

AMERICAN BLOOD TRACKERS ASSOCIATION TESTING GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Our testing program is designed to evaluate both the handler and the dog. Our experienced judges will assess the team and offer guidance to help advance their skills.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Both the handler and dog must be capable of working cooperatively with others. The handler should exhibit humility and respect, while the dog must be non-aggressive toward anyone involved in the testing.

The handler is responsible for controlling the track and must give directions as they would in an actual tracking scenario.

On-Lead Testing

The handler must maintain control of the lead at all times. If the lead is dropped, the handler must pick it up immediately. The dog must remain visible to the judge at all times. The handler must allow the dog enough distance ahead so the judge can observe the dog's work. The judge must be able to place a tracking collar on the dog to monitor the track.

Off-Lead Testing

The off-lead test must be conducted using a track/train system. The judge must be able to access or place their own collar on the dog. The handler must maintain full control of the dog through the use of an electronic collar.

Off-lead tests may only be conducted with the written consent of the landowner or leaseholder.

Track Conditions

Lines must be laid in natural tracking conditions, which may include woods, water, mud, snow, ice, roads, gravel, and other varying terrain.

Blood and Line Requirements

All test lines will be laid with approved tracking shoes and 2 ounces of blood, which must be distributed evenly throughout the track. Blood should be placed in areas where the handler can see it, when possible.

Line Laying and Tracking

Anyone appointed by the judge may lay the test lines for evaluation by a certified judge, provided they are supervised by the certified judge.

All test lines must be recorded and tracked on two platforms, one of which must be a Garmin tracking system, with a tracking collar on the dog. All challenges must be marked on both devices or apps.

Test Completion

The test must be concluded and the handler briefed as soon as the failure criteria are met. However, the judge may allow the team to continue for practice if they choose. If the judge decides not to let the team finish, it is at their discretion.

Callbacks

A maximum of two callbacks may be given by the judge. When called back, it is the handler's responsibility to return to a point of their choosing.

- For on-lead tests, the callback distance is 40 yards from the last contact with the line.
- For off-lead tests, the callback distance is 75 yards.

A callback shall be issued for lack of forward progression after 10 minutes without movement.

Hide Placement

A piece of hide, representing the deer, will be placed at the end of the trail to mark its completion.

Testing Levels

Started and Seasoned tests may be conducted privately by a certified judge. Finished-level and above tests must be conducted at ABTA-approved events.

The number of judges assigned to a test line is at the discretion of the ABTA.

Testing Requests

All requests for testing, including private tests, must go through the judge coordinator.

Certification

Certificates will be issued by the board once all supporting documentation is reviewed.

Liability

The handler assumes full liability for participation in ABTA testing and events.

Testing Sequence

A team must begin testing at the Started level and progress sequentially through Started, Seasoned, Finished, and Elite. Introductory Level Evaluation is not required to progress.

Extended Lay Time

If a test line exceeds the allotted lay time, the handler may choose to proceed with the test.

Judge Conflict of Interest Policy

To protect the integrity of ABTA testing, the following conflict of interest rules apply:

Judges may not evaluate any dog they, or an organization they own or manage, have been paid to train outside of ABTA events. This includes all types of services, whether provided in-person (such as board and train, private lessons, or group classes) or remotely (such as phone consultations, video sessions, or messaging support).

Judges may not evaluate any dog they, or an organization they own or manage, have bred or currently own, regardless of paperwork or transfer status.

Exception Allowances

In limited circumstances, exceptions to these rules may be granted under the following conditions:

Private Testing

A judge who has previously trained or bred a dog must request approval to evaluate that dog for private testing. Approval may only be considered if:

- No other ABTA judge is available within a 150-mile radius from the handler, and
- At least one year has passed since the judge's last involvement with the dog.

Event Testing

- At ABTA events, judges may not evaluate any dog they have trained or bred if any other qualified judge is available, regardless of the time elapsed.
- If no other qualified judge is available at the event, the judge may request approval to evaluate the dog, provided at least one year has passed since their last involvement.

A request for approval may be sent to the Testing Coordinator to be reviewed by the board, and must include:

1. Handler contact information, including address
2. Dog information
3. Date & description of Judge's last involvement with the dog

PASS/FAIL CRITERIA

The dog must consistently follow the track, and once the handler identifies the hide, it is considered a recovery.

"Positively following the track" means the dog must engage with all components of the test, including turns, obstacles, challenges, and most of the length of the line. Simply locating or indicating the hide at the end of the trail is not sufficient to pass. Dogs that circle the test area, wander aimlessly, or use winding methods to locate the game may not be considered for a pass.

Off-Lead Test Requirements

In the off-lead test, the handler must be able to communicate to the judge when the dog is on track, off track, in search mode, and when the game is located. The dog must demonstrate the ability to follow immediate commands from the handler through the use of an electronic collar. Failure to do so will result in an immediate failure of the test.

Callbacks

The maximum number of callbacks is two. The handler must return to a point of their choosing when called back.

- For on-lead tests, the callback distance is 40 yards.
- For off-lead tests, the callback distance is 75 yards.

A callback shall also be issued after 10 minutes of no forward progress.

Test Documentation

The testing documentation must be filled out accurately to determine pass or fail. Documentation must be submitted online, in the judge's area, within 24 hours of administering the test.

Payment

Tests must be paid for prior to test lines being laid, whether a private or event test.

Introductory Level Evaluation

Distance & Lay Time

The line must be a minimum of 150 yards and maximum of 200 yards.

The line must lay a minimum of 30 minutes and maximum of 60 minutes.

Dog Challenges:

One 90 Turn

Preparation & Execution:

The use of tracking shoes will be used over the course of the track.

Blood will be used for the first 50 yards.

Handler will be shown the hit site and direction of travel.

Post Introductory Level Evaluation & Development

At the conclusion of the evaluation line, the judge will provide feedback to the handler, provide an overview of the ABTA testing program & Started Level Test, then work with the handler to lay an additional training line and provide pointers for progressing.

Started Level Test

Distance & Lay Time:

A minimum of 400 yards and maximum of 500 yards in total length, to include one wound bed

A minimum of 2 hours and maximum of 6 hours lay time

Dog Challenges:

Two 90 degree turns

Handler Challenges:

Hunter interview prior to test

Property line marker (just identify it and ask if you have permission to cross)

Preparation & Execution:

2 ounces of blood with the use of tracking shoes will be used over the course of the track. The handler will be shown the hit site and direction of the test line. Maximum of 30 min to run the test.

Seasoned level test:

Distance & Lay Time:

A minimum of 800 yards and maximum of 1000 yards in total length, with 2 wound beds

This test must lay for no less than 8 hours old and max of 12 hours old

Dog Challenges:

No directional marker from hit site

Three 90 degree turns

5 min wait at property line

30 yard scent challenge with a random exit

(circle, spiral, star, zig zag)

Handler Challenges:

Hit site analysis with feedback as to shot placement and proper wait times

2 wound beds, which at least one must be investigated by the handler to discuss details & strategy

Preparation & Execution

2 ounces of blood with the use of tracking shoes will be used over the course of the track. The handler will be shown the hit site, but not the direction. Maximum of 60 min to run the test.

Finished level test

Distance & Lay Time:

The test must be a minimum of 1000 yards and a maximum of 1200 yards, with 2 wound beds
The test line must lay overnight at a minimum of 12 hours and maximum of 16 hours.

This is an upper level test in which you may be faced with many realistic challenges such as dogs barking, gun shots, obnoxious people, and more. You must demonstrate the ability to handle these situations.

Dog Challenges:

Another dog used to track on a portion of the test line (75-100 yards)

A grid searched area by 2 people on a portion of the test line (75-100 yards total)

5 turns, which may be any degree of angle

50-60 yard scent gap with random exit

Other animal distractions along the test line on 2 random spots

Terrain challenges (water, mud, snow, and/or gravel)

Test line will cross a field, food plot, and/or road

Handler Challenges:

Hit site and direction not shown (you will be shown a 30 yard square area where it is)

Property line with 10 min wait

Scent gap with random exit

Preparation & Execution:

2 ounces of blood with the use of tracking shoes will be used over the course of the track. This is part of the handler test. Maximum of 10 min to locate the line and progress forward. Maximum total time of 90 min total to run the test.

Elite Level Test

Scenario:

A prior tracking team has tracked a deer, jumped it, and backed out.

Distance & Lay Time:

The test must be a minimum of 800 yards and a maximum of 1200 yards (post jump site)

The test line must lay at a minimum of 24 hours and maximum of 30 hours

Dog Challenges:

Another dog has tracked prior to the “Jump Site”

6 Turns of any degree

Multiple people and distracting scenarios along the trail

You may encounter advanced level challenges found in the Seasoned & Finished Level Tests

Handler Challenges:

As the handler, you will have the option of beginning at the “Jump Site” OR at any point along the prior tracking team’s trail.

Location and direction of travel from the “Jump Site” will not be shown. (you will be shown a 30 yard square area where it is)

2 Property Challenges in which you will be required to call and request permission to access

Multiple people and distracting scenarios along the trail

You may encounter advanced level challenges found in the Seasoned & Finished Level Tests

Preparation & Execution:

2 ounces of blood with the use of tracking shoes will be used over the course of the track. This is part of the handler test. Maximum total time of 90 min to run the test. Time will begin once the dog is on the ground.

Multi Dog Off-Lead Test:

Distance & Lay Time:

A minimum of 800 yards and maximum of 1000 yards in total length, with 2 wound beds

This test must lay for no less than 2 hours and max of 6 hours

Dog Challenges:

No directional marker from hit site

Three 90 degree turns

Demonstrate recall of all dogs at property line

Handler Challenges:

Must demonstrate the ability to operate handheld device

Must be able to read and verbally communicate what the dogs are doing

Preparation & Execution:

2 ounces of blood with the use of tracking shoes will be used over the course of the track. The handler will be shown the hit site, but not the direction. If one dog gets off the distance of a call back, it counts as a call back for the team. Maximum of 60 min to run the test.

ABTA Wounded Game Drone Recovery Certification

Test Guidelines:

The test must be conducted at night

The target will be within a ½ mile by ½ mile area

Operator Expectations:

The operator must demonstrate the following:

- Proper hunter interview to include estimated point of impact, wait times based on estimated impact, and realistic expectations based on estimated point of impact
- Proper hit site/wound bed inspection/analysis
- Verbally give proper wait times and expectations for all possible points of impact
- Proper pre flight checks
- Proficient search patterns
- Ability to mark non relevant targets
- Ability to lead the hunter to the location of the target
- FAA Part 107 License

Preparation:

Operators should review the ABTA Wounded Game Drone Recovery Training Guide before scheduling a test.