

Understanding AKC Hunt Test, Walking Field Trials and the Difference

We at Hastings Island encourage people to become more involved with their dogs in the field; ultimately making both our members and their dogs better hunters. To this end, Hastings' ownership and management make the Island available to various dog clubs for the sponsoring of field performance testing events. Primarily these events are AKC Pointing Breed Hunt Tests and AKC Pointing Breed Walking Field Trials. We often receive inquiries as to what is required for the events and what is the difference between Hunt Tests and Field Trials.

The major difference between Field Trials and Hunt Tests is that Field Trials are **COMPETITIVE**, with only the top four dogs in each classification receiving recognition and AKC point accumulation. Hunt Tests are **NOT COMPETITIVE** and only require dogs to be compared against a **STANDARD**. Dogs do not compete against each other and all dogs achieving a minimum level of performance are awarded a pass. Horseback handling, scouting or gallery is not permitted in any Hunt Test. Walking Field Trials **MAY** allow horseback scouting and galleries, but typically no horses other than the Judges and Marshal are allowed at Hastings.

Hunt Tests are divided into three major categories; Junior, Senior and Master. After achieving one of these basic titles, owners may take their dogs on to an "Advanced" title in each category. The requirements for these Advanced Titles are simply a higher average score in the respective categories. Each category is judged by two individuals. Judging is somewhat subjective, with some judges being more critical than others and with each having their own opinions of the importance of the characteristics desired in each of the performance categories. The judges evaluate each dog's performance and must collaborate to decide upon the individual category scores and final **PASS** or **FAIL** for each dog. Their judgement is made against a **STANDARD** expectation. The performance of other dogs in the test is not considered. At a minimum, passing dogs must provide a yeomen's performance and may provide superior performances. Dogs are scored on a 0 to 10 scale with a minimum average score of 7 required to pass. Additionally, no single category may be scored below 5.

JUNIOR HUNT TEST dogs are judged on 1) their Search or Hunt, 2) their ability to find game, 3) their pointing ability and 4) their trainability or cooperativeness. All dogs must be at least 6 months old; but dogs of any age above that can compete. Judgement is simply upon current level of performance and not age or future promise.

Junior dogs must point at least half of the birds they encounter. Upon establishing point, the dog must hold until the handler is within reasonable gun range prior to breaking. Junior dogs are not required to "stop to flush" and may chase any bird that has taken wing. A blank pistol is to be fired once a bird has been put to wing over the dog. Dogs must show a keen desire to hunt, be bold and independent, have a fast and attractive running style and show intelligence in seeking objectives.

SENIOR HUNT TEST dogs are evaluated on the above four characteristics as well as 1) Honoring or backing and 2) Retrieving. A Senior Dog is expected to demonstrate more maturity, training and cooperativeness. A Senior Dog must point all birds found and must hold point until the handler has put the bird to wing and fires a blank cartridge.

If a Senior Dog encounters a bird on the wrong side of the wind or otherwise has a "wild flush", the dog must stop and watch the bird fly away. The dog may not move or chase until after the handler fires a blank cartridge.

A Senior Dog must honor or back. If an opportunity is not presented, the judges will set up an honor. Senior Dogs may be given a caution to point, honor and stop to flush. Once having established an honor, the handler may collar the dog while the bracemate works the bird.

A reasonable retrieve to the handler is required for a Senior Dog. Once a dog has established point the handler must flush the bird and an official gunner will shoot the bird. The dog may break for the retrieve upon the shot of the gun.

MASTER HUNT TEST dogs are judged in the same six categories as Senior Dogs; however, a complete finished performance is required. In a Wild Flush situation the dog must stop and may not move until released by the handler. The dog **MAY NOT** delay chase the bird, but rather must hunt off in another direction. In an honor situation the dog must honor on its own without caution and may not be collared. The dog must stand and watch the other dogs retrieve and may not move until released by the handler. Again the dog may not delay chase. If an honor situation is not presented, the judges will set one up.

Masters must be under the handlers control at all times, show and check in front frequently and handle kindly. He or she must point all birds located. The dog may not move until the bird has been flushed by the handler, shot by an official gunner and then released by the handler for the retrieve. The retrieve must be to hand. If the bird is missed, the dog may not move until released by the handler and then may not delay chase.

At only the Master level, the handler must carry a shotgun or simulated shotgun and follow the path of a flushed bird as if he or she were going to shoot it.

A blank gun is required in all levels. If in the Senior and Master level tests not all birds are to be shot for retrieve, then a blank cartridge must be fired. A blank is also to be fired upon a proper stop-to-flush.

Multiple Passes are required to achieve each Hunt Test level title. A dog may start at any level and progress upward. Some participants only enter their dogs in the highest level test and attain a Master Hunt Test title. Others start at the lowest level, Junior, and work their way up. Depending upon how a dog is entered; 4 to 6 Passes at any one level are required to attain a Hunt Test title. Once a dog passes a higher level it may not be again entered in a lower level.

FIELD TRIALS offer a multitude of stakes and draw varying degrees of quality dogs. AKC Champion points are awarded to only the top dogs based upon the number of dogs entered in a stake. Stakes may be offered to a single breed, multiple named breeds or all pointing breeds. A complicated formula of AKC Championship Point accumulation amounting to 10 points is required for both a (Open) Field Championship and/or an Amateur Field Championship.

Except in stakes of 25 or more dogs, Open Championship Points are only awarded to the winner. Depending upon the number of dogs entered, Amateur stakes offer Amateur Championship Points to First, Second and even Third. Consequently Walking Field Trials are typically entered by dogs which provide more than a yeomen's performance. Even stiffer competition can be expected in Horseback Field Trials. Like Hunt Tests, Field Trial stakes are judged by two qualified individuals.

Generally Field Trial competitions are divided into OPEN and AMATEUR stakes. Amateur stakes may only be entered by amateur handlers; whereas Open stakes may be entered by both amateurs and professional handlers. Further the competitions are divided by age and performance level. Dogs must be a minimum of 6 months old to enter any stake.

PUPPY stakes are for dogs up to 15 months of age. Generally no birds are planted for these stakes and puppies are not required to find or point birds. Puppies are judged on their application, desire, activity, running style and future promise. They should be bold and show initiative in seeking likely objectives. Puppies should show reasonable obedience. No extra credit is to be given to a dog that finds and points birds.

DERBY stakes are for dogs up to 24 months of age. Dogs which are still Puppy age may also run in Derby stakes. Derby dogs are judged with an eye for more work ethic, experience and maturity. They should have a fast and attractive running style, show a keen desire to hunt and intelligence in seeking likely objectives. Derbies must locate and point game. The point need not be much more than long enough to call the judges' attention to it and then the dog may break and chase. A derby dog is not required to stop-to-flush and may chase wild flushed birds. Derbies are judged for both their actual performance and a large measure of future promise.

Adult dog stakes are broken into 4 types in both Amateur and Open categories; Gun Dog, Limited Gun Dog, All Age and Limited All Age.

LIMITED stakes require that entrants must have previously won a Derby stake or placed in a Gun Dog or All Age stake.

GUN DOG stakes are for totally trained dogs which give a finished performance. They may not break or chase game in any circumstance. A Gun Dog should show an accurate nose and style and intensity on point.

They typically run at a range suitable for the foot handler and are not out of sight for long periods of time. They should show and check in front of the handler frequently. Dogs which range out of sight for more than 1/6 of the time are discredited. Judges may overlook lengthy absences in unusual circumstances; such as heavy cover and a dog unseen standing on point.

Adult dog stakes may or may not require retrieving, depending upon the choice of the sponsoring club. If retrieving is required, then it may be done on course, in a bird field or in call backs following the running of all dogs. In call back situations, only the anticipated placing dogs are called back for a retrieve with gunning being done by official gunners. The dog may not initiate the retrieve until sent by the handler and the retrieve must be absolutely to hand.

Adult dogs are only required to honor or back another dog's point if the opportunity presents itself. Unlike Master Hunt Tests, Adult Field Trial dogs may be cautioned into an honor and/or point. Additionally, following bird work, a Field Trial dog may be collared away.

ALL AGE stakes are for finished performance dogs which run at great ranges and with a forward sweeping pattern. All Age dogs show much more independence and run to major objectives. They do less quartering and often pass up minor objectives in preference for more likely objectives at farther off distances. An All Age dog may check in on the handler less frequently and from great distances; however, they must show a willingness to handle. Although many avid hunters foot hunt these dogs on wild birds; All Age dogs typically run too large for foot handled field trials. All Age stakes are not typically offered at Walking Field Trials sponsored at Hastings Island.

We hope this overview provides you with enough insight and confidence to feel comfortable participating in Hunt Tests and Walking Field Trials sponsored at Hastings Island and other locations. Randy Berry, our resident dog trainer, is often available to provide additional insights and individual coaching. In addition to handling clients' dogs in Field Trials, Randy trains many dogs which are handled by their amateur owners in both Field Trials and Hunt Tests. Providing enough interest Randy is willing to schedule two day seminars at Hastings Island.