

The Real Purpose of AKC Hunting Tests

By Lyle Johnson, AKC Executive Field Representative

Hunting Tests for Pointing Breeds were developed so people would have an opportunity to demonstrate a dog's ability to perform under actual hunting conditions. Judges should evaluate a dog's natural abilities as well as those traits obtained through training.

Hunting Tests are for people of all ages, male and female and for dogs at least six months of age and older. The dogs are not being judged as in competition, but against a standard designed to evaluate what each dog should be capable of doing to receive a passing score. Any child old enough to fire a blank pistol can run in hunting tests and any dog that is 6 months of age can run in either Junior, Senior or Master stakes. Dogs must be AKC registered or have an Indefinite Listing Privilege (ILP) or PAL number in order to participate. ILP's are for dogs that do not have official registration papers but are, or appear to be purebreds for the breed so named.

The most appealing thing about the Hunting Tests is that you do not have the option of handling off horseback. All participants must walk and no horseback gallery, that might tend to confuse a hunting dog, is allowed. For the average hunter, this works very well. While the handler nor the gallery can be on horseback, dogs must be used to horses as both judges and the marshal are normally mounted in order to better view the dog's performance. Although, in some hunting tests, judges and the marshal may walk throughout the event.

Dogs are run in braces, two at a time as determined by a drawing several days in advance of the hunting tests. The purpose of bracing is to allow the judges an opportunity to determine whether or not a dog has an aggressive demeanor, or is a "trailer", one that chases its bracemate. Another reason for bracing is that dogs, in some situations must also honor their bracemates in both Senior and Master stakes in order to receive a qualifying score.

In Junior stakes, dogs must show a keen desire to hunt, be bold and independent of its bracemate. Dogs must show desire to find game and when finding such, must point until the handler gets within gun range. A blank shot must be fired by the handler to show that the dog is not gun shy. The Junior dog should also be responsive to its handler's commands.

The Senior dog should also show all of the above PLUS be steady to the flush but can break at gunshot. The dog must show willingness to honor without being "whoa-ed" into an honor. The Senior dog must retrieve to its handler. A Senior dog that "steals point" from its bracemate cannot receive a qualifying score.

To obtain a Master title is no easy task as the dog must show a "completely finished" performance. The dog must be under complete control of its handler at all times. This would be the ultimate in a finished hunting dog. The dog must stop to flush without a command and also honor without being prompted by the handler. The dog must honor the bracemate's point

and be steady to the flush, shot and retrieve of its bracedmate's bird. The dog must also find game and be steady to wing and shot plus retrieve absolutely to hand a shot bird. All this must be done with a minimum of noise and hacking by the handler.

Score cards are set up to evaluate a dog on a scale of one (1) to ten (10), with five being the magic number, as any score below a five (5) is a failing score and the dog cannot qualify. Dogs must maintain a score of at least five in each individual category, with an overall average score of no less than seven (7) to qualify in all levels of testing.

The six categories are:

Hunting

Bird Finding Ability

Pointing

Trainability

Retrieving (Not applicable to Junior)

Honoring (Not applicable to Junior)

Judges must agree on which dogs will qualify before submitting their score sheets to the event secretary.

Hunting Tests for Pointers are great for those individuals who want to get their dogs out into the field, on birds and enjoy fine tuning their abilities while participating under simulated, but very realistic natural hunting conditions. All this without the added expense of having to have horses, horse trailers in which to transport the animals. At Hunting Tests the participants all root for each other's dogs, and a real camaraderie exists at these events. A lot of "high fives" and just shaking each other's hands on receiving a qualifying score.