

JUNIOR LEVEL HUNTING TEST TIPS FOR HANDLERS AND JUDGES

GENERAL TIPS

1. READ THE AKC RULE BOOK!!! You can purchase for \$2.00 from RSVC c/o Deborah Sanders 4413 N. 56th Street, Phoenix, AZ 85018 or from AKC 5580 Centerview Drive, Raleigh, NC 27606
2. Go to training sessions.
3. Go out in the field on your own or with one other person and dog to practice.
Work on commands to control your dog in the field.
Field commands are different than obedience commands.
Whoa = stop
Here = come
Easy = slow down
Up or Front = dog needs to get up ahead of you
4. Practice commands in backyard.
5. Use pigeons to train if quail aren't available. Professional trainers use pigeons.
6. If you pass your last leg of Junior at a HT on Saturday, carefully consider whether you and dog are ready to move up to Senior on Sunday. Only move up if you are confident your dog is ready and that it won't interfere with bracemate.

Here are some tips in the 4 categories that will be judged in the Junior Level.

HUNTING ABILITY

Dogs should show a keen desire to hunt, boldness, independence, fast yet useful running pattern.

BACK COURSE

1. At the line keep a good space between you and your bracemate.
2. Be assertive w/your dog if it's trailing, bumping, or interfering with bracemate. Call dog to you if needed.

Judges should watch for this and give direction to handlers if this occurs.

3. Dogs should be looking for game – sniffing intently at bushes, grass clumps – areas where wild birds would covey.
4. Encourage dog along the way w/praise. Don't let them mess around. Keep dog ahead of you. Have a command to get your dog ahead of you. Excessive talking to your dog is called "Hacking." Avoid this.
5. Walk at brisk pace. Keep conversation other handler to a minimum.

Judges – Remember – these are inexperienced dogs and possibly inexperienced handlers. It's your job to guide them and watch out for unacceptable behavior in the dogs.

BIRD FINDING ABILITY

Dog must find and point birds. Dogs must show intelligent use of wind in seeking objectives to find birds. Quality of find is more important than number of finds. No call back if dog goes birdless.

BIRD FIELD

1. Try to enter bird field into the wind. Guide dog in zig zag pattern to cover bird field.
2. Learn to read your dog. Dog's behavior should get more intense due to scent of game.

Key signs the your dog has found scent cone:

Pace slows and may cover same area several times.

Body tenses up.

May creep along into scent cone as gets closer to game.

3. Try to keep away from brace mate to avoid divided find or undue pressure on dogs.
4. Dog may be scored low if it "stumbles" upon bird rather than "finding" it by scent.

Judges may want dog to find another bird to show dog's true bird finding ability. **Judges** should clearly indicate to handler if this is the case.

5. If you are confident that your dog found game by hunting, pointed, bird was flushed, and you fired your pistol – guide dog to fringes of bird field. This reduces chances of failing if dog finds another bird and also allows brace mate to find birds.

Judge may tell you to pick up dog if it is interfering with brace mate finding a bird, or if you have failed, or if your dog has passed - to allow brace mate a chance to find a bird.

Do not pick up/leash dog w/o consulting judge first. It's OK to collar your dog to keep it from interfering with brace mate.

POINTING

BIRD FIELD

1. Use a check cord when training to steady dog on point and keep dog from busting in on bird.
2. Dog's demeanor will change to reflect that it's found a bird. It should be obvious to anyone looking at your dog in the field that it has found a bird and is on point.

Key signs that your dog is going or on point:

Muscles tense
Dog is immobile w/still head

Judge may award a score based upon style of point – intensity and staunchness. Lifted foot and 12 o'clock tail position are not necessary. Dog with low stance should not be scored low.

Judge may fail dog if it just stops at bird w/soft stance.

Judge may want dog to find another bird to see if point improves.

Judge should clearly communicate to handler if this is the case.

Judge should keep in mind these are Junior level dogs and not score as severely for lack of staunchness (flagging – see pg 30).

3. Handler should raise hand and yell "Point" to get judges' attention when dog is on point.
4. Handler should get to dog quickly, approaching from the side if possible so dog isn't startled.
5. Get pistol out and ready.

6. Talk softly to dog – “Whoa, easy”
7. Keep dog on the opposite side as your pistol is held.
8. Flush bird quickly w/o blocking dog’s view.
9. Shoot pistol in air when bird is flushed.
10. If dog flushes bird, you need to be about 30 yards away to fire your pistol.

Judges should focus on dog/handler on point. If both dogs go on point, **Judge** can tell one handler to collar dog so other dog can work their bird.

Judges should split up if dogs separate to different areas of bird field.

11. If dog chases bird handler needs to call dog back into bird field. This can be hard to do with Junior Level dogs. This is where training comes into play.
12. If your dog is on point, but it is not staunch (flagging) (page 30), handler should check to see if there is a bird there or if it is old scent. If old scent, handler should heel dog off (“Leave it” is a common command) and give them the command to keep hunting. A yell to the judge of “No bird” is OK.
13. A “Flash” point (page 30) is not counted as a point. This is when a dog stops momentarily at a bird and then keeps going or busts up bird and chases it. Handler should check out bush to see if contains a bird. Handler should alert Judge if it was a “hot spot” and no bird there.

Dog should point long enough for Handler to get within “gunshot range.” This distance is not defined in the rulebook. Most hunters would say about 30 yards is within “gunshot range.”

Judges should check out bush to confirm no bird and that dog was flashing/flagging old scent. No score reduction should be given if no bird present.

Judge may want dog to find and point another bird if true flagging or flash point is involved. **Judge** should clearly communicate this to the handler.

TRAINABILITY

Trainability is a big issue at the Junior Level. Many inexperienced dogs don't listen when they are out in the field with birds. The dogs are judged on their willingness to be handled, reasonable response to commands, and gun response. This can be the most time consuming part of field training.

BACK COURSE AND BIRD FIELD

OBEDIENCE

1. Dog may be collared to prevent interference with brace mate.
2. Dog should be independent but listen to handler's commands.
3. It's a problem if your dog leaves the field and doesn't come back when called.
4. In training sessions use commands that you and dog are comfortable with. Use same commands for same action each time.

GUN RESPONSE

1. Gun-shyness is not tolerated in any level.
Judges can fail a dog that is afraid of the sound of gunshot.

To avoid gun-shyness, during training, start by letting your dog run and firing the pistol some distance away from dog. Depending on the dog's reaction, get closer each time you fire, working up to right next to dog. This exercise should be introduced before bird work begins.