

AKC Pointing Breed Hunting Tests Rules and Procedures

The following is taken from the AKC booklet, *“Regulations for AKC Hunting Tests for Pointing Breeds Including Guidelines for Pointing Breed Hunting Tests”*, available from the AKC. A lot of information was left out as it was deemed unnecessary for purposes of providing the reader the gist of what a Pointing Breed Hunting Test is about. It is highly recommended that anyone seriously interested in the topic should acquire a current copy of the booklet. Attending tests as a spectator or volunteer are also good ways to learn more about what is required as a handler.

Hunting tests are conducted with the dogs running in braces of two dogs at a time. If a bracemate is absent then the lone dog is dropped down the brace order and matched with the dog in the last brace, if it has no bracemate, or it will run in a final brace with a bracemate chosen from the dogs previously run in the same level test. It is up to the club hosting the test to determine whether or not bitches in season shall be eligible for entry in any Hunting Test or allowed on the hunt test grounds.

Unlike Field Trials all handling is done on foot and only the judges and the marshal may ride horses. Gallery wagons are prohibited. Handlers carry and may fire blank pistols only on the flush of a bird. In Senior and Master tests, there will be two Official Guns who are responsible for any live shooting. The Official Guns must not interfere or assist in any manner the handler of the dogs. In the Master test the handler must shoulder an empty shotgun with both hands and follow the flight of the bird as if he or she were planning to shoot the bird.

Anyone in good standing with The American Kennel Club may be approved to judge a Hunting Test subject to the qualification requirements in force at the time. Basically these are people with experience with pointing dogs in the field and familiar with how pointing dogs should perform in the field. A person that is a judge may not handle a dog in the same test level they are judging but may handle a dog in another level. Judging is done by a pair of judges.

Scoring in a hunting test is based upon four criteria for a Junior Hunter and six criteria for a Senior and Master Hunter. The categories in Juniors are hunting, bird finding ability, pointing, trainability, and in Seniors and Masters, retrieving and honoring are added. These criteria are loosely defined as follows:

Hunting: Dogs must demonstrate desire, boldness, independence, speed and a useful pattern of running. Dogs must hunt and not merely be out for a run in the field. They must show independence by leaving their handler's side to explore the territory. Junior dogs are scored more leniently than Seniors and Masters.

Bird Finding Ability: The dog must demonstrate the ability to find game. Translated, find a bird or don't pass. The number of finds is not as important as the quality of the finds. Scenting conditions, terrain and cover should be considered in the scoring of this category. Note: the course should have sufficient birds (no less than two per brace and more are strongly recommended) to insure that a dog with good finding ability will locate them.

Pointing: scoring in this category should reflect the style (intensity and staunchness) of the dog and its ability to pinpoint birds, especially with difficult or confusing scent patterns. A dog with

a low stance should not be scored lower than a dog with a high stance if it demonstrates staunchness and intensity, particularly in difficult pointing situations. A 12 o'clock tail is not necessary and indeed is not found in any AKC Pointing Breed standards. Flagging (considered a lack of staunchness) on game is generally a fault in older, more experienced dogs, but should not be reflected too severely in the pointing score of a Junior dog. A flash point cannot qualify in any of the three levels. A flash point is generally a point in which the dog stops only momentarily before chasing the bird.

Junior dogs must hold their point until the handler gets with normal gunshot range and must point at least 50% of the birds they find.

Senior dogs must point and remain in position until the bird is shot or the dog is released. The dog may reposition itself if it is attempting to pin the bird. The dog should not creep after or trail a bird that the handler is attempting to flush.

Master dogs must demonstrate steadiness to wing and shot on all birds and cannot receive a qualifying score if it breaks.

Trainability: A dog is judged on its willingness to be handled, its obedience to commands and its gun response. In Juniors, the dog must demonstrate "reasonable obedience" to commands and be willing to be handled. The Senior dog is scored with less tolerance than the Junior. The scoring of "obedience" and "willingness to handle" should reflect the level of response by the dog. The Senior dog must stop on a wild flushed bird and may be commanded to do so. The Master dog cannot be given a command to stop. Gun response is also evaluated under Trainability.

Retrieving: Not required of a Junior dog. A good retrieve is one characterized by directness to the bird, quick location, prompt pick up, brisk, direct return to the handler, with tender delivery. A Senior dog is not required to retrieve to hand. Generally one or two steps would be generally acceptable. A Master dog must retrieve absolutely to hand. The handler cannot assist the dog on the retrieve in either Senior or Master tests by moving toward the downed bird. Mouthing is a serious fault and any dog which renders a bird unfit for consumption cannot receive a qualifying score.

Honoring: Honoring is a requirement in Senior and Master levels. If a dog is given an opportunity to honor and refuses, it cannot receive a qualifying score. In Seniors the handler may give the dog a command to honor but only after the dog acknowledges that its brace mate is on point. A dog that steals its brace mate's point cannot receive a qualifying score. A Master dog must honor on its own.

Scoring (Or What It Takes To Qualify)

Scoring on each element is from 0 to 10, and to qualify a dog must achieve an average score of 7 for the required elements. Any score of less than five on any element is a non-qualifying score, even if the average score is seven or more. If the judges disagree on a score in a given element they may average their scores to arrive at the score for that element.

For a Junior Hunter title, a dog must receive 4 qualifying scores (tests). A Junior dog is scored on hunting, bird finding ability, pointing and trainability.

For a Senior Hunter title, a dog must receive 5 qualifying scores or 4 qualifying scores if the dog holds a Junior Hunter title. Qualification is based on all six elements; hunting, bird finding ability, pointing, trainability, retrieving and honoring.

For a Master Hunter title, a dog must receive 6 qualifying scores or 5 qualifying scores if the dog holds a Senior Hunter title. Qualification is based on all six elements; hunting, bird finding ability, pointing, trainability, retrieving and honoring. A Master Hunter should demonstrate the excellence of a truly finished hunting companion