

Regulations for Versatile Hunting Dog Federation Breed Tests
Hunting Aptitude Evaluation (HAE)

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to record the level of hunting aptitude in the young dog. We recommend this evaluation for dogs up to approximately 1.5 years old; however, there are no age requirements. At this age, the dog should have been exposed to game but not seriously trained and thus still exhibit semi-natural aptitude. The judgment should note the kinds of hunting behaviors displayed by the dog in a hunting setting. These records for individual dogs and possibly whole litters should be useful to breeders for future breeding decisions. The results also will tell owners what areas they should emphasize in future training for an all around and capable hunting dog.

The site

The setting in this evaluation should be natural land or agricultural land that could hold wild game. The evaluation should be conducted on wild birds where possible and augmented with flight conditioned captive-raised game birds. The area should be large enough such that all the dogs being evaluated in a day can sometimes hunt over new ground.

Scoring System

(1) The dog is scored in each subject from 0 to 12 points. The scores of 11 and 12 are only be given as an exception for truly excellent work under difficult circumstances. Scores of 11 and 12 should be documented in writing by the judging team.

The 12-point scoring system allows for a detailed evaluation of each subject, and since these scores are important for breeding decisions, it is required that judges take care to apply the scores in a uniform and consistent manner.

SUBJECT	POINTS
Nose	12
Search	12
Pointing	12
Tracking	12
Water	12
Desire	12
Cooperation	12
Total Possible with all 10's	70

(2) Each subject is then ranked into the appropriate category. Before a specific score is determined, judges should determine by consensus which category the work in a particular subject falls. Once a category for the individual piece of work is determined, an individual score can be awarded with deductions for negative performances and credits for positive performances or difficult conditions.

CATEGORY	POINTS
Excellent + Difficult Circumstances	11-12
Very Good	9-10
Good	6-8
Fair	3-5
Poor	0-2

(3) Three judges will evaluate each dog, and one designated judge will average the point scores within a given category to arrive at a final score. The final average score will be the official score for each subject. Fractions are rounded to whole numbers.

(4) Judges must record their notes regarding each stage of the dog's work in each subject.

Scoring Specific Subjects

1. Search

(1) The search should be conducted in an area where the dog is likely to encounter game.

(2) If no birds are encountered, each dog shall have at least two captive birds planted to observe the dog in contact with game.

(3) The search should demonstrate a persistent desire to find game without undue handler interference. The dog's use of cover, terrain, wind conditions, and other variable factors are also considered.

(4) The balance between cooperation and will to find game is a key element of the search.

2. Pointing

(1) Pointing instinct is evident when the dog stops to acknowledge the scent of game.

(2) The point must be by scent, and established independently of influence from the handler.

(3) Major weight is given to the best pointing, whether it is during the search or the tracking.

(4) Moving game should be considered as an added difficulty.

3. Tracking

(1) Tracking is judged on tracks that the dog is able to discern by scent of hares, wild birds, and, /or flightless captive birds that are not and have not been visible to the dog. The handler is allowed to work the dog on leash for a short distance to start the track.

(2) A dog may be given multiple opportunities to track, especially if wild birds or hares are used and the conditions of the tracking are less controlled.

(3) The evaluation should consist of the will to track and the reliability of the track. In other words, how hard the dog tries to follow the track and how certain the dog is on the track.

(4) The will to track can be seen first by the way the dog starts the track. Recognition and keen interest of the starting place indicate a will to locate the track. Second, the will to track can be recognized by the dog that follows the track eagerly and with self-control. Third, the will to track can be seen in the dog that diligently searches to regain the track after it has been lost. Fourth, the will to track can be seen in how the dog adapts to the random difficulties or conditions at hand. Weather, wind, moisture, soil conditions, heavy rain, or other difficulties can influence tracking conditions.

(5) Tracking reliability is demonstrated in the way the dog follows the track and advances the track in a confident manner.

(6) In the final evaluation, the length of the track may or may not correspond to the quality of the work. The will to track, tracking reliability, and random difficulties, should factor into the overall tracking score.

4. Water Aptitude Evaluation. (Optional)

The Hunting Aptitude Evaluation may be offered with or without the water portion. It is the choice of the sponsoring club. In early spring, when Hunting Aptitude Evaluations are frequently conducted, water is often frozen. In addition, many breed clubs and breeders feel that an early evaluation of water aptitude is useful while others feel that a more thorough test of water aptitude at the yearling level is completely telling. We leave this decision to the individual breeders and breed clubs. We do not recommend that the water aptitude evaluation, as outlined below, be used in lieu of the water subjects that are completed during the VHDF Advanced Hunting Aptitude Evaluation. Good water aptitude is apparent in the versatile hunting dog that shows no fear of water and enters the water to swim without hesitation and without undue enticement from the handler. It is recommended that individuals contact their breeders or breed clubs to verify the necessity of water evaluation and at what age it is required.

(1) The dog must willingly swim in water with its feet not touching the ground. The dog must swim more than once, but the judges will determine the number of occurrences—usually two or three for the dog that does not hesitate to enter and swim. (2) To earn a score in the very good or excellent category (9, 10, 11 or 12) the dog must swim on its own, or the handler must be able to send the dog into the water with minimal verbal encouragement. No bumper, rock, bird, etc., may be used as visual enticement. Once the dog is swimming and the judges allow, a dummy may be thrown to get the dog out of the water. (3) To earn a score in the good category (6, 7, or 8) the handler may throw a bumper, rock, stick, etc., to create a visual enticement for the dog to enter the water. Objects that have form similar to gamebirds or waterfowl must not be used. (4) To earn a score in the fair category (3, 4, or 5) the handler may use a dead bird to entice the dog into the water. (5) The dog must enter the water and swim to score above the poor category. In the end, the judges will determine if the dog has an aptitude for water work.

5. Nose

(1) Evaluating the use of nose can be very difficult due to the many unseen environmental and climatic factors existing at any given moment. Nose should be evaluated carefully.
 (2) The nose is evaluated during the search by how frequently and rapidly the dog finds game or acknowledges scent. Dogs that briefly acknowledge old scent or non-game scent and move on should be given credit, while dogs that work unproductively should be rated accordingly.
 (3) The use of nose is evaluated during tracking by how the dog reacts as it searches for and finds the track.
 (4) The final evaluation shall use the above observations as a base for determining nose score, but in the end both the overall performance and the prevailing conditions of weather and environment are considered in determining the score given for the use and quality of the nose.

6. Desire

(1) Desire is determined after observing how the dog applies himself to each task during the entire evaluation. Desire to work is not to be confused with running speed, range, excitement, or simply how active the dog is. The dog's will to complete the task at hand is the primary consideration when evaluating overall desire.

7. Cooperation

(1) Cooperation is demonstrated by the manner in which the dog interacts with its handler. A cooperative dog is willing to be in contact with, and work for the handler.

(2) Cooperation is evaluated during every dog and handler interaction throughout the day.

8. Obedience

(1) Obedience is not scored as a subject in the Hunting Aptitude Evaluation; however, it is noted throughout the day since a basic level of obedience is intrinsic to the proper evaluation of the dog. Obedience is demonstrated in the way the dog can be handled and by how the dog responds to commands. While in contact with game, the puppy is not expected to be obedient. Dogs that are disobedient to such a level as to make good judgment difficult, and disturb the execution of the entire day's events may be excluded from further evaluation.

Other Characteristics Noted

1. Reaction to Gunfire

(1) To evaluate gun shyness or sensitivity, at least two shots must be fired at a distinct interval while the dog is searching within gun range. If the evaluation is indeterminate, it can be repeated after a 30-minute interval.

(2) Judges should note any irregular behavior suggesting gun shyness or sensitivity.

2. Temperament Assessment

(1) The personality and temperament of the dog will be summarized in the judges' own words at the end of the evaluation.

3. Conformation

Judges will conduct a basic conformation evaluation including eye defects, teeth, bite, testicles, and other visible faults.