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# *AKC Field Trials One Judges Perspective*

*Prepared by: Mitch Patterson with John Cavanaugh*



*FC-AFC JJ's Desire To Go*

*This booklet was prepared using input from myself and fellow Field Trialer, John Cavanaugh. This booklet contains my comments and the views may not necessarily express the views of the parent club and/or the other members of this judges clinic. My sincere thanks to John Cavanaugh for his work and input for this booklet*

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## **Introduction and Goals**

This clinic will cover topics on:

- 1) What are the guidelines and responsibilities of a Judge?
- 2) Judging Open, Amateur All-Age, Qualifying, and Derby Stakes
- 3) The methods, how to, and avoiding pitfalls of setting up tests in varying stakes
- 4) Line etiquette for handling
- 5) Diagramming and scoring tests
- 6) Review of AKC Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedures for Retrievers
- 7) AKC Retriever Field Trial Judges test
- 8) How to Handle Misconduct of Handlers

## **Purpose**

### **Retriever**

The function of a retriever is to seek and retrieve “fallen” game when ordered to do so. He should sit quietly on line or in the blind, walk at-heel, or assume any station designated by his handler until sent to retrieve. When ordered, a dog should retrieve quickly and briskly without unduly disturbing too much ground, and should deliver tenderly to hand. He should then await further direction.

### **Field Trial**

The purpose of a retriever field trial is to determine the relative merits of the retriever in the field. The safety of each dog is imperative!!! It is the duty and responsibility of each judge to take precautions to insure a safe field in which a dog may perform.

The purpose of this manual is to provide general guidance and ideas to use when preparing to judge a retriever trial. The information is a culmination of rules, thoughts, and ideas and should be used as a guide, and is not intended to be used as a rulebook or official document.

## **Preparing for a Judging Assignment**

### **Pre-Departure List**

- Check local weather forecast
- Judge’s chair (if possible)
- Transit arrangements: Airport Pick-up/Drop-off
- Car phone numbers exchanged
- Meeting Time/Place/Directions
- Hotel/Directions/Phone
- Copy of premium mailed in advance
- Size of trial (number of dogs to judge)
- Judging book with sufficient amount of waterproof sheets (numbered), compass, tape, whistle
- Special Judging needs (food, beverage, hunting license)

### **General Preparations**

- Review rule books and misconduct review
- Local sunrise/sunset times/weather station summaries/wind direction
- Number of judge’s sheets required
- Chairman/Marshal/key worker cell phone numbers
- Allow yourself sufficient time to judge/complete your assignment. Don’t short change the test/dogs because of tight return trip accommodations

### **Other Pre-Trial Thoughts (pre-trial checklist while on the grounds)**

- Remember that the first hour of the field trial is the most important time of the weekend!!!
- Talk to Stake Marshal(s) – set rotation, no-bird re-runs and any special instructions
- Equipment (what will you need and what is available and required by club rules – gun stands, decoys, etc)
- Bird Boys (how many will you need/available)
- Reality of available time (sunrise, sunset, STARTING TIME, finish time, for each stake, tailgates, etc)
- What you will need to do to help other stakes (releasing Pro's, cross entries, etc.)
- Work our rotation (include rotation if additional series are needed or scraped tests)(no dog is #1 twice)
- Weather forecast – (will temperature require ice/pool, will wind change your test, rain cause inaccessibility)
- Dead birds available to get started?
- Discourage use of a judge's dog as a test dog
- Equipment to cut brush for retired guns, paths, etc.
- Other special equipment needs (decoys, boats, mechanical bird throwers, rat traps, etc)
- Talk to your co-judge and review likes/dislikes, no-bird, re-run thoughts, reheel thoughts, interference, etc. This can avoid conflicts and surprises during callbacks and placements.
- Don't be complacent with doing the same tests that have been done in past years. Look for the non-obvious marks/blinds. Be creative, cut some brush and do something new.
- Remember, you are looking for the best dog for the weekend.

## **NATURAL AND TRAINED ABILITIES**

Retrievers should be judged on their natural and trained abilities that produce the “ideal” retriever.

### **Natural Abilities are of great importance and include:**

- Memory
- Intelligence
- Attention
- Nose
- Courage
- Perseverance
- Style
- Desire to please

### **Trained Abilities include:**

- Steadiness
- Control
- Response to direction
- Delivery of game
- Critical decision making

### **The Ideal Retriever**

- Accurately marks the fall of a bird,
- Uses the wind,
- Follows a strong cripple (game finding ability) and,
- Takes direction from the handler, holds the desired line for good distances.

## **Trainability:**

### **Manners**

- Sit quietly on line and in the blind
- Walk at heel
- Assume any station designated until sent to retrieve

### **Control**

- Line Manners
- Walking tractably “AT HEEL”
- Assuming and staying in position on line
- Remaining quiet beside handler (while identifying stations, after delivery, while honoring)
- Returning promptly when called
- Also: no creeping, no bird stealing

### **Response to Directions**

- Complexities
- Distance (drive and fatigue)
- Diversions / Tight or Remote
- Sloping Terrain
- Cross Wind
- Cover
  - Shorter cover (enough to hide birds)/short birds (over run on fast surface)
  - Rough cover/long birds (tough going) > Fair to Early/Late Dogs?
- Retired Guns
- Live Bird attraction
- “Tightness” (or lack of): lines or falls

## **STYLE**

**Style** is apparent in every movement of a dog and throughout his entire performance, including:

- Gaiety of manner, approaching the line
- Alertness on line
- Eagerness and speed on retrieves
- Water entry
- Pick-up of birds
- Return with birds

**Style** makes for a pleasing performance, evidenced by:

- Alert and obedient attitude
- Fast determined departure, both on land and into water
- Aggressive search for the fall
- Prompt pick-up
- Reasonably fast return
- Dogs that want to look at and retrieve birds
- Desire to please
- Shows Perseverance

**Style** is the appearance of grace and confidence, even under pressure.

“Style is something in the movements of a dog when working, which gives to the onlooker the impression that the dog is determined and likely to succeed in his task.” Charles Alington, 1929

## **MAJOR STAKE TESTS INCLUDE:**

**Marks:** land, land/water combination, and water

- Short (retired) Guns (Wrap and conceal the blind)
- Retire a gun to the flyer station (cropper triple)
- Long (retired) Guns (Wrap and conceal the blind)
- Multiple retired Guns (Wrap and conceal the blind)
- Delayed/Interrupted
- Out of order birds/flyers
- Breaking bird flyer
- Mama-Papa, indents, hip-pockets, in-line, converging, etc.
- Walk-outs, Pop-ups
- Primary/Secondary Selection
- Bull-dogs
- Long Swims/Stay-in/need to get out early
- Cross Points/re-entries (including scented areas)
- Boat bird marks (usually time consuming)
- Demanding water entries/re-entries
- Demanding elements (weather, terrain)
- Honoring

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Blinds**

- Poison Birds
- Dry pops/live rounds-sluice
- Long Blinds
- “No see-um” beginnings
- Tight alleys/corridors
- Technical blinds requiring “tight” control
- Big “go get’em” blinds
- Multiple blinds
- Remote send
- Walk-up distractions
- Partial out-of-site (on line)
- Demanding water entries
- Cross over multiple points/re-entries (including scented areas on blinds)
- Demanding Elements (weather, terrain)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **MINOR STAKE TESTS INCLUDE:**

### **Derby Stake:**

**Marks:** land, land/water combination, water

- Doubles (you DO NOT need triples or retired guns to get answers in the Derby Stake)
  - Wide open
  - Tight/converging
  - Natural (go get'em)
  - Trained (very tight lines, two down the shore, angle entries, stay in the water marks)
- Demanding singles (natural element aided, stay in the water, hold a line)
- Moderately demanding elements (weather, terrain)
- Boat bird marks
- Demanding water entries/re-entries (two down the shore, angle entries, stay in the water marks)
- Demanding elements (weather, terrain)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Qualifying Stake:**

**Marks:** land, land/water combination, water

- Wide open
- Tight/converging
- Natural (go get'em)
- Trained (very tight lines, two down the shore, angle entries/re-entries)
- Boat bird marks
- Moderately demanding water entries/re-entries
- Moderately demanding elements (weather, terrain)
- Simple (Retired) Gun (not necessary to "All-Age" wrap)
- Mama-Papa, indents, hip-pockets, converging, etc.
- Primary/Secondary Selection tests
- Long Swim/Stay-in
- Honoring

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Blinds:**

- Long Blinds
- Partial out-of-site (on line)
- Line behind and past gun stations
- Square water entries
- Past points, simpler cross over point
- Behind and past gunner stations
- Demanding Elements (weather, terrain)

*Qualifying blinds are simpler than All-Age blinds with no poison birds, remote sends, walk-up distractions, etc.*

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# CLASSIC TEST CONCEPTS AND SITUATIONS

## General Usages of Elements:

- Terrain: hold line along slope (dogs tend to square up or down)
  - add rough cover, cross-wind or other elements
- Ditches/Roads: Angle and Recover
- Very Long: Perseverance/Control (sits/casts)
- Obstacles/Mounds midway/up front
- Contrary factors (against the grain)
- Multiple “wrong” paths to fall area
- Double obstacles (ie jump tree then shoreline entry)... extend distance between obstacles
- Difficult Throws/Bird Placement
  - ***Bird placement:*** It’s important to place birds that can be equally seen by ALL dogs (regardless of dog size) in all lighting conditions expected during the day. For instance, don’t throw a critical bird that the later dogs won’t be able to see due to obvious lighting or anticipated weather conditions.
  - ***Flyer Placement:*** Be smart in the use of the flyer. Do not use a flyer as a “controlled” bird. Flyer fall areas are MUCH larger than a controlled fall area so set the test accordingly. Trying to use a flyer as a control bird can make for a logistical nightmare.
  - ***Difficult throws:*** Be sure that all throws can be duplicated equally for ALL dogs.
- Throws across channel/to island
- Shoreline marks: Dogs tend to swim (forced response) to “end” of channel
- Down hill (tend to square hill behind gun)
- Base of hill (tend to drive to top)
- In water/cover vs. on bank (tend to exit water/drive to hunt)
- Way-up and out marks/blinds
- Across road/ditch (throw mark across/retire?)
- Line angles into cover/water
- Long Marks, throw into wind? (Quartering away)
- Short Marks, throw with wind? (Quartering away)
- Angle back throws with wind? (Quartering away)
- Mid-distance
  - Land spit, water in front/beyond
  - Run around space deep
  - Mid-distance retired with longer gun out
  - Check down after obstacle, with longer gun out
- Go-bird past shorter memory bird (especially difficult on water)
- Thru hedge row (especially difficult retired)
- Against/along tree line (dogs tend to run along tree lines)
- Over stone wall/log jumps
- Throws from/onto mounds: on top, at base (throws from mounds complicate depth perception, throws onto mounds cause gun station hunts)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Varieties of Tests/Concepts (All-Age)

### General

- Walk up
- Modified walk-up
- Delayed
- Interrupted
- Cold Honor
- Bulldog
- Field Decoys
- Bird Calls
- Moving water

### Marks

- Can't go straight to fall area/bird marks (objects/elements in the way)
- Retire Go Bird
- Multiple "key" birds
- Pop-up mark: no cueing
- Winger, very long throws
- Long/short/multiple retired
- Wipe-outs
- Breaking bird
- Cheating marks

### Blinds

- No picture blinds
- Remote Cast
- Multiple
- Confusion drill blinds (walkup, sluice, poison bird, etc.)
- Out to sea blinds

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## MARKING PRINCIPLES

- *Accurate marking is of primary importance!*
- *Don't expect a dog to mark what the dog cannot see, whether by natural element/hazard or judges design.*
- A retriever should recognize the depth of the "area of the fall", stay in it, then quickly and systematically "hunt it out".
- Retrievers should perform equally well on the land and in the water.
- A retriever's performance should be a "FINISHED" job and pleasing to the eye.
- Time management and mechanics is almost everything. You can have a wonderful test but if it's mechanically difficult to repeat for all dogs, then you'll have multiple problems including time management. This includes difficult flyer placement, multiple boat birds, bull-dogs, and delayed marks... You **MUST** be able to duplicate the test equally for each dog.

## Marking Test Design

### **GOOD MARKING TEST DESIGN - General Thoughts**

- Time management and mechanics are critical when designing a test. You can have a very nice test but if it's too time consuming, or is mechanically difficult to repeat for all competing dogs, you will have the receipt for disaster. This includes difficult flyer placement, multiple boat birds, bulldogs, and delayed marks... You MUST be able to duplicate the test equally for each dog.
  - Be cautious of long retired guns in the first series of a big entry trial. This type of test will allow dogs long hunts prior to failure. Devise a test that will get answers quickly if the dog doesn't have a mark. I.e.: Shorter retired in which a dog that misses the mark will have the opportunity to go back to an old fall and handle/fail/pick-up.
- Place birds where dogs will not want to naturally go - Enter heavy cover, line along hillside, through water, hard to find birds, hard to get to-easy to find, distance (short or long with other gunners present) other "factors" to draw dogs attention
- Do not waste time with superfluous marks. 1 minute/dog X 60 dogs = 1 hour wasted
- Try for at least 2 tough marks, no "gimmies" ("one bird" tests can be a disaster if conditions change)
- Do not ignore natural factors: sun, wind, shadows rain, temperature
- Remember to "defend" all birds from all sides. Don't allow dogs to see gunners sitting in holding blinds from the rear. (Box in and brush the blind)
- Do not move gunners after they shoot unless you fully retire them (walkout, pop-up marks/flyer)
- Setup challenging tests that you would enjoy running.
- Be VERY conscious of available time and setup tests with sufficient time to allow ALL dogs an equal opportunity to perform.
- Allowing dogs to see bird in flight and as it lands
- Handler can see dog in fall area and all sides of it. Ability to handle if required.
- Gun stations do not move or start to retire until all bids are down and the dog has been released to retrieve. Movement in the field distracts from a dogs marking abilities.
- Avoid "traffic" in test background
- Face north (if possible), for best lighting conditions, particularly during short day-light days
- Give dogs/handlers a factor (tree, bush) to allow for depth perception, not just lining to area.
- Balance short and long
- Balance trained responses to natural responses.
- Honor dog placement in a way that does not distract the running dog from watching action in the field and does not jeopardize either dog during the movement to and from the honor box.
  - Do not honor in a fashion that creates "crossing lines" for the dogs.

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## **POOR MARKING TEST DESIGN - General thoughts**

### **ALL-AGE**

- Wasting birds/time. Using pheasant's in/thru water (wastes birds) throwing a "worthless" non-secondary setup mark/flyer. (A mark that "sets up" other key birds)
- Tests where the mechanics will make it very difficult to re-bird or pick up "no birds" or failures.
- Setting up tests that intentionally trick, or deceive dogs. (Example: Throw short mark, then center long retired, then short flyer. Another example: Throw key birds out of order). Is this done with the intention that dogs won't see the key bird thrown?

### **Remember "Don't take pride in tricking a Labrador, it's not that hard to do!!!"**

- Test that you can finish only "if everything goes perfect." TIME MANAGEMENT IS IMPERATIVE!
- Tests running into the sun, or other natural factor that will make the test unfair to certain dog group (early/late)
- Tests using marks that dogs cannot see (lighting, cover at dogs level, distance). \*If you're using white flags on a bird at a dead bird station, maybe the bird is too long.
- Can't see dogs in/near hunt area (all sides)
- Can't see birds thrown or as they land (background, sharp angle back throws, throws into valleys)
- Flyer guns creating unnecessary distractions.
- Quick signaling, changing cadence of signaling for birds
- Ambiguous walk-up/inconsistent time limits to watch
- The cover paths up/cover breaks-down/excessive "drag back" scent for later dogs
- Retired guns move but still in sight when dogs approach area of the fall.
- Retired guns move too far (trails, sight distractions)
- Retired gun station not adequately brushed allowing dogs to see station from out of area.
- Birds thrown toward line
- Birds thrown in front of water
- Transporting gun stand to holding blind each time
- Honor dog placement which creates distractions the running dog at may cause on-line confusion
  - Creating an honor that creates "crossing lines" for the working dogs.
- **Gunner movement:**
  - **Gunner movement tricks dogs.** IF you move a gun station after they have shot, be sure to retire them!!! As often happens with walkouts, gunners walk out to shoot then walk back to their station, which remains visible to the dogs. Remember, dogs have been taught to hunt off of gunners so if the gunners have moved and are visible, you're tricking the dogs to hunt away from the bird.
  - Excessive confusion in the field (gunners moving while marks are going down: confusion drill)

### **Minor Stakes:**

- Short mark, then long (tricks young dogs)
- Two marks down the shore (water) (training test - lining drill)
- "Lining" marks
- Excessive "trained dog" tests
- Breaking tests

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## **BLIND PRINCIPALS/DESIGN**

- Make hazards obvious reference the true line
- Dog visible if on line (also for shorter/senior handlers)
- Handler visible to dog: (glare off water? sun, shadow)
- Avoid artificial ‘commandments’: (ie: must be left of bush, on point, etc.) Maybe use “We are judging your work from the true line”
- Judge from the true line to the blind and avoid moving to see dog.
- Set up blind so stylish dogs are not disadvantaged (avoid ticky-tac blinds)
- Avoid foot path buildup to blind by planter
- Place planter to make test fair for every dog (down wind, out of site)
- Poison bird is a “mark” (guns retired or left out) (bird picked up or not)
- Avoid path buildup and drag back (maybe move pickup line.)
- Natural markers for bird placement. (avoid using fresh paint)
- Whistle audible throughout blind, especially in hazards (ie: brush, running water, corn, etc)
- Define pick-up area.
- Define handler movement/restrictions and how to enforce “Get back in place”
- System to assure blind has been planted \*Note in holding blind: “Did we plant your blind?”
- Set up blind to have three parts, beginning/middle/end. Make initial line difficult to get, have challenging, jeopardizing hazards.

### **Evaluation of Dog Work on Blinds**

- Dog “bugging” on line, refusal to “look out”
- Excessive lining?
- Take and hold initial line?
- Prompt stops?
- Take and hold casts? (watch dog, not handler for cast refusals)
- Pop/recast
  - Where, when, why, extenuating circumstances?
  - Caused by elements, confusion?
- Judge all three parts of the blind (initial/middle/end)
- Smooth work vs. “hack” to stay on line (yet challenge jeopardy hazards)
- Did dog take the hazards
- Perseverance
- Style

### **Good Blind Design**

- Clear corridors, visible ‘fairway’, yet jeopardy out of sight potential on both sides
- Clear “picture” to handlers of blind expectancy and “obvious” hazards
- Multiple “wrong” places to go
- Initial line is complicated to “break-up” the initial line picture

### **Poor Blind Design**

- Easily scent or trailing birds
- “Framed-in” picture of corridor for dog (“no where else to go”)
- Easily able to get, and hold initial line
- Ability to smell or trail blind when running marks with planted blinds (avoid if at all possible)

# **GENERAL THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE LINE AND EVALUATION OF DOG WORK:**

## **Running Line and Holding Blind Position**

- Set up the Holding Blind in a position to allow the next handler to study the test without disrupting the running dog.
- Set up the holding blind giving the judges the opportunity to evaluate heeling and overall line manners.
- Set up the holding blind/running line/honor line with traffic patterns of dogs in mind to minimize dogs “facing off” while entering/leaving the line areas.
- Try to allow shade (ice & water if hot) for running dogs in holding blinds.
- Allow sufficient area on line for handlers to comfortably maneuver dogs
- Clearly delineate line area to assure fairness for all competitors
- Always remember, the judge controls the action from the blind to the line.

## **Other General Misc. thoughts relative to the line**

- Position of birds/dryers to eliminate confusion or bird “stealing”
- Marshals position and job functions
- Gallery position
- Judges position for easy sight to the gunners and from the dogs
- Shadows from judges impairing dogs’ concentration.
- Position of other equipment (umbrellas, tents, cooler, lunches)

## **Evaluation of Dog Work**

- Creeping and controlled breaks (Derby/Qualifying) penalties
- Re-heeling on creeping (should judges tell handlers to reheel?)
- Handling on mark
  - Evidence of mark?
  - Timing/smooth handle
  - Evaluation of hunt vs. handle
- Pops/recast
  - Where, when, why, extenuating circumstances?
  - Caused by elements, confusion?
  - Pops are not “death” there are ok places along with terrible places to pop.
- Sticky mouth (when is it considered a failure) (three strikes and you’re out rule???)
- Noise on line, during retrieve, in honor box, in blind
- Lines to marks
- Retired guns
  - Evidence of mark
  - Identifying station while on line
- Intimidation/interference (honor, etc.): what constitutes?
- What constitutes a break?
  - Creep vs. break
  - Honor dog creep causing running dog break
  - Did “both dogs” break?
- Switching: yes or no call, scenting conditions (attempted vs. prevented?)
- Honoring nose: pop / check / continue
- Dog fights
  - Get dogs off and handlers off line and dogs back to the trucks. Assess the situation while handlers are putting dogs away
  - Contact field trial committee and get the facts written down

# **ELEMENT INFLUENCES ON EARLY RUNNING DOGS**

## **Unfair influences**

- Cover that will easily path up. (man-make multiple paths or “entry points”)
- No Paths created by early running dogs
- All manmade, set-up obstacles are intact
- Little scent buildup by bird/dog/thrower
- Poor scenting conditions
- Poor lighting conditions
- Cooler temperature
- Summer months unfairnesses
  - Lush cover
  - Morning dew
  - Mid-day warm better scent
- Winter months unfairness
  - Low light shadows
  - Temperature extremes
  - Poor scenting conditions
- Avoid gallery interference
- Ideal “judges conditions”
- Poor mechanics (shooting, no birds)
  - Little test observation/limited learning time
  - Order to select birds
  - Hazards
  - When to handle

## **Equalizing the Influence Factors**

- Well scented areas
- Good lighting
- Wind remains as predicted
- If cover will path up, create multiple bad dog paths at start, then re-establish as necessary (this will avoid “funneling” effects)
- Work hard on early smooth mechanics
- Practice mechanics before test dog (no-bird throws will not get better if left alone)
- Avoid surprise hazards; be informative about the not so obvious. Walk the field prior to starting the test.
- Keep guns away from shadow areas (early and late)
- Attention to re-birding routes (minimize “field trips” and take multiple paths)
- Consistent factors that test perseverance (terrain, water, diversions, multiples, distance.) Cover and wind may break down/change test)

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## General Test Design Logic

- ***Dog Safety: Assuring dog safety is absolutely imperative!***
- Identify/avoid/protect underwater hazards (culverts, pipes, shallow water entries, stick ponds dangers)
- Design tests with time management in mind.
- Design tests in which ~25% do very well, ~25% fail, ~50% have one or more faults.
- Reality of Time (how much time you ACTUALLY have and leave time for errors)
- Will light be a factor (sunny or overcast, hours on location)
  - Sunrise/sunset times
  - Sun position for handlers, dogs, and gunners
  - Early/late shadows
- Wind: talk to locals to understand the winds and consider variability (direction and intensity)
- Mechanics: Safety and efficiency for vehicle movement to/from the test (consider peripheral movement as distraction)
- Bird and Gun stations visible – will lighting change? Shadows?
- Background – white/black coats?
- Can you see (judge) the dog in and around the fall area?
- Ease of moving guns in/out (rebirding, etc.)
- Safe, intelligent flyer placement. Do not use flyer as “controlled fall.”
- Safe, intelligent placement of other birds. Are retired gunners fully hidden? Minimize movement of gunners. Can station duplicate throws throughout the day?
- Is there sufficient area to safely hunt, and/or fail mark?
- Will whistle be heard to handle or pick-up?
- Handler disadvantages: Age/Mobility/Height
- Background - Looking back at line from blind/falls
- Ditches - Identify ditches to allow dogs the ability to see, and avoid if necessary.
- Public Roads: Assure more than adequate room to allow for handling/avoidance of entrance onto public roads
- Walk were the dogs will go, then walk it again. Assure that it’s safe.
- Gallery
  - Vantage to watch (user friendly vs. interference)
  - Efficiency of all traffic concerns
- Back-up Plans
- Alternative wind direction/flooded access
- Scrapped test
- Quick test alternative
- Don’t panic

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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### **Preparing for the Specifics of the Test**

- Review and decide on gallery, traffic and safety issues.
- Who will control the line, call for birds, release dog on number.
- What are your expectations for each bird and each test? Do not use flyer “control” bird, it’s a recipe for disaster.
- Decide on where and what the boundaries/area of fall and area of hunt (good mark, switch) boundaries/reasons for “No bird”
- Corridor and expectation of blind and blind hazards.
- Instructions to Handlers, Marshall, Guns
- Receiving locations / Paths? Drag-back?
- Bird handling, which judges will take and examine the bird
- Humane treatment of birds / public image (shade, rain, food, water)
- Decide when excessive “sticking” will occur and judges response

### **Significance of “Last bird Down”**

- Use as a “true” mark and to set up subsequent marks.
- Running through shorter marks to get “last bird down”
- Consider what effect last bird will have on subsequent marks
- Factors on the way to mark (water, cover, ditch, obstacle avoidance, other hazards)
- Hunt potential (cover, distance to fall area, terrain)
- Allowing for other “key bird” setup (retiring, delays)
- Over-run to easier/other birds

## **LOOKING FOR THE IDEAL DOG**

- Dog that has a “presence” on line and commands your attention.
- Balance of natural and trained responses
- Cool temperament (nice dog during total performance)
- Full of keenness
- Good Memory
- Adaptability
- Game finding ability/control
- Desire to “do the right thing”

### **General Appearance of Dog**

- Muscular, strong, athletic, powerful in water, endurance, stamina,
- Efficient, active, free movement, stride, reach, long, agile, quick, flexible
- Intelligence, versatile
- Good temperament, stable
- Eager, alert, confident, keen, willing to work, desire
- Tender hold of game
- Intelligent
- Hunting ability, innate ability, cover ground, “birdy”
- Balance: power/strong but elegant, smooth, coordinated
- Responsive, trainable, tractable
- Style, determined, desire to please
- Courage, perseverance
- Nose, natural ability/talent



## **Working Environment**

- Waterfowl, Upland (land / water, ?????)
- Long time, difficult conditions
- Weather, rugged conditions (ice, snow)
- Water, ice cold, tide, long swims
- Multiple retrieves
- Wind
- Rugged conditions
- Leaving punishing cover
- Game variety, mixed bag

## **GENERAL JUDGING PHILOSOPHY QUESTIONS**

### **General Thoughts**

- Look for retrievers the average person (or you) would want to handle/own.
- Look for and find the best dog in YOUR trial (on that given weekend)
- Should you judge the dog or judge the dog/handler team?
- Judge a dog “using” the wind vs. breaking down to wind
- How to distinguish? (loops behind guns, out of area loops/hunts, etc.)
- What is a reasonable distance for marks/blinds?
- Hearing and Sight Standard (Dog and Handler)
- Point at which dogs should be eliminated for slowness, lack of style, stickiness, other factors.
- Point at which a dog should be eliminated for stickiness (three strikes and your out rule?)
- Test run directly into the wind Proper/Fair?
- Is “trainability” a natural ability? Clever dogs may not be the best dogs?
- Are style/perseverance/intelligence the only natural abilities a judge can evaluate?
- Do you tell the handler to reheel the dog that creeps, or not let the handler creep to meet the dog?

### **Points of View**

- Utility of the dog: to gather game we cannot easily get ourselves
- Bird Placement
  - Birds concealed by cover
  - Birds in inaccessible places (across water / distance)
  - Birds placed where dogs will not go naturally (not at end of channel, top of hill)
- Greater control = quicker gathering of game
- Ability to put dog where you want him
- Ability to control the game, not allowing dog to “take over the line”
- Bottom line = pleasing performance, was the dog fun to watch??
- Which type of dog is preferred: dog on the edge “wild” vs. controlled, deliberate: Balance of both?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## **THE THREE PHASES OF JUDGING:**

Through the years I have found that there are three phases that judges go through as we learn this wonderful game. Hopefully everyone makes it to phase three...

**PHASE ONE:** The new judge: This person is new to judging, realizes that they're new, realizes that they know very little about judging and want to learn as much as they can. This person has input to the test but is willing to listen and learn and can become a very good judge.

**PHASE TWO:** The dangerous judge: This person has judged just enough to know everything there is to know about judging. This person feels bullet proof and is ready for any circumstance. Anything and everything they say is matter-of-fact and reasoning is not an option. Be wary of this judge, this is where trouble looms!!!

**PHASE THREE:** The accomplished judge: This person has successfully judged quite few All-Age trials (>25) is currently/recently campaigning in All-Age stakes and has come to feel that the more you're around these wonderful animals and the more you judge, the less you truly understand. This person should make a good/excellent judge because he/she will simply sit back, watch, marvel, and judge the dog work as they see it without OVER analyzing the whats and whys of the dog work.

## **DETERMINING THE RELATIVE MERITS: JUDGEMENT AND DOG WORK**

**Both judges should define and agree on:**

- Area of fall
- Indication of mark?
- When have they "left" the "area"?
- Did he hunt the "fall area" before moving-on, switch?
- Did dog "go back" to old fall and hunt with purpose before leaving?
- "No-bird" boundaries?
- Other boundaries of concern.

### **Hunt Criteria**

- Reasonably accurate mark
- Effort/intelligent/intelligent, systematic hunt
- "Use" of the wind (nose)
- "Owning" the fall area (perseverance)
- Not disturbing excessive cover

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## **Call Backs/Judgment**

During Each Series and following each dog's performance you should have a simple tally sheet to record:

- "Failure" list
- "In trouble" list
- "OK" list

The tally sheet can be checked-off during a dogs return from long marks, long swims, or prior to signaling guns-up. This tally sheet will expedite call-backs.

- Rate each series using a simple system \*[ok, -, failure]\* (If you feel you MUST use a more in-depth rating system, use one that will be consistent throughout the test, for every dog.
  - (I personally think that using a 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 system has multiple flaws, as consistency of scoring is nearly impossible for early dogs vs. late running dogs.)
- Make notes on remarkable/non-remarkable events: Excellent – Poor - Failure: marking, style, control, and other factors (this will be key when deciding placements)
- Comparing and/or discussing rankings, notes, and thoughts before and during each series will help facilitate placements, identify emerging likes/dislikes and minimize "surprises".
- Have your judges' book ready (numbered) and keep it in a manageable fashion. Good book maintenance will alleviate lost time and confusion.
- Be sure to double-check your Call-Backs list to assure accuracy and minimize embarrassment.

## **DETERMINATION OF PLACEMENTS**

**SCORE EVERY BIRD not every series.** \* Using this manner you will have scored 6-8 marks and 2-3 blinds. If you have scored each bird then marked birds will be the majority of your score, (8 marks vs. 3 blinds) which fulfills the Rule Book statement, "marking is of primary importance."

- Watch the dog and judge what you see, NOT WHAT you think the dog did (winded bird, see the retired gunners, "hail mary/hollywood cast")
- Draw a "picture" of the test to include each fall and pertinent hazards to give you a detailed picture of the performance of the dog
- Make notes of any significant issue of the performance:

Your notes should include:

- Any faults that alone or cumulatively could result in penalties/elimination. Penalties also may effect late series call backs (cumulative work)
- Exceptional performances/exhibitions of qualities
- Any other thing you feel will help you to remember and judge the dog (dogs name)

## **Basis of Comparisons/Balance**

- Each mark (Land & Water), dog vs. dog
- What was the MOST difficult bird(s) in the trial? Which dog had the best work on that bird?
- Adequate style to win?
- Adequate control to win?
- Perseverance/hunting ability evident?
- Pleasing performance
- Did the "best" dog win?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## **Setting Up Tests and Test Scenario Descriptions**

### **Scenario:**

- Discuss your thoughts on the mechanics of what will happen (who, what, when, where, why)
- Discuss basis of evaluation: “M, S, P & T” (marking, style, perseverance, trainability)
- Expectations of test
- Be sure contestants understand the test and special instructions (walk-up, poison bird, etc.)
- “Sit” command on walk-up
- Timing on dry pop, and walk ups
- Bull dog (diversion bird/shot) can be unfair if dog has wing over eyes during “mark” when returning. Discuss how to deal with no-bird bull-dog. Be careful of mechanics of test.
- Avoid too complex of instructions and handler skill oriented participation (climbing mounds, etc.)

## **Judging Philosophies – Yours vs. Co-judge**

### **Determining Test Mechanics**

- Dry run the test mechanics before running the test dog
- Running Order: How important to stay in order?
- Define rotation to include rotation changes if a test is scraped
- Use of mat, and how mat is to be used (handle on mat, handle and dog)
- Re-runs (come back after 3 dogs)
- If dog failure should the dog honor on lead? Does lead “intimidate” the running dog?
- When has dog performed honor? Re-runs, gun changes/down time (release?)
- How will you handle: runners, wild game, birds that float out of fall area, sink?
- Compare books before last series
- Prior blind influence on marks
- “Wipe-out” birds (inconsistent falls?)
- Natural blind markers
- Dog visible to blind (shorter/older handlers)
- Guns face line vs. bird
- Distance gunners move to retire ...unfair diversion/foot path (prefer down wind)
- Blind planter path (prefer down wind)
- Mixed bag on key bird?
- Handler conduct after signal
- Pops/recasts philosophies: confusion, caused by element, other factors (gallery talk, noise, etc)
- Advice to handler during the test? Never tell handler whether or not the dog has the bird.
- Division of Duties: call up / signal / release / pick up / honor dog / receive birds
- “No Bird”: remember either may call
- Release all dogs using number
- Should you tell handler to re-heel?: set parameters and only one-judge talks
- Order of throws and cadence between signals to encourage marking
- Use of handler aids; ie binoculars, hats, multiple TYPES of whistles used
- Special assistance for handicapped handlers (helping to/from line, aiding in bringing dogs to/from line)
- Discuss any issues that you/co-judge find particularly offensive (creeping, noise, bird handling)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## **MEASURES OF SUCCESSFULLY JUDGED TRIAL**

- Did you place any dogs health and/or well being in jeopardy?
- Did you have fun?
- Would you have wanted to run your trial?
- No Rule Book/Technical/Mechanical problems/Tests Fair and EQUAL to all?
- Clear separation and understanding of pass/fail in each test?
- Clear Winner and clear separation between all places / Jams (Finished > 4 dogs)
- Were call backs clear, allowing many to play, yet clear separation between those not back
- Were instructions and expectations clear to the handlers?
- All series/birds achieve significant separation and contribution to the winner?
- Good balance between Land/Water, Marks/Blinds, Style/Control
- Were the test difficult enough to avoid the “cavalry charge” where everyone thinks they won?
- Would you be invited back to judge again? Would you want to judge there again??

## **WORKER INSTRUCTIONS**

### **Marshall Instructions**

- Marshal “handles and handlers” up to the blind. Judges take over from the blind to completion of test.
- Outline equipment/help requirements
- Gallery, Traffic and Safety (keep line area clear)
- Review instructions to Guns, Handlers
- Post Running Order and Rotation to include fifth series starter and rotation policy for scraped tests (if necessary)
- Re-runs: Wait three after no-bird IF birds have been thrown, right back if mechanical failure before first bird
- Test dog (have 2 ready)
- By-dogs (begin, end, out of dogs?)
- Pick-up dog, quickly available
- Sorting of birds (sex, badly damaged, quantity in bags for efficient re-birding)
- Timing: re-birds, gun changes, lunch, line viewings, etc. (consolidate/coordinate/schedule)
- Plan move to next series/clean-up/anticipate equipment/post signs, etc
- Send call backs to other stakes
- Call dogs to line (when/how)
- Coordinate release of handlers/dogs to other stakes, stay in touch with other stakes
- Blind Planted?
- Enough dead birds to get “rolling”
- Be sure all birds are picked up when a dog fails test
- Review traffic flow to/from line

### **General instructions to workers (additional Marshal duties)**

- ❖ ALWAYS BE NICE TO WORKERS. (unless you want to throw the bird)
- Safety/Comfort: Gun Safety, Ears, Eyes, Clothing, Gloves, Chair
- When to/not to communicate
- Discard badly damaged/shot up birds
- Special Equipment (throwers, etc... How to use)
- Give same instruction to NEW workers at each gun / worker change
- How/when to notify bird/equipment shortages
- How/when to help a dog?????\*\*\*
- Dry run the mechanics at each gun/worker change

**Mark Bird Station Instructions**

- Safety
- When to clear gun, sit down, retire, re-bird, reload – when to go “guns-up”
- Do not change stance positions/white coats (anticipate hot/cold / rain / visibility)
- Walking paths: retiring, re-birding, returning to line
- Clean-up (empty shells, etc.)
- Area of fall, what to do after “no bird”
- How and when to help dogs (if asked to do so)
- Even if a dog breaks, still look for signal
- \*Scent area with dead bird throws (widely)
- Enough poppers, birds, etc.
- Gun securely in gun stand?

**Flyer Guns’ Instructions**

- Safety!! Be sure gunners feel safe and comfortable that they can SAFELY shoot at bird.
- # of birds killed to start
- Keep birds’ quiet/in shade/out of rain
- Ask for minimum of two shots at each bird
- When to sluice/cripples (\*not necessary to sluice all birds if one bird requires sluicing...)
- When to sit-down, clear guns, retire (if required)
- How to inform judges of runners, unfair situation, badly shot-up birds, etc.
- Clean up during and after test (empty shells, etc.)
- When to mount guns (avoid head-swinging)
- Area of fall/no bird
- Even if a dog breaks, still look for signal
- Avoid shooting if dog has broken towards flyer area.
- \*Scent area with dead bird throws (widely) > day 2/3
- Give dead birds to others during re-bird

**Blind planter station Instructions**

- Safety
- Confirm blind is planted
- Walking paths: blind planting, re-birding, returning to line
- Clean-up
- When to/not to communicate (stay still and hidden)
- Plant all birds breast down/in same place

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## **DEALING WITH MISCONDUCT**

### **Purpose**

Obviously, anyone who competes in, or is involved in putting on a field trial is expected to do so in a sportsman like manner. Failure to do so may result in AKC Misconduct proceedings brought against you.

One test in connection with any kind of scene or altercation (act of misconduct) occurring during the progress of an event is whether a family attending their first event would be likely to decide, after witnessing such an incident, that the sport is not for them.

### **Types of Misconduct**

- Demonstration of dissatisfaction with a judge's decision
- Refusal to accept a ribbon
- Tossing ribbon on the ground
- Altercations with officials or participants
- Abusive or foul language in public
- Mistreatment or abuse of dogs
- "Lobbying" for placements

A judge who witnesses any of the types of misconduct must report it to the Field Trial Committee for investigation and appropriate actions.

## Mitch's Epitaph

### The Top 10 List

1. BE FAIR, BE FAIR, ALWAYS - BE FAIR!!! Always give the dog the benefit of the doubt. The test is in the field, not in the rulebooks. Remember, dogs don't read the rulebooks.
2. Don't brag about your "great test" or the "answers" that you got. Good chance you'll be the only one thinking the test was "great" and maybe your "answers" were for an **inappropriate question!!!**
3. DO NOT throw a trick test and don't take pride in your abilities to trick a Labrador, it's not that difficult to do.... Trick tests make good dogs look bad, you want your tests to make the good dogs look good.
4. NEVER EVER apologize for making a test too difficult... IF THE TEST IS FAIR...
5. Always judge with the thought that you're looking for the best dog. Remember that all dogs MUST be able to see ALL birds and ALL handlers must be able to see their dogs. It's ONLY THEN that you'll have a chance to truly find the best dog.
6. Always try to have fun judging; your attitude will shine throughout to the entire field.
7. Time management and test mechanics is imperative to a successful day. You must schedule each dog sufficient time to complete (or fail) your test... Don't setup a test with the thought that you'll have enough time ONLY if everything goes right.
8. Don't assume anything when judging dog work. Don't assume that the wind saved a dog, luck prevailed, etc., just watch the work and judge what you see, maybe the dog IS that good.
9. Don't panic, things have a way of always working out in the end...
10. Don't sweat the little stuff. WATCH, WATCH AND THEN WATCH some more!!! You can't judge what you didn't see, so don't make assumptions for something you didn't see!!!

**FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM:** ALWAYS REMEMBER, when things seem perfect, you probably missed something and will be struck by lightning.... cause S--t Happens

### The Final *FINAL* word:

This is so important that I'm saying it again; remember these words...

*It's up to YOU to assure the safety and well being of these great athletes while they demonstrate their talents, ambition and desire during your field trial, DO NOT take that responsibility lightly*

*Thank you,*

*Mitch Patterson*

*JJ's Retrievers*

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