

Retriever Field Trial Judging Fundamentals and Checklist

Fundamentals

1. Safety: The tests are safe.
2. Visibility: All dogs can see guns and birds all day.
3. Control: Handlers can see dogs. Dogs can see and hear handlers.
4. Fairness: Objective and impartial judging.
5. Time management: Efficient with trials on time.
6. Fun: Pleasant and courteous to all.

Safety

- Walk the entire field and water edges - eliminate or avoid any unsafe areas.
- Heat, Humidity, and Cover. Don't set a test that is too big or long for conditions.
- Weather. Storms, lightning, etc. Have an exit plan if the weather turns bad.
- Flyer location. Is the flyer being shot in a safe direction for throwers, and grounds?
- Workers. Make sure the gunners understand gun safety. Gun stands? Ensure worker comfort-drinks, food, sunscreen, repellent, rain and hearing protection.
- Traffic. How will vehicles enter and leave? Is traffic control needed? Avoid any unsafe roads in test or nearby. Avoid damage or misuse of property.
- Physically challenged handlers. Can they get to the line and handle safely? Are they penalized by your test requirements?

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Visibility/Control

- Determine how the position of the sun affects your test all day.
- Determine sunrise and sunset times and location.
- Anticipate and consider possible changes in visibility, shadows, and lighting during the day to maintain consistent lighting of guns.
- Consider the background for guns, birds, and handlers.
- Can the dogs see the guns?
- Can the dogs see the birds? Do you need to segregate the birds by gender, change from pheasants to ducks, or add streamers?
- Can you and the handlers see the dogs? Will dogs be out of sight and for how long?
- Can the dogs see the handlers?
- Can the dogs hear the whistle?
- If you use a winger, will arm movement from the operator be helpful and consistent?
- Consider the need for a stick man or multiple guns or multiple shots and multiple shots.
- Consider the order you throw your birds. Will a hard to see gunner/bird be better if shot first?
- Consider the location of the gallery, movement by participants and traffic.
- Locate the mat and/or cut cover so that all dogs can see guns and birds. View the test from a small dog's view.
- Check visibility from line and confirm that judges and handlers can see the dog hunt and pickup birds. Remember to consider the shorter handler.
- Call for each bird consistently, so that dogs have an opportunity to track each bird as it is shot.

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- Consider the order birds are thrown including the location/nature of short birds. Are they too distracting for the dog to locate other guns? Do you really want a short out of order flyer to distract a dog from locating subsequent longer marks?
- Retire guns with minimum distraction and avoid hiding them in a deceiving location.
- Will the dogs disappear briefly on the blinds? Will handlers have a reasonable chance to get the dogs back on line when they become visible?

Time Management

- Consider the size of your field and the amount of daylight available when you design your test. Consider the mechanics that you will have.
- Set aside time for the unexpected.
- Whenever possible, avoid tests where traffic will create delays.
- Make an equipment list for the FT Committee so that you have what you need to begin. Items include: # of guns, birds, gun stands, blanks, live shells, brushing and # of holding blinds in the field and at line, chairs, radios, drinks, line mat, blind markers, bird dryers and the type and sequence of tests.
- Post any instructions for tests, if required, in the holding blind.
- Put holding blinds close to the line and keep two full.
- Call "guns up" as dog is returning with the last bird and receive off to side.
- Coordinate re-birds, gun changes, lunches, and any other delays in the action with marshal.
- Don't be afraid to ask a handler to pick up his dog or have dog helped if he is clearly out of the competition.
- Minimize location changes within the day.

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- Place the bird rack close to the line, but not where dogs can get birds either coming or leaving the line. Rack should be downwind.
- Place the working and the honor dog so that each sees the birds, are not in the way and can come and go efficiently without interfering.
- Never "waste" time – use extra time to recheck next tests.
- Callbacks: Discuss callbacks with your co-judge as the test proceeds. Try to break your dogs into three groups: a) In; b) Out; and c) To be discussed. Use a tally sheet to check off dogs and to categorize dogs as they run as well as monitor time. When reviewing the third group, break that group into groups of dogs with similar performance, rather than focusing on individual dogs. Keep or drop similar dogs in groups.

Fairness

- Design your test to minimize impact of changing conditions as much as you can (light, wind, scenting, trails). Try to avoid "split" tests.
- Take notes that will allow you to recall a dog's performance later.
- Judge the dog based on what it does, not on reputation or past performance.
- Callbacks should be consistent. Dogs with similar work should be judged similarly and either called back together or dropped together.
- Treat everybody with courtesy.
- Know the Rulebook and review it and the Retriever Field Trial Judges Manual often.
- Follow the Code of Sportsmanship and the Golden Rule. "Test and judge others as you would like to be judged."