird must then be tagged with the retriever's number and saved until the hunt is over.”* (Rule Book – Judging Retrievers -- Delivery)

*“Judges should periodically inspect birds taken from the Handler, especially in the case of a dog suspected of hard mouth.”* (Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests –Guidelines – Finished Hunt Tests – Guidelines)

**Recommendations** regarding the evaluation of hard mouth include the following:

- To be failed for hard mouth, a dog must practically eat the bird. If a dog is to be failed for hard mouth, the judge should peel back the breast skin to properly evaluate the condition of the breast meat. It should be inspected for missing chunks (tooth punctures and cuts are okay).
- Killing a bird is not in itself hard mouth. Remember the definition – “unfit for the table.”
- Caution bird throwers to set aside birds with torn breast or in poor condition.

## **RESPONSE TO DIRECTION – BLIND RETRIEVES**

What does the Rulebook say about response to direction?

*“When a handler chooses to direct their retriever with voice, whistle, and/or hand signals, the retriever should respond. Dogs entered in the Grand Hunt test will be judged much harder than Upland Hunter, Finished or Seasoned, but in all cases, excessive refusals by the retriever can result in failure. The judges must decide in each test what is excessive.”*(Rulebook –Judging Retrievers)

Unlike marking and memory, where all dogs are basically judged the same on going directly to the area of the fall (AOF) and initiating a hunt, control is judged more on a scale depending on what level they are being judged. For example, we prefer not to judge a Started dog for handling. Seasoned dogs are going to be allowed more mistakes than a Finished dog and so on.

Blind retrieves are independent tests meaning they are judged in a category all their own. When a retriever has completed the blind retrieve, judges have a box to check; Pass – Fail – Marginal. It should benefit judges to understand what goes into executing and judging blinds at all levels.

Judges are looking for the retriever to respond to whistle and directional control and for the handler to participate in the retrieve when necessary. The retriever who exhibits no ability to take an initial line, and no willingness to respond to directional commands, but stumbles on the bird, has not met the objectives of the test. Consider the scenario below:

Imagine a blind set up where the retrieving line is south on a compass and the blind is due north. Once the dog is cast, assume it veers to the left (west) and gets off-line causing the handler to blow a whistle. Judges must assume the handler blew the whistle so as to improve the dog’s position in order to successfully retrieve the blind.

The judge is now looking for the dog to do one of three things: either the dog improves its position toward the target, or it improves its position toward the original north/south line to the blind or the dog comes toward the handler. The dog should not continue in the same direction prior to the handler blowing the whistle.

## Recommendations that Apply to All Blind Retrieves

- Blinds should be placed downwind whenever possible. Every effort should be made to avoid running a blind into the wind.
- The blind should be placed where handlers have an adequate opportunity to see and control their dogs.
- The judge should avoid placing the blind where a dog that gets only a few yards off-line can go out of sight easily.
- The handlers should be told to cast their dogs toward the blind. Asking that the dog take a good initial line is not the same as requiring them to run a predefined route or channel. A handler is expected to run a blind so as not to “cheat” the intended line to the blind.
- When a retriever “winds” a blind bird, it should have been handled to that position where it winded the bird. The retriever should be scored lower if it was ignoring whistles and casts.
- Judges should understand the difference between literal and improvement casting.
- Judges should be able to differentiate a scallop from a cast refusal.
- Judges should consider the retriever’s recovery when responding to directional control away from factors.
- If the blind is included in one of the multiple marked retrieves, the judge must understand how other elements in the test can affect the retriever’s performance on the blind.

## **Factors/Distractions/Suction within any Blind Retrieve**

As mentioned earlier, judges should judge **recovery from factors** placed within the test. These “factors” become more prevalent in Finished due to distance and more permissive opportunities to find/create distractions. Listed below are several factors/distractions judges can use to make lining a blind more difficult:

- Diversions
- Old falls
- Use of points in water or points of high cover on land
- Angle water entries
- Cover – tall grass, thick grass or vegetation, trees, fallen trees, rocks etc.
- Cover changes – short grass to tall grass, land to water, water to land etc.
- Terrain - roads, creeks/ditches, hill sides etc.
- Wind

## **Evaluating SEASONED Blind Retrieves**

Based on the Rule Book, the Seasoned test will have "... a blind land retrieve and ... a blind water retrieve (Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Description). The maximum distances of blind retrieves are clarified in the Rulebook:

*"The land blind retrieve maximum test distance will not exceed sixty (60) yards. The water blind retrieve maximum test distance will not exceed sixty (60) yards."*  
(Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests -- Rules)

The Rule Book also provides language associated with procedures for setting up and executing the blind portion of the Seasoned test:

*"Blind retrieves should be through **easy cover** and **relatively open water**."*  
(Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests -- Rules)

Careful consideration must be given to **Setting up Seasoned blinds**.

**Recommendations** include the following:

- This is a separate test, so a primary consideration should be given to the location. The blind **should have no influence** on any other part of the Seasoned test.
- The Seasoned marks, walk-up or diversion bird should have no influence on the Seasoned blind, and the blind should have no influence on the marks, walk-up or diversion.
- Judges should avoid setting up water blinds with tight angles to the bank. A well-planned blind placement should encourage the Seasoned retriever to take a good initial line.
- Handlers will be provided a gun stand if the diversion is thrown during the dog's return from the blind.

"Reasonable control" is the standard applied at the Seasoned level. This concept is clarified in the Rule Book:

*"The standards of control and performance on blinds for Seasoned dogs are less than that for Finished and Grand. Less control and more whistle and cast refusals can be accepted for the Seasoned dogs as compared to more advanced categories."* (Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Guidelines)

*"Sitting on the whistle is not a necessity, but Seasoned dogs should demonstrate the capability to respond to directional control."* (Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests– Guidelines)

*“Lining the blind is not required. It is preferable that the dog exhibit the ability to be under control.”* (Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Guidelines)

On the other hand, it is perfectly acceptable for a retriever to line the blind retrieve.

*“Popping, (looking to the handler for direction without a signal), shall not be penalized.”* (Rule Book – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Guidelines)

## **Evaluating FINISHED Blind Retrieves**

Responding to voice, whistle and directional commands is often evaluated in the performance of blind retrieves. The Finished test description in the Rulebook clarifies that a water blind retrieve and a land blind retrieve are required elements of the Finished test:

*“The Finished Hunt will have ... (3) a water blind retrieve, and (4) a land blind retrieve. These blinds may or may not be included in one of the required multiple marked retrieves. Part of the test must include a diversion as the dog returns to the retrieving line from a blind, walk-up or return from any retrieve.”* (Rulebook – Finished Hunt Tests – Description)

*“The blind retrieve maximum test distance will not exceed one 100 yards.”* (Rulebook --Finished Hunt Tests – Rules)

“Finished Level Control” is the standard applied to evaluating performance in Finished Test blind retrieves. Additional language regarding control and response to direction expected of Finished retrievers is cited in the Rulebook:

*“The Finished Hunting Retriever must respond promptly to either voice or whistle commands and remain steady and under control at all times. The Finished Hunting Retriever should be a pleasure to hunt with under any condition.”* (Rulebook --Finished Hunt Tests -- Purpose and Philosophy)

*“The Finished Hunting Retriever should demonstrate a prompt and precise response to all voice, whistle and directional commands.”* (Rulebook --Finished Hunt Tests -- Rules)

*“The Finished Hunting Retriever should demonstrate the ability to take an initial line toward the blind and a willingness and ability to respond to the commands from the handler.”* (Rulebook --Finished Hunt Tests -- Rules)

*“The Finished Hunting Retriever must stay under control and pick up the bird quickly and efficiently.”* (Rulebook --Finished Hunt Tests -- Rules)

*“Lining the blind is not required.”* (Rulebook --Finished Hunt Tests -- Rules)

On the other hand, it is perfectly acceptable for a retriever to line the blind retrieve.



*“The judge will not require the retriever to run a predefined route or channel.”*  
(Rulebook --Finished Hunt Tests -- Rules)

A predefined route or channel is a specific track or course the judge is requiring the retriever to run.

The following **Recommendations** are intended to assist judges with Finished blind setup and evaluation:

- Judges should advise handlers of the objective of the blind and that they must demonstrate Finished level control.
- If a dog gets out of control at any point in the blind retrieve, it has failed the test. Out of control is evidenced by ignoring or failing to comply promptly and precisely to voice, whistle, and directional commands.
- Judges should consider the retriever’s **recovery** when responding to directional control away from factors.
- Judges should place blind birds where handlers have an adequate opportunity to see and control their dogs.
- The judge should ask handlers to cast their dogs toward the blind. Asking that the dog to take a good initial line is not the same as requiring them to run a predefined route or channel.
- If the blind is included in one of the marked retrieves, understand how other elements in the test can affect the retriever’s performance on the blind.

## Chapter 5

# MARKING AND MEMORY

In the preceding chapters, desirable traits of a hunting retriever were identified with elaboration for judging retrievers on the traits of desire, style, nose, and control. This chapter is devoted to the trait of marking and memory. For the average hunter, most of the birds a retriever will pick up are marked retrieves. A dog that is proficient at marking shot birds (falls) and demonstrates a good memory on multiple falls is a pleasure to hunt with and will pick up a high percentage of downed game. This chapter addresses the trait of marking and memory and how judges are to evaluate this trait. The following information applies to all categories, Started through Finished unless otherwise indicated.

## ELEMENTS OF MARKING AND MEMORY

Judges are expected to judge the retriever's marking and memory ability. The trait of marking and memory is cited in the Rulebook in the section entitled "Judging Retrievers":

*"The Judge must score on whether the retriever truly marked and remembered the bird, or if it merely stumbled upon it while wildly running around the field. Also, a retriever that must be handled to a marked fall does not demonstrate marking ability. Serious faults, which would be grounds for failure, would include:*

- 1. Failure to find a bird;*
- 2. Throwing an object to aid the dog; and*
- 3. Excessive handling to marks that the retriever should have seen.*

*The Judge should score a retriever lower for poor marking, repeated handling on marks, leaving the hunt area, and disturbing too much cover." (Rulebook – Judging Retrievers- Marking Ability and Memory)*

The Rulebook provides a description of marking:

*"This is a test designed to assess the ability of the dog to follow the flight of the shot bird to the area of the fall, and its ability to go directly to the area of the fall, retrieve the bird and return it to the Handler." (Rulebook - Guidelines – Judging Started Hunt Tests)*

Memory is a term generally used when discussing multiple marks. Webster defines memory as "the period over which remembering extends." For our purpose, memory is the ability to remember the direction and distance of a fallen bird. After a retriever has completed its first retrieve, subsequent marks are "memory" birds.

## **EVALUATING MARKING**

The capacity to evaluate marking is connected to the test set up. When setting up the marking portion of a hunt test, **judges must remember that the retriever must have the opportunity to see the bird**. Started dogs are evaluated for marking ability with single retrieves. Marking tests increase in difficulty at each successive testing level because of increased distances, multiple birds, more difficult cover and terrain, and distractions or other factors in the test.

However, to show they have successfully marked the bird(s) at each test, retrievers at every level must demonstrate the same basic skill, which will be evaluated in the same manner. Therefore, Seasoned, Finished, and Grand dogs are all evaluated for marking ability exactly the same way a Started dog is judged on marking. Skills a retriever must perform when marking a fall are as follows:

1. Follow the flight of the shot bird to the area of the fall;
2. Proceed directly to the area of the fall;
3. Establish a hunt for the bird in the area of the fall without aid from the handler; and
4. Find and retrieve the bird.

The retriever's ability to perceive the line and distance of the falls will be evaluated while the retriever is attempting to pick up the marks. In order to evaluate these aspects of the retriever's performance, an understanding of the term "**Area of the Fall**" (AOF) is essential. A definition of AOF follows:

The **Area of the Fall** is an imaginary area where the bird has fallen.

Figure 5.1 is a display of the AOF concept. The Rulebook states:

*"The area of the fall shall be left to the Judge's discretion in their consideration of the test and cover, based on the terrain and type of game hunted, but the following should be considered:*

- 1. Is there a clear field of vision for the dog to see the mark?*
- 2. Was the dog attentive at the line?*
- 3. Does the dog react to the attention-getting devices?*
- 4. Did the dog proceed directly to the area of the fall?*
- 5. Did the dog hunt the area of the fall?"*

(Rulebook – Guidelines – Judging Started Hunt Tests)

The area of the fall is a very subjective measure of distance and may be influenced by several factors such as the following:

- Distance to the fall
- Cover change
- Wind/Weather Conditions
- Slope of terrain
- Obstacles in the retriever's path
- Dog's view of the area from the retrieving line
- Landmarks in the field
- Order in which the birds are thrown and retrieved (is it a go bird or a memory bird?)

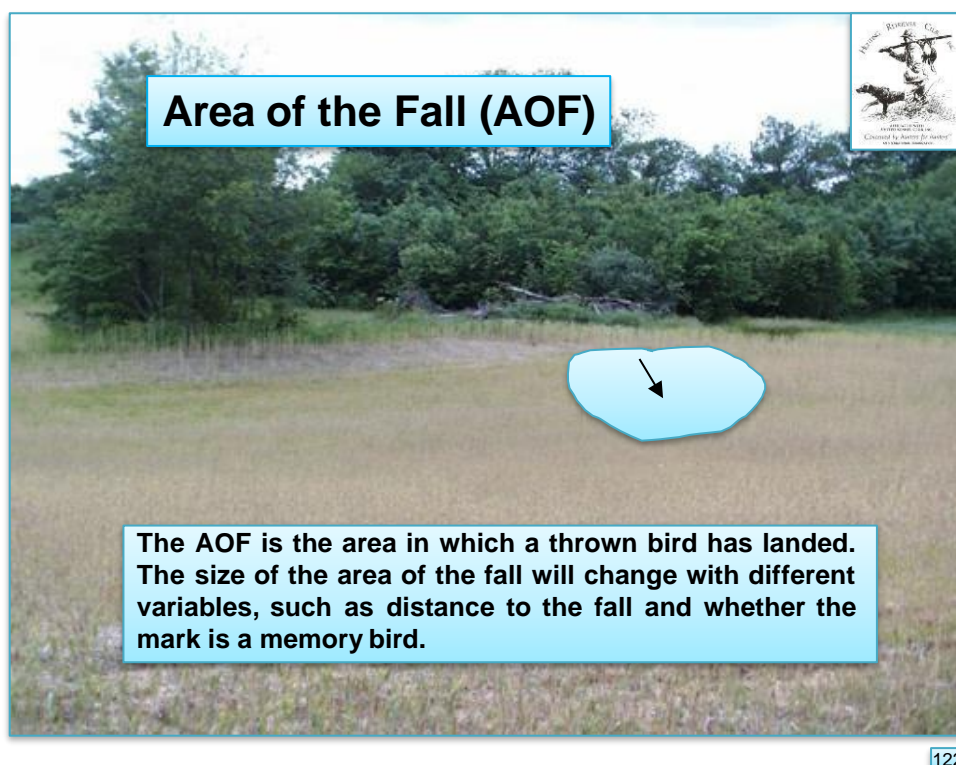
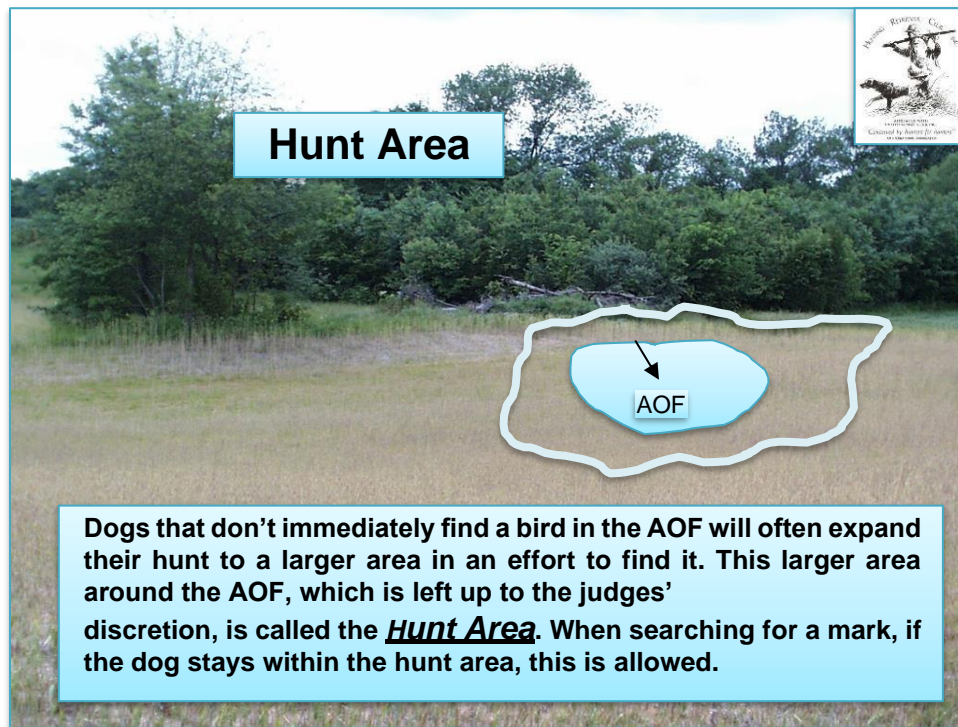


Figure 5.1. Area of the Fall.

As indicated earlier in the Rulebook description of Marking and Memory, the judge should score the retriever lower for leaving the **Hunt Area (HA)**, which is defined as

*“An area that is larger than the Area of the Fall and is that area where the retriever is expected to remain while attempting to find the bird.”*

The retriever should stay in the Hunt Area after establishing a hunt for the bird in the Area of the Fall. Figure 5.2 is a display of the Hunt Area concept.



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Figure 5.2. Hunt Area

What is meant by “**proceed directly to the area of the fall**”? The dog should not initiate a hunt for the bird until it reaches the AOF. It should not run about the test site hunting elsewhere until it comes upon bird scent in the AOF. If the retriever establishes a hunt before reaching the area of the fall or moves through the AOF and HA without searching for the bird (establishing a hunt), the retriever has not demonstrated an essential attribute associated with marking.

## Handling on Marks

The matter of “handling on marks” is addressed in the Rulebook for each category of retrievers tested. The Started and Seasoned test language is as follows:

*“The dog is being tested for its marking ability, not handling. However, a clean handle is preferable to an extended hunt.”* (Rulebook – Guidelines – Judging Started Test Tests – Guidelines Judging Seasoned Hunt Tests)

The language associated with handling on marks for the Finished category is similar:

*“The dog is being tested for its marking ability, and handling. However, a clean handle is preferable to an extended hunt.”* (Rulebook, Guidelines – Judging Finished Hunt Tests)

Judges are expected to evaluate the retriever's ability to mark and remember falls. It is not the intent of the statement, *“a clean handle is preferable to an extended hunt,”* to allow a retriever to be handled from the line to the mark. The intent of allowing handling on marks is to expedite the completion of the retrieve.

If the retriever does not reach the hunt area or begins to leave the hunt area, the handler has to make one of two choices:

1. Handle the dog to the bird, or
2. Recall the dog and send it for the mark again (not allowed in Finished).

The Rulebook is clear that excessive handling on marks may result in failure:

*“Should excessive handling or noise occur, which in the opinion of the judges would disturb the hunt, then at the judge’s discretion, they may declare failure of the test.”*  
(Rulebook – Guidelines – Judging Started Hunt Tests – Guidelines – Judging Seasoned Hunt Tests – Guidelines – Judging Finished Hunt Tests).

Once the handler begins handling on a mark, it is the handler’s responsibility to handle the dog all the way to the mark rather than to an area where the handler might yell “hunt it up.” Once handling begins, the evaluation of marking ceases and an evaluation of control begins.

If the retriever is **assessed a mark down for handling to the AOF on two or more marked falls, the retriever should be failed for excessive handling on marks** the retriever should have seen.

Many Judges record on their score sheets if a retriever is handled **“to”** the AOF or **“in”** the AOF to help determine if a markdown for lack of marking or memory is warranted.

Understanding the difference between “handled to” and “handled in” the AOF is an important distinction in the evaluation of marking. If the retriever handles poorly, with multiple cast and whistle refusals, it would possibly be failed for **“lack of control.”** not because it handled on the bird. As stated earlier, a judge cannot judge a dog it cannot see. Therefore, if the dog stays out of site for any length of time, it is going to receive a markdown. Judges should allow enough area around a fall for the handler to see what the retriever is doing.

Judges should note the order birds are thrown and retrieved.

### **Considerations – Handling on Marks**

There are many factors that judges should consider in association with handling on marks. For example, **scenting conditions** may vary as the test progresses due to the following:

1. Changes in wind speed and/or direction;
2. Moisture;
3. Number of birds thrown in an area; and
4. The condition of the birds.

**Cover** is another factor that can influence marking. Dense heavy cover generally makes it more difficult for the retriever to cleanly mark the fall, proceed directly to the area of the fall and establish a hunt. Not only is it more difficult for a dog to cleanly pick up a retrieve in heavy cover, but handlers will usually be quicker to handle to keep the dog closer to the bird.

Are “**distractions**” present in the marking test that might have caused the dog to be handled? Distractions could include:

1. Barriers that make proceeding directly to the AOF more difficult;
2. A designated order in which the birds are to be retrieved;
3. An AOF that is partly behind a hill or obstacle (not recommended); and
4. The “suction” created by old falls, or birds not yet retrieved, or cross wind conditions causing a dog to “honor” its nose.

Judges should consider how efficiently the retriever “recovers” in the presence of distractions.

### **Re-casting on Marks**

The concept of re-casting in the marking and memory portion of a hunt test requires clarification. What is a re-cast (sometimes called “multiple casting”)? Re-casting entails calling the retriever back to the line and then sending again on the same bird. The bird is not thrown again but rather sent to search, locate and retrieve the bird that was initially thrown.

Started and Seasoned hunt test rules permit the retriever to be cast from the retrieving line a maximum of two times per bird. Its purpose is to allow the handler to re-call and re-cast the retriever if it takes a poor line or becomes confused in the field. **The use of a re-cast does not eliminate the performance of the first cast. If the retriever is unsuccessful on the second attempt, the test is failed. The rule to allow a recast “per bird” does not insinuate re-casting on two or more marks is an acceptable performance. It’s intended to allow a re-cast on a mark, blind, walk-up, or diversion.**

In the Finished hunt test, the retriever can be cast from the retrieving line only once for each bird. Re-casting is not permitted at the Finished category.

## JUDGING RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended to assist judges in the evaluation of marking and memory:

- A dog that is handled to the AOF has either not marked the bird or cannot remember where it fell. It should be marked down for “lack of marking and memory.”
- Remember – to demonstrate that the dog marked a bird successfully, it must perform the following two tasks:
  1. Go directly to the AOF and
  2. Establish a hunt for the bird in the AOF both without aid and/or intervention from the handler.
- Running all over the test site, and/or hunting in places other than the HA, (i.e., essentially stumbling into the AOF or onto the bird), cannot be considered going directly to the AOF or properly marking the bird. The retriever should be marked down for “lack of marking and memory” on this bird.
- A dog that is stopped by a whistle while running through the AOF has not demonstrated it has marked the bird. It should be marked down for “lack of marking and memory.”
- Did the retriever diligently and persistently hunt for the bird? If a retriever performs the required elements of marking and memory and diligently hunts for the bird in the area of the fall, the retriever **SHOULD NOT BE MARKED DOWN** if it is subsequently handled to complete the retrieve!
- If the retriever does not adequately hunt the bird in the hunt area or the retriever is quick to leave the hunt area, the retriever should be assessed a mark down.
- Judges should ask themselves: “Why did this retriever need to be handled on the mark?”
- Are there legitimate reasons for the dog to be handled, or did the retriever simply not mark, remember, or diligently hunt for the bird?



## **STARTED Marking Test**

Started dogs are evaluated for their natural marking ability with single retrieves. The Rulebook provides clear and descriptive language about the marking and memory portion of the Started hunt test:

*“The Started Hunt will have four tests. Two tests shall be marked water retrieves. Two tests will be marked land retrieves.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Tests – Description)

*“The maximum land test distance **will not exceed seventy-five (75) yards** but may be less. The maximum water test distance **will not exceed sixty (60) yards** but may be less.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Test – Test Rules)

*“Only one bird is allowed per mark.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Tests – Test Rules)

*“On consecutive singles from the same retrieving line, the line to the falls should not be less than 90 degrees.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Tests – Test Rules)

*“When Bird Boys and Gunners are hidden, an attention getting shot or shots may be used or a duck or goose call must be used before the birds are thrown.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Tests – Test Rules)

*“Shot flyers shall not be used in the started class.”* (Rulebook – Started Hunt Tests – Test Rules)

The following is a typical step-by-step process through a Started single mark:

1. On the line: Dog is brought to the retrieving line on lead. The handler holds dog and signals when ready. The dog alerts to an attention getting device from bird thrower. The dog sees bird thrown and watches bird land in the area of the fall.
2. Marking: Dog is released to retrieve and proceeds directly towards the bird, reaches area of the fall, and establishes a hunt for the bird on its own in the area of the fall.
3. Completing the Retrieve: Dog finds the bird, picks it up and begins to return to the handler. The dog brings bird back to immediate area of handler.

While rare, dogs that have “marked” a bird well can still have problems finding it. Most common reasons a Started dog that has “marked” a bird cannot find it are:

- At a land test – the bird has landed in heavy cover in the AOF
- At a water test – the duck is sitting too low in the water, or has drifted off
- The dog does not diligently hunt for the bird in the AOF

## **SEASONED Marking Test**

Double marks are thrown at both land and water in Seasoned Hunt Test. The test description for the Seasoned Hunt Test as cited in the Rulebook is reported below:

### *“TEST DESCRIPTION:*

*“The Seasoned hunt will have five (5) tests. These five tests shall consist of at least the following: (1) a double-marked land retrieve, (2) a double-marked water retrieve, (3) a walk-up, (4) a blind land retrieve, and (5) a blind water retrieve. Part of the test must include a diversion. The hunt areas cannot overlap, nor can the retriever be expected to run through one hunt area to proceed directly to the hunt area of another mark”. (Rulebook – Seasoned Hunt Tests – Description)*

Seasoned marks are limited to **100 yards or less on land** and **75 yards or less on water**. Attention getting devices at this level are optional. Although the distances are increased slightly from Started and double marks are thrown at both land and water, the Seasoned dog must demonstrate the same marking skills as a Started retriever on each bird it retrieves in the test. The dog must proceed directly to the AOF of each mark, establish a hunt for the bird on its own, and return with the thrown bird. The dog must then demonstrate memory of the remaining memory bird, proceed directly to the AOF, establish a hunt, and return with the thrown bird.

The standard for judging marking and memory does not change from Started to Seasoned, what changes is the distance and cover which makes the marks a little more difficult.

Judges should record the order of the retrieves on their score sheets. Handling to the AOF on a mark should result in a markdown for a lack of marking and memory. **If a Seasoned retriever receives a markdown for lack of marking and memory on two or more retrieves for the day, the dog should be failed for lack of marking and memory skills.**

## **Test Set up Considerations for the Seasoned Hunt Test**

When judge's set up the marking memory portion of the Seasoned Hunt Test, consideration should be given to the following:

- The Seasoned double marked retrieving test should be conducted with no distractions or interference from any other part of the test! During set up, the judges should pay close attention to placement of the diversion bird, blind and walk-up so they do not interfere with the marking test or each other.
- When bird boys are hidden, Seasoned judges may use an attention getting shot or shots or a duck or goose call before the birds are thrown.
- There should be adequate time between throws to allow the dog to mark and remember the first bird, and swing toward the second bird before it is thrown and for the handler to operate the gun.

- **Visible gunners** may be used no more than once in the event the same as Started.
- Seasoned hunt test rules permit the retriever to be **cast from the retrieving line a maximum of two times per bird.**
- The **area of the falls (AOF)** of a Seasoned double mark should be well defined. Judges should not throw birds near areas of heavy cover or terrain where a Seasoned dog that is staying in a hunt area could easily disappear. Remember, if a mark is thrown on top of a hill, a portion of the area of the fall is over the hill and may be out of sight. This should be avoided during set up.
- Fall areas must be well separated and not overlap. Throws must be far enough apart so as not to entice a Seasoned dog to switch hunt areas from one mark to the other.
- The swing between birds should not be so great as to promote undesirable movement by the Seasoned dog at the line.

## **FINISHED Marking Test**

As in the Started and Seasoned hunt tests, the Finished hunt test includes a marking and memory portion. The description of the Finished hunt test as cited in the Rulebook appears below:

*“TEST DESCRIPTION:*

*“The Finished Hunt will have at least four (4) tests. These four tests shall consist of the following: 1) a triple marked water retrieve, 2) a triple marked land retrieve (either or both the multiple marked water retrieve, or the multiple marked land retrieve must include an honor), 3) a water blind retrieve, and 4) a land blind retrieve. These blinds may or may not be included in one of the required multiple marked retrieves. Part of the test must include a diversion as the dog returns to the retrieving line from a blind, walk-up or return from a marked retrieve.” (Rulebook – Finished Hunt Tests - Description)*

Finished marks are limited to **150 yards or less on land and 125 yards or less on water.** Attention getting devices are optional, but recasts are not allowed in Finished. The objective of the marking and memory portion of the Finished Hunt Test is to evaluate the Finished dog’s ability to retrieve multiple marks on both land and water. The Finished test description uses the term “multiple marks” to describe the land and water marking tests. Item V of the Finished Test Rules provides clarification of the term “multiple marks”:

*“Testing will consist of triple marks for both land and water.” (Rulebook – Finished Hunt Tests)*

HRC judges agree that when terrain, cover, and distances used are appropriate to the Finished level, a set of triple marks that meets the criteria above is the correct way to evaluate Finished marking and memory skills. It puts the burden of demonstrating marking ability squarely on the shoulders of the handler and dog team.

Standards for evaluating marking and memory of Started and Seasoned dogs are applied in the Finished hunt test – proceed directly to the AOF, establish a hunt in the AOF without aid of the handler, locate the downed bird and return to the handler. What makes these retrievers stand above the rest are the additional distance, additional bird and wide variety of cover used to test the dogs.

If a Finished retriever receives a markdown for lack of marking on two or more retrieves for the day, the dog should be failed for lack of marking skills. This recommendation assumes of course that the birds were visible, adequate timing was allowed between throws for the retriever to mark and remember the falls, and the fall areas were distinct, and the retriever can find the birds in the fall areas. The recommendation also assumes the retriever was allowed to pick up the triple mark uninterrupted.

## Test Set up Considerations for the Finished Hunt Test

There are other factors that set Finished marking apart from a Seasoned marking test besides adding an extra memory bird. Some of these factors that warrant the consideration of judges are cited in the Rulebook:

*“At the judge’s discretion, the Finished hunting retriever may be required to make retrieves in an established sequence.”* (Rulebook – Finished Hunt Tests Rules)

*“A diversion bird is required as the dog returns to the retrieving line from a blind, walk-up or return **from any marked retrieve.**”* (Rulebook – Finished Hunt Tests Rules)

*“Blinds may or may not be included in one of the required multiple marked retrieves.”* (Rulebook - Finished Hunt Tests - Description)

*“When Bird Boys and Gunners are hidden, an attention getting shot or shots may be used, or a duck or goose call may be used before the birds are thrown.”* (Rulebook – Finished Hunt Tests – Rules – Item X)

Some other factors associated with Finished test set up that are not cited in the Rulebook but worthy of consideration include:

- Obstacles like fallen timber, brush piles, cover and terrain changes, roads and ditches are factors that may make it more difficult for the dog to meet the marking and memory standard.
- Marks that require the dog to traverse through old fall areas, dense cover and poison birds can also influence marking and memory.

As more factors like these are included in a test, greater demand is placed on the dog’s memory of fallen birds. Judges should consider recovery in the presence of these distractions.

## **Chapter 6**

# **UPLAND HUNT TESTS**

The upland hunt test is intended to evaluate the usefulness of the upland retriever as a hunting companion in upland hunting conditions that could be encountered anywhere in the country.

The successful completion of these tests leads to the Upland Hunter title (UH). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss upland hunting tests. The following are addressed: eligibility, purpose and philosophy, test elements, calling a “No Bird”, safety considerations, and clothing.

## **ELIGIBILITY, PURPOSE, AND PHILOSOPHY**

Based on the Rulebook, a purebred dog of an eligible breed of any age or gender may participate in the upland hunt tests. These tests are established primarily for the flushing breeds such as retrievers and spaniels. It is not necessary to have earned championship points in any other regular hunt test category prior to participating in an upland hunt test. However, upland hunt tests are conducted according to the rules established in the Rulebook for the Finished Hunting Retriever when evaluating the standards of control throughout this test.

Upland hunt tests attempt to replicate actual upland hunting conditions that can be found throughout the country. Judges evaluate the skillfulness of the upland retriever in the conditions associated with hunting upland game birds.

To pass an upland hunting test, the upland retriever must accomplish the required tasks with accuracy and style. Judges are looking for both natural ability and a trained performance. The upland retriever must respond promptly to either voice or whistle commands and remain steady and under control at all times. The upland retriever should be a pleasure to hunt.

## **TEST ELEMENTS**

There are three required elements in the upland hunt test. The required elements are walk-up, quartering, and honor. Tracking is also optional.

### **Simulated Upland Walk-up Test**

This test is to simulate a hunter sneaking up on resting birds to get a flush and shot. A dog that runs ahead or has to be loudly controlled will most likely scare off the birds before the hunter can get within gun range. The upland retriever must remain under reasonable control when it is walking into a hunting scenario. Rulebook language clarifies the expectation of the upland retriever:

*“The Judge should look for the dog that walks attentively at heel and does not have to be loudly reminded to stay in position.” (Rulebook – Guidelines for Judging Upland Hunt Tests)*

During this test, a bird is thrown or released while the dog is walking at heel. As the handler approaches the flushing area, the bird is released. The handler shoots a popper at the simulated flushing bird. The dog is to remain steady through the shot or shots. Once the bird is on the ground, the handler may release the dog to make the retrieve of this bird. The dog should pick up the bird and promptly deliver it to hand. Live shot flyers or dead birds may be used during the Upland walk-up test. If live birds are used, only approved gunners may shoot live ammo.

The judge should look for the dog that walks attentively at heel and does not have to be loudly reminded to stay in position. It is not necessary for the dog to sit when the bird is flushed or released, but it should not leave the retrieving line before being commanded to do so. The retrieving line in the walk-up test is the point where the handler and dog are when the bird is flushed. Judges must decide if the retriever is demonstrating a Finished level of control.

If the dog were off-lead walking into a dove field or a pheasant field, it would be expected to stay with the handler without noisy or frequent restraint. The retriever will be evaluated for steadiness exactly as it is on the retrieving line. A dog will be failed for breaking and may be failed for a controlled break. The walk-up bird must be retrieved to hand unless a flyaway is produced that is un-retrievable.

Handlers may talk to the retriever without verbally intimidating it or disturbing the hunt. Handlers may use the whistle or voice commands to steady the dog. However, handler involvement to stop forward progress of the dog may be considered a controlled break. Handlers should be reminded if the dog creeps forward past the muzzle of the shotgun, the dog must be re-called to heel position before being sent.

Recommendations for setting up the walk-up test include:

- The dog should be able to walk a sufficient distance before the walk-up bird is thrown so the judges are satisfied they can properly evaluate its ability to remain under reasonable Finished control while walking off lead.
- The handler should be informed of the area where the walk-up bird will be thrown. It is suggested that a double set of ribbons be marked, and handlers informed that the **walk-up bird will be launched when the dog and handler are somewhere between the two marked spots on the ground.** This will permit the bird to be launched when judges have the best opportunity to fairly evaluate each dog's performance.
- Judges should find a way to call for the bird without having to loudly yell, “There goes one!” from behind the dog. The yell may startle the dog and contribute to a performance that is difficult to judge.
- There should be sufficient distance from the dog to the landing area of the bird so as not to entice the Upland dog to break.

- The bird should be thrown high enough to give handlers a chance to steady the dog, then shoulder, aim and shoot at the escaping bird.
- The handler and dog should be walking toward the landing area of the walk-up bird when it is thrown. Handlers may have difficulty watching the dog and seeing a bird thrown from the side. Birds that fall well to the side of the dog and handlers' path may encourage the dog to reposition itself and promote unsteadiness. The dog should see the walk-up bird as it falls to the ground!
- It's recommended that judges not call for the release of the dog on the Walk-up, but to advise handlers the dog can be sent only after the bird is on the ground and the dog is in the heel position.

## **Upland Quartering Test**

This test is to simulate a day of Upland hunting in the field. Based on the Rulebook

*“The dog should be eager to hunt all available cover diligently and be under control. The intent of the quartering test is not to demonstrate running a pattern, but to demonstrate a natural tendency to hunt under control.”* (Rulebook – Upland Hunt Test – Test Rules)

The dog must first demonstrate the ability to search for game before continuing the test. Ideally the dog would hunt 10 to 30 yards to the front of the handler. The dog must demonstrate the ability to search for game under Finished level control responding to commands eagerly and accurately. If the dog will not leave the handler's side or only hunts the field after excessive and frequent commands from the handler to demonstrate the ability to search for game, the test will be failed at this point.

The dog should hunt the available cover on its own without continual coaxing by the handler. The Rulebook provides clarification regarding the use of hand voice and whistle commands:

*“Hand, voice, or whistle commands are acceptable to begin the dog hunting, change the dog's direction or hunt areas, or keep the dog in gun range. However, a markdown should occur, and the test may be failed if the dog is directed by the Handler for every change of direction and to every patch of cover.”* (Rulebook – Guidelines for Judging Hunt Tests)

Once the dog has demonstrated its ability to search for game, the dog is required to hunt the field in the attempt to find birds. In general, the dog should use its nose to hunt the cover, with eyes attentive, ears erect and tail up. Once the bird is located, the dog is expected to flush the bird and remain steady throughout the flush and shot. Once the bird is on the ground, the dog is then expected to retrieve the shot bird to hand.

The handler will work the Upland dog into the planting areas so as to search for the planted birds. The handler should be informed of the area to search and how to proceed while searching for the planted birds. It is suggested that ribbon markers be placed in the quartering field as guide makers to aid the handlers on how to proceed through the field.

These guides allow the handler to bring the Upland dog into the wind as conditions may change throughout the event while allowing the best opportunity to fairly evaluate each dog's performance. Once the Upland dog finds the bird, it is **expected to flush the bird** into the air. The dog must actively participate in the flush to receive credit for the flush. A bird that flushes wildly out of the view of the dog due to nervousness of the bird or noise on the part of the handler shall not be counted.

The dog that will not readily flush the bird or one that has to be continually coaxed in order to obtain a proper flush has not demonstrated the desirable traits necessary to obtain the Upland title. This is a flushing test of natural ability, not a handling test such as that used during a blind retrieve.

Care should be taken to keep the handler a sufficient distance away from the planted bird and dog being tested to avoid the handler inadvertently flushing the planted bird. Each dog must be presented a minimum of two birds to flush in the quartering test.

After the flush, the dog must demonstrate Finished level control. The Rulebook language specific to steadiness at the flush ("**Steady to Wing**") is cited below:

*"After the flush is made the dog should come to a stop on its own or on command from the Handler. It is not necessary for the dog to sit, but it should come to a stop within a reasonable distance after the flush to allow the Handler and gunners a clean and safe shot. A dog that does not stop on the Handlers whistle or voice command should be assessed a markdown for a refusal, the severity of which will be determined by the conditions of the test and the individual flush. For example, a dog that is merely repositioning or moving out of heavy cover to mark the fall better, and then stops on its own or on command, should not be marked down. Any subsequent refusals by the dog to stop will place the dog in increasing jeopardy of failure."* (Rulebook – Guidelines for Judging Upland Hunt Tests)

The dog is expected to remain **steady to the shot** or shots fired at the flushed bird. The evaluation of "steady to shot" begins the instant the dog comes to a complete stop and the handler fires a popper. The dog is to remain steady until the shot bird has fallen to the ground. In the case of a fly away, the dog is to remain steady until given a signal from the judges to re-heel the dog and continue hunting.

Any handler involvement to stop a dog from attempting to retrieve a downed bird or chase an escaping bird, or handler involvement prior to the judges calling for a re-heel, will be considered a controlled break. Based on the Rulebook

*"A Controlled Break will result if the dog stops after the flush, then leaves, before being sent by the Handler, to retrieve the downed bird or chase a fly away bird, and then is stopped by the Handler."* (Rulebook – Guidelines for Judging Upland Hunt Tests)

A dog may be failed for a controlled break and will be failed for a break.



In the case of a fly away, when instructed by the judges to re-heel the dog, it is possible the dog may take off on the first sound from anyone. This action should not be penalized once the timeline for steadiness has been met and there shall be no mark down from that point for a dog that inadvertently leaves with the attempt to retrieve. The dog must, however, remain under control and return immediately to the handler on command. Failure to immediately respond to the handler's command will result in a markdown for lack of control and may result in a failure of the test.

To fulfill the quartering requirement at the completion of each of the two required flushed birds, the dog must immediately return to hunting more game. The dog must demonstrate the ability to be under control and return to hunting after each bird was either shot and retrieved or missed as in a fly away. To perform this act, it is recommended that the handler turn and quarter the dog away from the last escaping bird or flyaway in order to give the dog the best opportunity for success. If the dog then bolts in an effort to chase a fly away and does not immediately engage in hunting the field, the test would be failed at this point.

Care should be taken in setting up the quartering test. The following recommendations are provided:

- The dog should quarter a sufficient distance before entering the area where the birds are planted.
- Natural flushes are the preferred testing method. Rulebook language specific to the natural flush is cited below:

*"In all cases a natural flush is preferred to the use of traps, pens, cages, or other devices designed to contain and release birds during the quartering test. However, when conditions exist that prohibit the use of natural flushes (e.g., weather, poor birds, insufficient cover, etc.), such devices may be utilized but must be sufficiently camouflaged. When such devices must be used, the live bird is released (or thrown) in full view of the dog."* (Rulebook – Upland Hunt Test - Upland Hunt Test Rules)

- It is the **responsibility of the club to understand this rule and to make every effort to purchase the proper quality of birds in order to produce natural flushes** for this event. Traps, cages, or other devices should be only used as a last resort after all other means of natural flushes have been exhausted. As with a regular hunt test where quality ducks are required, the same principles should be applied to the upland hunt test.

A few set up birds should be used in the quartering area to put scent on the ground to help the early dogs to begin to demonstrate their quartering technique.

The birds should be planted in cover that is neither too dense nor too sparse. Cover that is head height to the game bird being used is generally appropriate. Cover that is too tall or dense for birds to escape will often produce trapped birds by the dog requiring repeated unnecessary no-bird calls. The bird planter should be prepared with an additional bird in the event it is needed. This procedure can save time during the test especially in the event of a wild flushed bird.

Birds shall be randomly planted throughout the field. Every effort should be taken to prevent the retriever from seeing the bird being planted. This will help to avoid a dog running directly to the planted bird possibly aiding in a dog becoming out of control.

## **Upland Honoring Test**

Honoring the work of another dog is a required element of the upland hunt test. This usually is performed during the walk-up portion of the test. This allows for the best ability to control this portion of the testing process. Honoring of dogs during the Quartering test while working in the field may work; however, this sequence can provide many draw backs. It may require many more flushes in order to have both dogs aware of the bird as it flushes to fulfill the requirements of the honor. Many times, there may be two different types of dogs in the field working at different speeds. We must make every effort to not allow the performance of one dog's quartering to affect the performance of another dog. Consider this example:

Two dogs enter the field. The dog to the left is very fast and quarters the field very well. The dog to the right is somewhat overweight and works the field very slowly. In order for the line of hunters to work the field and stay in a straight line for safety, the fast dog has to be constantly stopped and called back to the handler to allow the slow dog to catch up. This constant calling back on the part of the fast dog handler has not allowed this dog to be tested properly as would happen if the dogs were to have run separately.

Also, many times you will be working two strange dogs together in a free environment. Although we do not expect Finish level dogs to be out of control, many times during the flush or retrieve they can be.

## **Upland Tracking Test**

The upland tracking test is an optional element of the upland test. In the tracking test, the dog should be evaluated on its ability to find a scent trail and follow it to the bird. The dog is not required to stay exactly on the scent trail, but should demonstrate progress along the scented path to the dead bird or along the route of a running bird. The Rule Book provides clarification on the nature of the scent trail.

*"If the judges use a drag scented path, it should not be less than forty (40) yards in length nor more than seventy-five (75). It should also contain at least one distinguishable change in direction." (Rule Book – Upland Hunt Test – Test Rules)*

Voice or whistle commands may be used to encourage the dog to hunt, but hand signals should not be used once the dog is set on the beginning of the trail. Sufficient time should be given for the dog to work out the scent trail as long as it is making progress along the trail.

However, if the dog aimlessly hunts with no direction along the scent trail and has to continually be reset on the track, the test may be failed. Once the bird is found it should be retrieved and delivered to hand.

## CALLING A “NO BIRD”

During the Upland test, events may happen that warrant calling a “No Bird.” It is up to each judge to be ready to act in an appropriate manner in order to give every dog an equal chance to be evaluated properly while keeping everyone safe. Trapped birds, weak flyers or runners are all a fact of Upland game hunting. During the upland test, judges must do everything possible to prevent problems from occurring, ensure safety, and provide every dog an equal opportunity to succeed. Call a “No Bird” when any of the following occurs:

- Anytime during the Walk-up when a dog cannot be judged properly.
- Anytime a bird will not flush to a reasonable height during the flushing test to allow proper judgment of the retriever’s ability to become steady or to be properly evaluated on the flush.
- Anytime a dog traps a live bird on the ground. After two consecutive trapped birds, the dog will be placed back three dogs in line and come back for a re-run to complete the flushing portion of the test.
- Anytime a bird flushes in an unsafe direction preventing the handler to act on the flushing bird.

## SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Safety and especially gun safety is a priority in the upland test. Gunners use live ammunition, and the flight of birds can be quite variable. Based on the Rulebook, gunners must meet the following criteria:

*“If a designated Gunner is used, the individual should: 1) be at least 16 years of age; 2) have completed a certified Hunter Safety Course; and 3) be approved by the Judges of the Test where the Gunner is being used.”* (Rulebook – Running Rules – Gunners)

The following **safety recommendations** are intended to **guide** gunners and the gunners should be instructed to follow these guidelines:

- Official gunners with live rounds shall be instructed to discharge their firearms only after the handler has safely fired their popper round.
- Gunners should understand gun safety is the first priority. It is not necessary that the bird be killed during the flush in order to adequately judge the dog and handler.
- Always safe their guns until advised by the judges that the test is proceeding.
- Always carry their guns in a safe manner, i.e., muzzle up, safety on.
- Never take the safety off until ready to fire.

- Never shoot at any birds on the ground.
- Never shoot in an unsafe direction.
- Never shoot unless the bird flushes high enough for a safe shot.
- Never shoot unless the working dog has completely stopped.
- Judges should advise gunners that after the shot or shots, the gunners should hold perfectly still until the retriever has been sent on the retrieve and is well clear of the line. At that time the gunners can then quietly open the breech and remove any empty shells and remain open until instructed again to load.
- If live shot flyers are used during the walk-up, the gunners and bird thrower must be placed at least 90 degrees to the walk-up line. This set up shall be used to avoid accidental spray of lead pellets. The gunners may also walk to each side of the Handler during the walk-up in order to shoot the live flyer; however, this set up may produce very erratic results. A launcher must be used to avoid having a person out in the field possibly located in the line of fire.

The following **safety recommendations** are intended to **guide** handlers:

- A single popper only should be loaded, and handlers admonished to carry the firearm in a safe manner, i.e., safety on, muzzle up and pointed forward during each portion of the Upland test.
- Handlers should be advised that when the bird is flushed, they should steady their retriever first and only then take the safety off the firearm, to aim, track and shoot the bird. Removing the safety prior to the bird flushing into the air or the Handler shooting prior to completely stopping the dog will result in a gun safety warning.  
A second occurrence of either of these infractions will result in Handler disqualification for gun safety.
- Handlers should be reminded the gun should be safe (safety on, breech open) and the muzzle pointed in a safe direction as they accept the retrieved bird.

## **CLOTHING**

Clothing worn in Upland Hunt Tests by judges, hunt marshals, gunners, handlers, and bird techs must be blaze orange in color suitable for upland hunting, including upper body, vest, jacket or shirt; optional head covering: hat or visor.

## Chapter 7

# **JUDGE/HANDLER RELATIONSHIP**

The relationship that judges establish with handlers will contribute to the hunt test experience. An enjoyable experience is likely if exchanges are courteous, respectful, and cheerful. Conversations that are condescending, sarcastic, or rude will diminish the likelihood of an enjoyable experience. In addition to establishing good relationships with handlers, judges must also establish relationships with the Hunt Committee, test marshal, bird throwers, and others who are engaged in the hunt test. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss factors associated with relationships between judges, handlers and other people who are part of hunt tests. Attitude and communication before, during, and after the test is addressed. Notification of disqualification or failure is addressed as well as accommodating handlers with physical handicaps.

## **ATTITUDE**

The portion of the HRC Rulebook entitled “Guidelines for Judges and Conducting Hunts” suggests that attitude and disposition are important.

*“Judges should greet each handler in a friendly and courteous manner ...”*

*“A judge’s disposition can make or break a Hunt. Please make every effort to settle down a nervous Handler.”*

*“It should be remembered that the AA Licensed Judge should guide, train and assist the apprentice Judge in every way possible.”*

*“Judges should ... cooperate with the Hunt Committee in preparation for the hunt.”*

To assure a positive hunt test experience for all, it seems reasonable for judges to be courteous, engage in conversation with handlers and others at the hunt test, and be supportive.

## **SPEAKING WITH HANDLERS BEFORE THE TEST**

Judges will speak with handlers before the test begins. The “Test Briefings” printed in the Appendices and discussed in Chapter 2 provide an effective and efficient way to speak to handlers before the test begins. Based on “Test Briefings” (Appendix D-G), judges should clarify the purpose of the test, objectives and describe the mechanics and logistics of the test. Undesirable traits that may result in markdown or failure should be identified. Judges should courteously advise handlers of appropriate dress, clarify the location of the gallery and where dogs can be aired. After the test dog has been run, judges are expected to respond to handler questions. Conclude the test briefing by wishing handlers “good luck” and a “great day.”

## **SPEAKING WITH HANDLERS DURING THE TEST**

Generally speaking, it is wise to minimize conversation with handlers during a test, especially when the dog is working. It is not a good practice to give hints to help a handler like the “bird is farther left.” If the handler puts the dog as instructed by the judge but the location is incorrect, the judge is in a difficult position. Recommendations regarding speaking with handlers during the test include:

- While the dog and handler are on the retrieving line, reduce conversation with your co-judge and other hunt site personnel to a minimum. Be as quiet and least disruptive as possible.
- Judges should stay in control, be good observers and recorders and strive to keep conversation to a minimum.
- Don't hesitate to stop the handler from creating an unsafe situation. Use your voice to stop the handler from shooting or stop the test if an unsafe situation has emerged.
- Be reserved about the dog's performance. Your co-judge may have observed something you may have missed.

Although judges should be reserved about a dog's performance, this should not preclude them from **advising a handler that he/she has failed. When a dog has clearly failed and both judges agree, it is far better for a handler to learn it immediately.** The dog's performance is fresh in both the handler and judge's minds, and the standard for performance deemed acceptable by the judges is immediately clear to all. Below are recommendations for advising handlers a dog has failed while at the retrieving line:

- Anytime a dog has clearly failed any portion of a test, judges should advise the handler immediately that the test is failed and briefly explain why.
- Both judges must agree that the dog has failed and there is no chance it can recover to earn a passing grade. Judges may pause to converse with each other.
- The decision that a dog has clearly failed will be based on the dog's performance, not changing test conditions, a poor throw, a sunken duck, or any other mitigating factors.
- The dog will be allowed to run other portions of the test until such time as it has failed, is creating bad habits or endangering itself per the Rulebook.

HRC is not advocating for judges to make a pass/fail decision at the retrieving line for every dog. These recommendations apply to those dogs that both judges agree have clearly failed the test and have no chance of passing for the day. Refer to Appendix L for examples of advising the handler that the test is failed.

The Rulebook clarifies when a test must be declared failed, and the handler notified before leaving the retrieving line. An understanding of the terms “**FAILED**” and “**DISQUALIFIED**” is essential. When a handler or retriever has **failed**, they are eligible to continue to run any remaining tests during the hunt. When a handler or retriever is **disqualified**, **they cannot run any remaining tests during the hunt. The handler cannot handle any other dogs at the hunt test.**

Based on the Rulebook, handlers must be immediately notified while at the retrieving line if they have been **disqualified** for the following:

- Gun safety violations committed by the handler. (Rulebook – Shotguns, Gun Safety & HRC Firearm Policy)
- Physical abuse of a retriever by the handler. (Rulebook – Disqualifications)
- Hunting retriever engaged in fighting. (Rulebook – Disqualifications)

Elsewhere in the Rulebook there is language regarding immediate notification that the dog has been **failed** for the following:

- Hard mouth. (Rulebook – Test Rules – Immediate Failure)
- Unproductive retrieve after the second attempt at Started or Seasoned and after the first attempt at the Finished or Grand level. (Rulebook – Test Rules)

Tables 7.1 and 7.2 provide additional clarifying information regarding **failed** and **disqualified** handlers and retrievers.

Table 7.1. Disqualified vs. Failed Handlers

<b>Handlers</b>	<b>Handler Failed</b>	<b>Handler Disqualified</b>	<b>Rulebook Reference</b>
Gun Safety	No	Yes	Disqualifications Shotgun
Physical Abuse of Retriever	No	Yes	Disqualifications
*Handler Interference	No	Yes	Disqualifications
**Sportsmanship	Yes	No	Sportsmanship

\*handlers will be asked to leave the test grounds if the handler interferes with the test, judges, hunt marshal, gunners, bird throwers, UKC/HRC officials or any other participant

\*\*carrying exposed training equipment, threatening retrievers, deliberate blocking so the retriever cannot see birds fall, pointing out bird throwers prior to birds being thrown

Table 7.2. Disqualified vs. Failed Retrievers

Retrievers	Retriever Failed	Retriever Disqualified	Rulebook Reference
Hard mouth	Yes	No	Delivery
Unproductive Retrieve	Yes	No	Test Rules
Gun Safety	No	Yes	Disqualifications Shotgun
Fighting	No	Yes	Disqualifications
Performance	Yes	No	Test Rules

The Rulebook states that judges should tell handlers to pick up their dog under the following circumstances:

- After an unproductive retrieve (Rulebook – Test Rules – All Levels).
- “... if that dog has, in the judge’s mind, already failed and is creating bad habits or endangering itself.” (Rulebook – Test Rules – All Levels)

## **SPEAKING WITH JUDGES AFTER THE HUNTTEST**

Based on the Rulebook:

*“All judges are expected to remain at the hunt site so that the test results may be discussed. Judges score sheets shall be open for review by any handler. Judges are to keep the score sheets for one (1) year.”* (Rulebook – Judges Requirements – General Information)

Field Representatives and the members of the Hunt Committee are entitled to review judges’ sheets for completeness and consistency.

It can be difficult telling a handler their dog has failed. The following recommendations are provided to guide judges in speaking with handlers after the test:

- Ensure that both judges are present to discuss the performance of a dog with the handler. Pass and fail decisions are made jointly by both judges. The judges must mutually agree on each dog’s performance. This is a decision the judges make alone, and they must agree.
- Discussion should be with one handler at a time. It’s sometimes difficult to speak with a handler who is dissatisfied. Having a group of handlers listening will likely compound the difficulty.
- Only the handler is permitted to review the judge’s sheet for a dog they handled. Since the dogs are judged against a standard and not “dog against dog”, sheets of other dogs have no bearing in the decision and the performance of other dogs is not



discussed.

- Tell the handler why the dog failed. Do not “nit-pick” the dog’s performance but rather “get to the point.” Be specific and accurate. For example, instead of saying failed for “too many whistle and cast refusals” say “lack of control.” Instead of saying failed for “handling on the marks”, say “lack of marking and memory.”
- Do not tell the handler how to train the dog or how to correct a problem.
- Maintain a courteous and non-argumentative disposition throughout the conversation with the handler.

## **ACCOMMODATING HANDLERS WITH DISABILITIES**

The Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) has done a great deal to assure that people with disabilities are not denied the opportunity to participate in leisure and recreation activities solely on the basis of a disability. Organizations that provide recreation opportunities are expected to afford persons with physical handicaps an equal opportunity to participate. Even though there are few handlers with physical handicaps participating in HRC events, judges, hunt secretaries and Hunt Committees ought to be aware of the language in the Rulebook regarding handlers with physical handicaps.

In the portion of the Rulebook entitled “Guidelines for Judges & Conducting Hunts,” the following language appears:

*“Handlers with physical handicaps should advise the Hunt Secretary of their special needs prior to the hunt date. The Hunt Committee and judges will make every reasonable effort to accommodate the needs of the handicapped so they can enjoy and participate in all HRC/UKC Licensed hunts and tests.*

*Examples of appropriate accommodations may be but not limited to:*

- a. Adequate parking provided as close as possible to the retrieving line for participants with disabilities and their personal assistants.*
- b. Adequate pathway wide enough for a wheelchair with solid footing provided to and from the retrieving line. Handlers with disabilities will be permitted to use whatever means necessary to get safely to and from the retrieving line. Water tests should have sound footing.*
- c. Personal assistants will be permitted to aid a handler with disabilities to and from the retrieving line. One personal assistant may assist at the retrieving line as needed based upon the disability.*
- d. The seat height recommended to be an 18” minimum such as double buckets. Walking aids are permitted. Judges and/or marshals should ask handlers at the handler’s meeting if anyone needs special accommodations.”*  
(Rule Book - Guidelines for Judges & Conducting Hunts)

A concept in the Rulebook language that is consistent with a key provision in ADA is to “provide reasonable accommodation.” For example, reasonable accommodation could include allowing a “gunner” to shoot the shotgun for a handler with a physical handicap that precludes them from safely and properly operating the shotgun. In this case the gunner serves as the accommodation whereby the handler with a physical handicap can participate in the hunt test.

Other reasonable accommodations could include an “assistant” to help the handler with a physical handicap transverse terrain to get to the retrieving line or reposition the handler during the progress of the test. The purpose of the assistant is to aid the handler with a physical handicap, not run the dog. The handler listed on the entry generated from the premium is expected to run the dog.

Another concept in the Rulebook that is important involves the handler and the Hunt Secretary. The handler with a physical disability is expected to advise the Hunt Secretary of his/her needs. In doing so, the Hunt Secretary can advise the Hunt Committee and judges in advance so that reasonable accommodation can be discussed, and its implementation planned.

# APPENDIX A

## STARTED TEST BRIEFING

### Welcome Handlers

#### Introduce yourself and your Co-Judge

#### Gun Safety:

- Gunner Location.
- Muzzle-Breach & Safety.
- If the handler decides to shoot the shotgun, the dog may not be handheld, and the handler will be judged for gun safety.
- Popper loading sequence.
- When is the safety removed?
- Only the Judges may stop the test during a gun malfunction or at any other time.

**Purpose:** This test is designed to assess the ability of the dog to follow the flight of the shot bird to the area of the fall, retrieve the bird and return it to the handler.

#### Mechanics & Logistics:

- Location where judgment will begin and end?
- Keep the dog on lead to and from the retrieving line.
- Proper use of the attention getting device.
- Dog may be handheld to steady.
- When will the dog be released to retrieve the bird?
- Define a controlled break.
- The retriever may be cast from the retrieving line a maximum of two (2) times.
- Actions if the retriever is unproductive after the second attempt.
- The dog must deliver the bird to the handler area.
- Introduce the Test Marshal.
- Cover acceptable attire.

#### Objectives:

- Testing marking ability, not handling.
- The dog will be expected to follow the flight of the shot bird and proceed directly to the area of the fall and establish a hunt without aid of the handler.
- The dog must retrieve the bird and deliver it to the handler area.

#### Undesirable Traits:

- Hyperactivity, wildness, jumping about, barking, excessive disobedience, lethargy, or lack of interest.
- Consistent failure or reluctance to deliver.

#### Run a Test Dog

#### Answer Questions

- Make sure all handlers hear all questions.
- Avoid "what if" questions.

**WISH THE HANDLERS "GOOD LUCK"  
AND "HAVE A GREAT DAY"**

#### TEST DISTANCES

- Land Marks – 75 yards or less
- Water Marks – 60 yards or less

# APPENDIX B

## SEASONED TEST BRIEFING

### Welcome Handlers

#### Introduce yourself and your Co-Judge

#### Gun Safety:

- Muzzle-Breach & Safety.
- Popper loading sequence.
- Proper shooting form: shoulder the gun, aim, track, and shoot at the top of the arc.
- When is the safety removed?
- Only the Judges may stop the test during a gun malfunction or at any other time.
- Judge's expectations if dog creeps.
- "Other shotguns."
- Courtesy "the gun is safe."
- Set gun down in stand when handling dog.

**Purpose:** This test is designed to assess the ability of the dog to perform under actual hunting conditions found in the local area. Look for style and natural ability and evidence of a reasonable degree of control.

#### Mechanics & Logistics:

- Location where judgment will begin and end?
- What point is the lead removed?
- The dog may not run with a collar.
- Where will the marks come from?
- Proper use of the attention getting device (if used).
- Dog is required to be steady at the retrieving line.
- When will the dog be released to retrieve the bird?
- Define a controlled break.
- When will the diversion bird be thrown?
- The retriever may be cast from the retrieving line a maximum of two (2) times.
- Actions if the retriever is unproductive after the second attempt.
- Introduce the Test Marshal.
- Cover acceptable attire.

#### Objectives:

- The dog should walk obediently to the line, sit obediently, and exhibit an attentive attitude.
- Testing marking ability, not handling. However, a clean handle is preferable to an extended hunt.
- The dog will be expected to follow the flight of the shot bird, proceed directly to the area of the fall, and establish a hunt for the bird without aid from the handler.
- Once the dog finds the bird, it will be expected to retrieve the bird and deliver the bird to hand.
- Dogs should demonstrate the capability to respond to directional control.

#### Undesirable Traits:

- Controlled breaks, poor obedience, and poor manners.
- Consistent failure to deliver or consistent reluctance to deliver.

#### Run a Test Dog

#### Answer Questions

- Make sure all handlers hear all questions.
- Avoid "what if" questions.

**WISH THE HANDLERS "GOOD LUCK"  
AND "HAVE A GREAT DAY"**

#### TEST DISTANCES

- Land Marks – 100 yards
- Water Marks – 75 yards
- Land and Water Blind – 60 yards

# APPENDIX C

## FINISHED TEST BRIEFING

### Welcome Handlers

#### Introduce yourself and your Co-Judge

#### Gun Safety:

- Muzzle-Breach & Safety.
- Popper loading sequence.
- Proper shooting form: shoulder the gun, aim, track, and shoot at the top of the arc.
- When is the safety removed?
- Only the Judges may stop the test during a gun malfunction or at any other time.
- Judge's expectations if dog creeps.
- "Other shotguns."
- Courtesy "the gun is safe."
- Set gun down in stand when handling dog.

**Purpose:** This test is designed to duplicate actual hunting conditions found throughout the country. Look for natural ability and a trained performance.

**NOTE:** Effective January 1, 2011 – The hunting retriever shall not be required to honor during another dog's blind retrieve.

#### Mechanics & Logistics:

- Location where judgment will begin and end.
- At what point is the lead removed?
- The dog may not run with a collar.
- Explain sequencing of the test elements and retrieves.
- Where will the marks come from?
- Proper use of attention getting device. (if used)
- Dog is required to be steady at the retrieving line.
- Define a controlled break.
- When will the diversion bird be thrown?
- The retriever may be cast from the retrieving line only once.
- Actions if the retriever is unproductive after the first attempt.
- Location and dismiss time for honor dog.
- Introduce the Test Marshal.
- Cover acceptable attire.

#### Objectives:

- The dog shall walk obediently to the line, sit obediently, and exhibit an attentive attitude.
- Testing both marking ability and handling. However, a clean handle is preferable to an extended hunt.
- The dog will be expected to follow the flight of the shot bird, proceed directly to the area of the fall, and establish a hunt for the bird without aid of the handler.
- Once the dog finds the bird it will be expected to deliver the bird to hand.
- Dogs should demonstrate prompt and precise response to voice, whistle, and directional commands.

#### Undesirable Traits:

- Controlled breaks, poor obedience, and poor manners.
- Consistent failure to deliver or consistent reluctance to deliver.
- Poor response to directional commands.

#### Run a Test Dog

#### Answer Questions

- Make sure all handlers hear all questions.
- Avoid "what if" questions.

**WISH THE HANDLERS "GOOD LUCK"  
AND "HAVE A GREAT DAY"**

#### TEST DISTANCES

- Land Marks – 150 yards
- Water Marks – 125 yards
- Blind Retrieves – 100 yards max land and water

# APPENDIX D

## UPLAND TEST BRIEFING

### Welcome Handlers

#### Introduce yourself and your Co-Judge

#### Gun Safety:

- Muzzle-Breach & Safety.
- Popper loading sequence.
- Proper shooting form: shoulder the gun, aim, track, and shoot at the top of the arc.
- When is the safety removed?
- Only the Judges may stop the test.
- Judge's expectations if dog creeps.
- "Other shotguns."
- Courtesy "the gun is safe."

**Purpose:** This test is designed to duplicate actual upland hunting conditions found throughout the country. Look for natural ability to hunt available cover and a trained performance to remain under control at all times.

#### Mechanics & Logistics:

- Location where judgement will begin and end.
- What point is the lead removed?
- Explain sequencing of test elements and retrieves.
- Where the flushes will occur.
- Dog is required to be steady at the flush of the bird and the shot. Gunners will shoot the bird after the handler has shot the popper.
- When will the dog be released to retrieve the bird?
- Deliver the shot birds to hand.
- Define a controlled break.
- Action in case of a fly-away.
- Calling a "no-bird."
- Introduce the Test Marshal.
- Cover acceptable attire.

#### Objectives:

- The dog should walk obediently at heel during the walk-up element and does not have to be loudly reminded to stay in position.
- The dog is expected to hunt available cover without continual coaxing by the handle
- The dog is expected to be steady he the flush of birds and the shot or shots fired at the bird.
- The dog is expected to deliver to hand.
- The dog is expected to honor the work of another dog.
- The dog is expected to respond to all voice, whistle, and hand command with promptly and accurately and be under control at all times.

#### Undesirable Traits:

- Controlled breaks, poor obedience, and poor manners.
- Consistent failure to engage available cover in order to locate and flush birds.

#### Run a Test Dog

#### Answer Questions

- Make sure all handlers hear all questions.
- Avoid "what if" questions.

**WISH THE HANDLERS "GOOD LUCK"  
AND "HAVE A GREAT DAY"**

# APPENDIX E

## Frequently Asked Questions: HRC Started Test Level

### 1) Must my dog be steady?

Answer: A Started dog is not expected to be steady on its own. Because we don't want to encourage poor habits, and because steadiness is a safety issue, Started handlers are allowed to use a lead or hand-hold their dogs when birds are thrown to assist in achieving steadiness.

### 2) Do I have to hold my dog with a lead if it is steady?

Answer: No, you do not have to hold your dog if he is steady. However, we encourage everyone to hold the dog because if he should break and get the bird, this dog will fail at that point.

### 3) Do I have to have it on a lead?

Answer: No, you may hold your dog by a bear hug if you would like as long as you are not hurting the dog in the process. We suggest you wrap a lead around the dog's neck and when ready to release the dog, you just let loose of one end of the lead and the dog is free to run.

### 4) Will they use live ducks or other game and how many birds will my dog have to retrieve?

Answer: No, in the Started class only dead birds shall be used. These birds may be pheasants, pigeons, ducks, or other game birds such as quail. In Started you will have four single retrieves to perform. Two of those marked retrieves will be on water and two will be on land.

### 5) What if my dog has never seen a dead duck?

Answer: Before running any test you must be prepared. You will need to work your dog on the

process of retrieving game birds. You may ask one of the Judges if you can take a bird being used in the test to familiarize your dog with that bird. However, coming to the test properly prepared will turn out to be your best choice.

### 6) Can I shoot the gun, or will someone shoot for me?

Answer: Normally there will be a gunner used in all Started tests. He/she will do the shooting at the retrieving line. You may also choose to shoot the gun yourself. In this case you will not be able to hold your dog and the dog will be required to be steady without the aid of a lead. You will also be judged on gun-safety while handling the gun throughout the test.

### 7) My dog has not been around a lot of gunfire – how close will the gunner be?

Answer: In Started you may ask the judges to have the gunner move away from the dog given his inability to have experienced gun fire prior to this test. This distance while slight, must still give the dog the opportunity to realize a gun is still in the picture and is pointing in the direction of each throw. The best advice would be to, once again, come prepared for a Started test knowing that this dog will witness gunfire at the retrieving line. Surprising a young dog with his first gunfire in this manner may not always become the best first experience.

### 8) Will they always use attention-getting devices before a throw?

Answer: Yes, in the Started class a shot or attention getting device such as a duck or goose call shall be used before each thrown bird appears. The intent here is to focus the dog's attention on the direction of each throw.

### 9) What do the judges mean by deliver to an area?

Answer: In the Started class the dog is not required to deliver the birds to hand but instead to bring the bird back to the immediate area of

the handler. This is normally within a few steps of the handler.

**10) What if my dog didn't see the bird, will they re-throw it?**

Answer: No, in the Started class each of the birds thrown in each of the single marking tests may be thrown only one time. This is also why the attention getting device is so important to the success of this level of test.

**11) If my dog is having trouble finding the bird, can I handle it to the fall?**

Answer: Yes, you may handle the dog to complete the retrieve, but this is a marking test. Once you determine that handling is your best chance to pick up the bird, the marking test is over at that point. Most Started dogs will not properly handle at this level. When preparing for this test, solid instruction on proper marking is your best option for success.

**12) Can I re-send my dog if it comes back without the bird?**

Answer: Yes, a Started dog may be re-cast a second time for any of the four single retrieves. The intent of the re-cast is to correct situations like a poor initial line taken by the dog on the initial cast. It should not be interpreted as a second chance to complete every retrieve at the Started level of testing. Even though a second cast has been taken with success, the result of the first cast will also enter into the final outcome of the overall test.

**13) If my dog does not complete a retrieve, can I ask the bird boy to help?**

Answer: Yes & No. Anytime you feel the need to ask the bird boy for help, the test is failed at that point. Many times, you have no other option, and this may actually become better for the dog at that time. Letting a dog just run around in the field may cause more problems for you in the future.

**14) Can I run the other parts of the test if my dog fails to pick up a bird?**

Answer: Yes, In the Started class if your dog has failed the first mark of the land test. He may continue to complete the other mark of the land test. He may also come back in the afternoon and try the two water retrieves for practice. A word of caution at this point, if your dog has serious control issues, allowing this dog to complete additional marks could possibly cause even more problems for you in the future. In this case running additional marks would not be advised.

**15) Sometimes my dog chews on the bird slightly – is this okay?**

Answer: No, mouthing of the birds is not ok. You will be judged in the Started class on delivery of which hard-mouth or chewing of the birds when excessive will be grounds for failure. It is best to correct problems in a dog instead of asking judges to make a tough decision whether to fail your dog for hard-mouth.

**16) Sometimes my dog does not want to bring the bird back – is this a problem and what do I do?**

Answer: Yes, this is a problem. On every bird of the Started test a dog is to proceed directly to the area of the thrown bird and establish a hunt for each bird. Once the dog finds the bird, he is to proceed directly back to the handler area with the bird and deliver it to the handler. If your dog finds the bird but chooses to run all over the field at that point. He has demonstrated a lack of control necessary to complete the Started test. The best advice would be to correct this problem before ever attempting to enter a Started test.

**17) When will I know how my dog did?**

Answer: Throughout the test the Judges are making an evaluation on your dog's performance. Anytime that your dog reaches a point of failure during the test you will be informed at the retrieving line that the test is failed. You will also be informed that you may continue to complete the remainder of the tests



as long as your dog remains under control to avoid future problems.

**18) Will my dog's temperament be judged at the Started level? He tends to be a bit noisy at the line.**

Answer: Yes, a Started dog is being tested on its natural abilities. The Judges will evaluate your dog on its spontaneous behavior in order to judge its usefulness as a hunting companion. Hyperactivity, wildness, jumping about, barking, excessive disobedience, lethargy, or lack of interest, are all undesirable traits of the Started dog. If your dog's barking is excessive, such as barking during all the marks, he will be failed for that undesirable trait at this level.

# APPENDIX F

## Frequently Asked Questions: HRC Seasoned Test Level

### **1) Do I have to have a lead on my dog?**

Answer: Yes. Seasoned dogs will come to the retrieving line on lead and judges may ask handlers to put the dog on lead between various parts of the test

### **2) Can I have a collar on the dog?**

Answer: Not at the Seasoned level unless required by local ordinance. A slip lead should be used.

### **3) Does it have to be steady?**

Answer: Yes. The Seasoned dog must demonstrate steadiness at the retrieving line.

### **4) Can I hold my dog to keep it from going?**

Answer: No. The Seasoned dog cannot be restrained by leash or line or hand-held.

### **5) Can I talk to my dog?**

Answer: Yes, in a quiet manner and so as not to intimidate the retriever.

### **6) Will I need to blow a duck call?**

Answer: Yes. It is very possible judges will ask a handler to call during part of the test.

### **7) Will I shoot the gun, or can I have someone else do it?**

Answer: Handlers will shoot the gun at Seasoned unless a physical handicap prevents it.

### **8) What happens if I don't shoot (or the gun jams between marks)?**

Answer: During the test briefing, the judges will advise handlers about what to do in the event of a gun malfunction.

### **9) What are the differences between creeping and a controlled break?**

Answer: When a dog creeps, it stops its own forward movement. When a dog is breaking, the handler stops the dog's movement with a voice or whistle command.

### **10) What if my dog breaks?**

Answer: It will fail the test.

### **11) How many birds will my dog mark and retrieve?**

Answer: At Seasoned, double marks will be thrown at both land and water.

### **12) What if it does not see the second bird of the double-mark?**

Answer: The mark will have to be picked up by handling to it. Judges will assess the dog's marking skills accordingly.

### **13) Will the judge designate which mark to retrieve first?**

Answer: No. Judges cannot designate the order of retrieves at Seasoned.

### **14) What if my dog is going for one bird, then decides to get the other first?**

Answer: This is acceptable if the dog has not reached the area of fall of the first bird or established a hunt for it.

**15) What if my dog switches to the diversion?**

Answer: The dog will receive a markdown at Seasoned for dropping one bird and picking up another.

**16) How much control do I need on the blind retrieves?**

Answer: Reasonable control is the standard at the Seasoned level. Judges make that determination.

**17) My dog usually lines short blind retrieves. Is this okay?**

Answer: Yes.

**18) Does my dog have to “sit” on the whistle?**

Answer: No. It must demonstrate that it has responded, which can mean stop and stand still.

**19) What if it does not sit, or take my hand signals?**

Answer: The dog must demonstrate reasonable control and a willingness to be guided by the handler. If it does not, it may fail the test for lack of control.

**20) My dog “pops” sometimes – is this okay?**

Answer: Popping – looking to the handler for direction without a signal will not be penalized.

**21) How many tries do I get to retrieve a bird?**

Answer: The Seasoned retriever can be cast twice to attempt to pick up a bird.

**22) If I fail in the morning, can I (should I) run the afternoon test?**

Answer: Yes you can. Should you? If you failed for lack of control, you may be creating bad habits by letting the dog continue to run. It is your choice.

**23) If I fail on part of the test, such as the walk-up, can I still run the marks or the blind?**

Answer: Yes. Failure of a part of the Seasoned test won't prevent a dog from participating in the other parts. But remember: Judges may ask you to pick up your dog if it has failed and is creating bad habits or endangering itself.

# APPENDIX G

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### HRC Finished Test Level

#### 1) Do I have to wear camo?

Answer: Yes. Camo should be consistent with the type of hunt test you are performing. Camo is considered appropriate for duck and dove hunting while browns or khaki, with an orange hat and vest, would be appropriate for an upland hunt.

#### 2) When do I take my dog off lead? Is this when my test starts?

Answer: You should take your dog off lead where instructed by the judges. This is where your test begins. You are being judged from this point in the test.

#### 3) When do I have to put my dog back on lead?

Answer: You put your dog back on lead at the conclusion of the test after leaving the retrieving line at a place where the judge designates. You and your dog are being judged until the dog is back on lead.

#### 4) Can I talk to my dog?

Answer: Yes. You can talk to your dog before and during the test as long as you do not intimidate your dog or disturb the hunt.

#### 5) Will there be a walk-up?

Answer: There could be, but it is not required at the finished level.

#### 6) When will you throw the diversion?

Answer: Judges can throw the diversion at any time while the dog is returning from any retrieve.

#### 7) What if my dog switches to the diversion?

Answer: At the finished level, your dog is failed for switching to the diversion bird.

#### 8) What if he breaks?

Answer: At any level all dogs are failed for a break.

#### 9) My dog gets really excited at Hunt Tests so he might bark a lot when he sees a duck flying. Is that okay?

Answer: Your retriever can be failed for excessive noise. If the judges determine it's disturbing the hunt, you can be failed.

#### 10) Sometimes during the excitement at the line my dog may run out in front of me a little. Can he be failed for a controlled break?

Answer: Yes. If the judges consider it to be excessive, your retriever can be failed for a controlled break.

#### 11) Do I have to sit on the bucket?

Answer: While in most cases you are not required to sit on the bucket, there may be a safety reason or unique feature of the test that requires you to do so.

**12) Will you tell me when to send my dog?**

Answer: No. The judges are looking for your dog to be steady. Once all the birds are shot and on the ground you can typically release your dog for the retrieve.

**13) Will you tell me which bird to pick up first?**

Answer: Possibly. There may be a hunting scenario where the last bird down (go bird) is considered dead, and a previous bird is representing a cripple that needs to be retrieved first.

**14) Does my dog have to actually "sit" when I blow the whistle?**

Answer: No. However, when you blow the whistle your dog should stop and look to you for a command.

**15) How many refusals do I get on the blind?**

Answer: Technically, none. At the finished level the Rulebook says the retriever should respond to all commands. However, there are times when a judge should consider a various number of distractions that can affect your dog's ability to execute a command.

**16) How many tries do I get to retrieve each bird?**

Answer: At the finished level you get one attempt to retrieve each bird.

**17) How big is the area of the fall? Should I blow a whistle on a mark?**

Answer: It depends. The AOF is smaller on the last bird down compared to the first bird down. Wind direction, cover and distance all play roles in determining how big the AOF is.

**18) If I handle on two marks, does that mean I'm out?**

Answer: Probably. However, the judge must determine why you handled or where the dog was when you began handling. It is not always that simple. Remember, once you start handling it is your responsibility to put the dog on the bird.

**19) Sometimes I get really confused during the test so, can I go ahead and load all my shells now, so I don't forget?**

Answer: NO! Listen to the judge's instructions. Load the correct number of shells when the judge tells you. Safety is the most important part of the test.

**20) Does my dog have to honor? What does he have to do while honoring?**

Answer: Yes. This is required at the finished level. The honor dog should sit quietly at the designated area and not disturb the hunt. The honor dog must sit, see multiple marks and the working dog leave for the retrieve.

**21) Will you let me shoot the shotgun on the honor bucket if my dog is out?**

Answer: No. If the judges determine you have failed the test prior to honoring, you will be asked to put your dog on lead while sitting at the honor position. Since the dog is on lead you are not allowed to operate a shotgun

**22) Will you tell me if I'm out so I can go home early?**

Answer: The intention is for every dog to run both morning and afternoon hunts. This requires judges to stay on a tight schedule throughout the day. Before deciding whether a dog has failed or passed each test, judges must confer about each dog. It is not recommended that judges stop the normal sequence of running dogs to hold judges/handlers' conferences during the test. If you need to leave and should you pass, the club will be happy to mail your point receipt and ribbon to you.

# APPENDIX H

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### HRC Upland Test

**1) Do I have to wear blaze orange?**

Answer: Clothing worn in Upland Hunt Tests by judges, hunt marshals, gunners, handlers, and bird techs must be blaze orange in color suitable for upland hunting, including upper body, vest, jacket or shirt; optional head covering: hat or visor.

**2) If I fail on the walk-up part of the test, can I still run the flushing portion of the test?**

Answer: Yes, failure to pass one part of the upland test will not prevent a dog from participating in other test elements.

**3) Does my dog need to run a back-and-forth pattern to pass the quartering portion of the upland test?**

Answer: No, the quartering test is intended to evaluate natural tendency to search for game birds. The dog must display an eagerness to hunt available cover under control. Hand, voice or whistle commands may be used to change the dog's direction in the field, but a markdown should occur, and the test may be failed if the dog is directed to every patch of cover.

**4) What happens if the gunners miss the flushed bird?**

Answer: In the case of a "fly-away", the dog is expected to show steadiness to both the flush of the bird and the shot or shots fired at the bird in order to be credited with a successful flush. The dog should remain steady until given a signal to from the judges to re-heel and then continue hunting.

**5) Does my dog have to honor in the upland hunt test?**

Answer: Yes, honoring another dog is a required element of the upland hunt test and is usually evaluated during the walk-up. When honoring, the dog should sit quietly at heel and not disturb the work of the other dog.

**6) Does my dog have to sit when the bird flushes or is released?**

Answer: No, it's not necessary for the dog to sit when the bird flushes or is released, but the dog must be steady and not leave to retrieve the bird before being commanded to do so.

**7) Do I have to shoot at the flushed or released birds?**

Answer: Yes, to get credit for the flush, the handler must shoot a shot in the direction of the escaping bird. Handlers may shoot up into the air if it is unsafe to shoot toward the bird.

**8) What if my dog traps a bird before it flushes?**

Answer: The dog is expected to flush the bird and remain steady throughout the flush and shot. Anytime a dog traps a live bird on the ground, a "no-bird" will be called. Test rules require that the dog be presented with a minimum of two birds to flush in the quartering test.

**9) What if the bird flushes wildly and my dog did not see it?**

Answer: The dog must actively participate in the flush to receive credit for the flush. A "no-bird" will likely be called but a minimum of two birds must be flushed in the quartering test.

**10) What if my dog chases a bird that was missed by the gunners?**

Answer: A dog that bolts in an effort to chase a flyaway and does not immediately respond to a command to return to the hunt area would be failed. The dog must be under control at all times.

**11) What if my dog stops when the bird is flushed but leaves to retrieve the bird before being commanded to do so?**

Answer: If the dog does not immediately respond to a command to stop, the dog would be assessed a "break" and would be failed. If the dog stops as commanded, a controlled break would be assessed. A controlled break results in a markdown for lack of control and may be grounds for failure.

# **APPENDIX I**

## **Advising the Handler that the Dog Has Failed**

It makes no sense at any time in the test not to tell a handler when their dog has clearly failed. If a dog has clearly failed, it is far better for a handler to learn it immediately.

The dog's performance is fresh in both the handler and judge's minds, and the standard for performance deemed acceptable by the judges is immediately clear to all. The following are examples of advising handlers a dog has failed:

### **Examples: Control**

1) A Seasoned dog is walking to the retrieving line on lead. The Handler was given the instruction that the Seasoned dog should walk from the holding blind to the retrieving line demonstrating reasonable Seasoned level control (the dog should walk with the Handler without pulling on the lead the entire way to the retrieving line). During this test this retriever would not walk with the handler but instead pulled the handler as if a sled the entire way to the retrieving line. The handler tried numerous times to jerk on the lead in an effort to get the dog's attention and to show some degree of Seasoned control. These efforts were ignored by the dog as he continued to drag the Handler the entire way to the retrieving line.

This dog would be failed at this point! The handler would be informed in a friendly manner that this performance was unacceptable at the Seasoned level. However, the Handler would be informed that he could continue with the remaining portions of the test if he so chooses.

2) A Finished dog is walking to the retrieving line off lead. The Judges instructed the handlers that the objective of this portion of the test was to show Finished level control by having their dog walk with them to the line. The dog in question breaks away from the Handler and runs up to the line, despite numerous and loud commands to "heel."

This dog would be failed at this point! The handler would be informed in a friendly manner that this performance is unacceptable, and the judges have the dog failed, that he could continue with the remaining portions of the test if he so chooses.

Further Control examples might involve a dog that drops and mouths every bird before delivery, or a dog that creeps excessively on every bird thrown despite loud verbal commands to "fetch it up", or "heel" respectively. If both judges deem the performance failing, the handlers should be told before leaving the line.

### **Example: Marking and Memory**

1) The Finished retriever locks on the first bird thrown. It does not swing nor see the second or third marks thrown. It picks up the first bird and is handled to the AOF on the second retrieve. The handler sends the dog in the direction of the third mark and the dog wanders about hunting here and there and finally stumbles upon the bird.

These judges agree the dog has failed for lack of marking and memory at this point! There are no extenuating circumstances such as a change in test conditions or a poor throw. The dog handled to the second bird, and while it was not “handled” on the third bird, it showed no marking on this bird. The handler would be informed at this point that the dog has failed for lack of marking but could still run the blind if he or she so chooses.

### **Recommendation: Honor Dog on Lead**

- **It is recommended that a Finished dog that has failed the test be put on lead to honor.**

It makes no sense to allow a dog who is not in contention a chance to interfere with a working dog that is presumably in contention. Remember, if the honor dog is on lead, the handler shall not handle the gun. It is also advisable to put a “bye” honor dog on lead for a working dog that is in contention.



# HRC APPRENTICE JUDGE EVALUATION FORM

Club's Hunt Secretary will submit this report online within 15 days of the hunt.  
Upload completed copies to JUDGE COMPLETED ASSIGNMENT found online at [WWW.HRC.DOG](http://WWW.HRC.DOG)  
**DO NOT SNAIL-MAIL OR EMAIL THIS FORM - SUBMIT VIA THE WEBSITE ONLY**

## To be completed by the HUNT SECRETARY:

Full name of Host Club: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Hunt: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Category Judged:  Started  Seasoned  Finished  Upland Grandfathered?  YES  NO

## To be completed by the APPRENTICE JUDGE:

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ HRC # \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ JUDGE # \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State/Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

## To be completed by the HRC AA LICENSED JUDGE:

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ JUDGE # \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

# of Dogs Judged: \_\_\_\_\_

- YES  NO Did the Apprentice have good understanding, participation, and input in your test set up?
- YES  NO Was the Apprentice in appropriate hunting attire?
- YES  NO Were YOU in appropriate hunting attire?
- YES  NO Did the Apprentice display an understanding and ability to judge by HRC Rules and Regulations?
- YES  NO Did the Apprentice satisfactorily record the test on the Judge's sheet?
- YES  NO For the most part, were the Apprentice's Pass/Fail determinations the same as yours?
- YES  NO Was the Apprentice courteous to the Handlers and to those in the gallery?
- YES  NO Did the Apprentice participate satisfactorily in the Handlers Meeting and any Handler Conferences?
- YES  NO Do you recommend him/her to be Licensed and potentially TEACH other Apprentices at this level?

REMARKS/COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(use back if needed) ⇌

ORIGINAL: Club's Hunt Secretary  
*(retain for 1 year)*

COPY: HRC ADMIN  
*(retain for 1 year)*

Version: 10/24/22

Started:  Seasoned:  Finished:

# LAND TEST

Club/Date: \_\_\_\_\_ DOG # \_\_\_\_\_

JUDGE: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME: AM \_\_\_\_ PM \_\_\_\_

LAND / WATER COMBINED SCORE: PASS \_\_\_\_ FAIL \_\_\_\_

## LAND MARKS

Pass	Marginal	Fail

Wind / Direction: \_\_\_\_\_ Speed: \_\_\_\_\_

## LAND BLIND

Pass	Marginal	Fail

### AREAS TO BE JUDGED:

Nose: \_\_\_\_\_ Desire: \_\_\_\_\_ Style: \_\_\_\_\_

	PASS	MARGINAL	FAIL
Control/Manners:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delivery:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diversion:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honor:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walk Up:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISQUALIFICATION:

Gun Safety / Other:

Remarks:

Wind / Direction: \_\_\_\_\_ Speed: \_\_\_\_\_

### SYMBOLS:

**W** – Whistle

**WR** – Whistle Refusal

**C** – Cast

**CR** – Cast Refusal

Started:  Seasoned:  Finished:

# WATER TEST

Club/Date: \_\_\_\_\_ DOG # \_\_\_\_\_

JUDGE: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME: AM \_\_\_\_ PM \_\_\_\_

LAND / WATER COMBINED SCORE: **PASS** \_\_\_\_ **FAIL** \_\_\_\_

## WATER MARKS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pass	Marginal	Fail

Wind / Direction: \_\_\_\_\_ Speed: \_\_\_\_\_

## WATER BLIND

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pass	Marginal	Fail

### AREAS TO BE JUDGED:

Nose: \_\_\_\_\_ Desire: \_\_\_\_\_ Style: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>PASS</b>	<b>MARGINAL</b>	<b>FAIL</b>
Control/Manners:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delivery:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diversion:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honor:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walk Up:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISQUALIFICATION:

Gun Safety / Other:

Remarks:

Wind / Direction: \_\_\_\_\_ Speed: \_\_\_\_\_

### SYMBOLS:

**W** – Whistle

**WR** – Whistle Refusal

**C** – Cast

**CR** – Cast Refusal

# UPLAND TEST

Club/Date: \_\_\_\_\_ DOG # \_\_\_\_\_

JUDGE: \_\_\_\_\_

CO-JUDGE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: AM \_\_\_\_ PM \_\_\_\_

PASS \_\_\_\_ FAIL \_\_\_\_

## QUARTERING

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pass	Marginal	Fail

### AREAS TO BE JUDGED:

Nose: \_\_\_\_\_ Desire: \_\_\_\_\_ Style: \_\_\_\_\_

	PASS	MARGINAL	FAIL
Control:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delivery:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honor:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISQUALIFICATION:

Gun Safety / Other:

Remarks:

Wind / Direction: \_\_\_\_\_ Speed: \_\_\_\_\_

## FLUSH 1

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pass	Marginal	Fail

## FLUSH 2

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pass	Marginal	Fail

## WALK UP

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pass	Marginal	Fail

## REMARKS

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### SYMBOLS:

W – Whistle

WR – Whistle Refusal

C – Cast

CR – Cast Refusal



A series of 20 horizontal lines for writing.

