

Advanced Hunting Aptitude Evaluation (AHAE)

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to record the level of hunting aptitude and trainability in the young dog that has been started for hunting. At this stage, the natural ability of the dog should be fully developed, and training largely complete but the dog may lack experience and performance level training. This evaluation is designed as the primary tool for the hunter and breeder to evaluate natural ability and trainability. 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 will 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 subjects are divided into ability and trained subjects. The ability subjects require both inherited ability and a certain level of training and, therefore have a higher multiplier. The dog is scored in each subject from 0 to 12 points. The scores of 11 and 12 are only 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.

Ability Subjects

	Subject	Multiplier	Max Score
1	Field Search	2	10+2
2	Pointing	2	10+2
3	Search Behind the Duck	2	10+2
4	Nose	2	10+2
5	Desire	2	10+2
6	Cooperation	2	10+2

Trained Subjects

7	Steadiness and Manners on Game	1	10+2
8	Retrieve of Shot Bird	1	10+2
9	Marked Water Retrieve	1	10+2
10	Blind Water Entry	1	10+2
11	Game Drag	1	10+2
12	Obedience	1	10+2
	Total Possible with all 10's		180

(2) Each subject is then ranked into the appropriate categories. 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) 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) Moving game should be considered an added difficulty.

3. Search behind the Duck

(1) A live flightless duck is released into the water within 20-30 meters from the starting point. The duck is then hazed out of the area into cover. The dog should not see the duck being released.

(2) The dog is sent to retrieve the duck from a starting point where it should find the scent trail within 20 meters. #10, the Blind Water Entry is scored during this portion of the Search Behind the Duck.

(3) The dog should search for and find the duck independently of the handler once it has found the scent trail. The handler may influence the dog to the scent trail by moving on the bank or speaking once the dog is in the water and has demonstrated his ability be sent confidently into the water in a blind scenario.

(4) If the dog finds the duck and the task turns into a sight chase, the judges may request to have the duck shot by the handler or a gunner. Safety is paramount at this point, and great care must be taken to only shoot the duck if a safe shot is presented. If the duck is shot and the dog has located the duck, it should be retrieved to hand.

(5) The dog does not have to catch the live duck to receive a good score. If the dog encounters other ducks, the work may be scored accordingly.

(6) Any live or dead ducks caught by the dog should be retrieved to hand.

4. Nose

(1) Evaluating the use of nose can be 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 should be given credit, while dogs that work unproductively should be rated accordingly.

(3) The use of nose is evaluated during the water work primarily by how the dog reacts as it searches for and finds the track of the duck. The duck track on water is easily lost due to the nature of the cover, weather conditions, and the ability of the duck to dive. The nose can be judged as the dog constantly looks to regain the track of the duck over the water and through vegetation.

(4) The final evaluation shall use the above observations as a base for determining nose score, but in the end the over all performance and conditions can be used to determine the quality of the nose.

5. Desire

(1) Desire to work is determined after observing how the dog applies itself to each task during the entire evaluation. Desire to work is not to be confused with running speed, range, or 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.

6. 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.

7. Steadiness

(1) Steadiness through shot and fall is not required at this level.

(2) The dog that remains staunch, and does not endanger the flush, and waits until the handler has moved in front of the dog and flushes the bird may be considered for a score in the very good category.

(3) Running game is an added difficulty.

(5) Artificial circumstances, which would not normally occur while hunting wild birds, should be discounted or ignored. (i.e. the bird runs under the dog, or jumps into the dog's mouth)

8. Retrieve of Shot Bird

(1) During the search, each dog must have at least one bird (preferably more) freshly shot for a marked retrieve. When the dog establishes point the handler is to walk in and flush the bird, and a pair of designated gunners may shoot the bird.

(2) The dog should promptly go to the game, pick it up, and return to the handler and sit or stand until told to release the game to hand.

(3) If the dog is not steady enough to safely complete the point and retrieve sequence, the dog should be held by the handler after establishing point in order to obtain a safe shot.

9. Gun Sensitivity on Marked Water Retrieve

- (1) A fresh dead duck is thrown far into the water while the dog is watching. If a Winger is used the mark should be no more than 40 to 50 yards as this is to be a simple marked retrieve.
- (2) The dog is sent for the retrieve after the duck is in the water and there is no steadiness requirement. While the dog is swimming towards the duck and is within 15 meters of the duck, a blank round is fired into the air. The dog should retrieve the duck without further command.
- (3) The dog that is gunfire stable in the water should continue without hesitation to retrieve the duck and return it to the handler.
- (4) The dog that hesitates or is otherwise impacted by the gunshot should be noted gunfire unstable in the water or gun shy in the water.

10. Blind Water Entry

- (1) During the test subject of "Search behind the Duck", the dog will also be scored on the blind water entry. Scoring of the blind water entry begins when the handler sends their dog into the water during the search behind the duck. Scoring of the successful blind water entry ends when the dog acknowledges the scent of the duck track. The handler is given the approximate location of the start of the scent trail from the released duck, and is to then send the dog into the water to search for the start of the track.
 - (2) This is not a test of the dog's ability to be handled to the area of the bird. This is a test of the dog's water aptitude and its desire to find and recover game from water. The dog with a high level of water aptitude, will readily enter the water on command, and search for game scent. The handler may aid and encourage the dog; however, over handling or constant influence will lower the score.
 - (3) The dog should enter the water after one command and move away from the handler and toward the location of the scent trail. A dog that readily enters the water and moves to expand its search, should readily find the scent trail. Further influence to get the dog into the water should be penalized. Immediate water entry is the key element of this subject. Dogs that are willing and eager to enter the water should find the scent trail with little difficulty.

11. Game Drag

The game drag is a retrieving reliability test, not a tracking skill test. The test is to determine if the dog will retrieve when out of sight and out of the influence of the handler.

- (1) The drag should be long enough so the dog is moderately out of the presence of the handler. 150 meters may be necessary in open ground such as pastures or low crops. A lesser distance may be used in heavy cover such as woods, heavy brush or other high cover. The drag must be laid immediately prior to judging each dog. There should be enough distance between individual drags for each dog so the chance of crossing older tracks is minimized. The drag should have feathers or fur at the starting point. The drag should not be in a straight line and should have two turns possibly as in the letter "S" and should be laid with the wind or at least across the wind and not into the wind. . The dog cannot see the drag being laid. At the end of the drag track, the judge will remove the string from the game and leave it in the open as much as possible, not in a depression or behind heavy cover. The game will generally be a bird unless the handler has brought a fur-bearer for the drag. The judge will then continue down wind of the fresh game and must take a position well out of sight of the oncoming dog.
- (2) The handler may work the dog on leash to start the track for a short distance. If the dog returns without game, and does not restart the track on his own accord, the handler may restart the dog with permission of the judges. A restart is defined as: any effort by the handler to influence the dog to complete the task.

(3) The dog should willingly follow the drag track, find the game and retrieve it promptly and eagerly to hand without influence from the handler. The dog is to be evaluated on his eagerness to find and retrieve the game.

(6) If the dog does not find game due to some extra ordinary disturbance during the track, the judges have the discretion to give the dog a new drag.

12. Obedience

(1) Obedience differs from cooperation in that it is trained and not natural ability. Obedience is requested from the handler of the dog. Cooperation comes from the dog and is shown in the dog's willingness to work as a team with the handler.

(2) Obedience is demonstrated by the way the dog can be handled and by how it responds to commands from the handler.

(3) At this stage of development, it is important to note that total obedience in the presence of live game is not required. If a dog chases a bird after it is flushed, the dog should not be penalized. The dog should return to the handler to continue work after it has lost the game or recovered it.

Other Characteristics Noted

1. Reaction to gunfire on land.

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

2. Reaction to gunfire in water.

(1) To evaluate gunfire stability in the water, a blank round is fired while the dog is swimming. This test occurs concurrently with the marked retrieve in the water.

(2) Judges should note any irregular behavior indicating gunfire instability in the "Other Comments" section of their scorebook.

3. Conformation

(1) Judges will conduct a basic conformation evaluation including eye defects, teeth, bite, testicles, hair coat, and other visible faults.

4. Temperament

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