

# 6 The Gun Dog Test

## 6.1 Purpose and Scope

The Gun Dog Test (GDT) is intended to evaluate the dog's progress toward being a successful member of the hunting team. It also provides a basis toward completing the other advanced NAVHDA tests.

The handler and dog gain experience and appreciation of the hunting team concept through their training because the GDT evaluates the dog and handler in a variety of hunting situations. In the GDT, the handler and dog work as a team with the focus of having a successful hunt and enabling game to be brought to the table.

Because of the level of training required to be successful in this test, some of the breeding potential of the dog can also be assessed. The dog's level of obedience and training should demonstrate that it is a serviceable hunting companion. However, for many, this test may show the dog to be a competent hunting dog for most situations and thus further training to meet or succeed in the Utility Test, while encouraged, may be deemed unnecessary. In addition, training for the Gun Dog Test will give the handler perspective on additional training that may be necessary to proceed to and successfully complete the other advanced tests.

### Sequence at the Blind

The Walking at Heel, Steadiness by the Blind and Retrieve of Duck tests are set up so they may be completed in sequence. The sequence requires:

- A pond or body of water large enough to allow a retrieve of approximately 40-50 yards and sufficiently deep to require the dog to swim for most of the retrieve. The blind must be positioned so that the dog has an unrestricted view of the area where the duck will be thrown and land. The local Chapter may have to cut some grass or brush to ready the area.
- Six to ten decoys should be set in front of the blind with short lines leaving a clear channel for the dog to swim through without becoming entangled in decoy anchor cords. Decoys are only meant as a visual distraction.
- Erect a 3-sided blind at least 36 inches high about 2 feet back from the edge of the water.
- A heeling course starting about 25 yards from the blind with a designated starting point that may be a natural object, a line in the dirt, etc. The course should be obvious, but no "physical line" to mark the course may be used. The course should contain a bend, preferably around some natural object. (Note: Care must be taken that crated birds are not resting within the scent range of the heeling course as this could create unfair problems in heeling and in later parts of the test.)
- A duck thrower (or winger) should be positioned out of sight either behind natural cover, a blind or other camouflage.

The duck should be thrown in open water, not into cover, and high for visibility, preferably with the sky for background. The background should not be a rising or setting sun. The gallery should be positioned so as not to compete for the dog's attention. No distraction shots are used.

The Gun Dog Test is divided in two groups:

#### Water Group

- Walking at Heel
- Steadiness by the Blind
- Retrieve of a Duck

#### Field Group

- Search
- Pointing
- Steadiness on game
- Retrieve of Shot Bird
- Retrieve of Dragged Game

There is no set sequence for conducting any events in a NAVHDA test, the decision on this matter is the responsibility of the Judging Team.

The following are judged throughout:

- Use of nose
- Desire to work
- Cooperation
- Obedience
- Physical attributes.

## **6.2 Walking at Heel**

*The dogs are evaluated on obedience.*

Walking at Heel is a demonstration of basic obedience that is useful around the house and in a variety of hunting situations. Any good versatile hunting dog should be able to walk with its owner at heel, on or off lead. This test evaluates the handler and dog's ability to quietly approach a pond to jump shoot ducks.

Prior to starting the Walking at Heel, a Judge will meet the handler and give instructions, usually for the entire Water Sequence. Judgement of Walking at Heel begins when the first verbal or non-verbal command is given following the instructions. Heeling ends when the dog and handler reach the blind.

The dog is to be walked at heel, on or off lead, while the handler carries a break open shotgun. Two of the Judges are placed at different points on the heeling course while the third one follows a short distance behind the handler and the dog. The highest score should be given to the dog and handler that can accomplish the task with minimal or no commands. The dog that walks beside the handler with a loose lead or off lead requiring no commands receives the highest score. The dog that leads the handler down the path is not at heel no matter what the slack in the lead may be. Excessive pulling of the lead by dog or handler, foot stomping, shuffling, or an abnormal pace may be penalized depending on the frequency and severity. Similarly, voice or other commands given by the handler while proceeding along the path may lower the score. However, occasional tightening of the lead may still be Prize I work. This is not to be judged as an elimination test but rather to establish if the dog is being obedient to the handler.

## **6.3 Steadiness by the Blind**

*The dogs are evaluated on cooperation and obedience.*

This is a test of the dog's steadiness in the presence of game and gunfire. Upon arrival from Walking at Heel, the handler will position the dog on one side of the blind, remove the lead if one is used, step into the blind and load the gun with a blank shell. When ready for the duck to be thrown, the handler will give the Judge a pre-arranged signal to proceed. Before calling for the duck to be thrown, the Judge should ensure that the dog is looking in the direction in which it will land and that there are no obstacles interfering with the dog's ability to mark the splash. When the duck is in the air, the handler should shoulder the gun, aim at the duck, and fire a blank. After the duck has hit the water, the handler sends the dog to retrieve with a single command. There should be a distinct time interval between the fall of the duck and the handler's command to fetch. Judges will not signal the handler to send the dog. The dog is expected to stay by the blind until sent for the retrieve but may still receive a maximum score if it leaves at the shot. To achieve a minimally passing score, the dog must remain steady at least until the duck is thrown. A dog requiring many reprimands, or one that leaves the blind, or whines and barks will be penalized.

## **6.4 Retrieve of Duck**

*The dogs are evaluated on use of nose, desire, cooperation and obedience.*

The dog is expected to mark the fall of the duck and complete the retrieve with desire and enthusiasm. The dog should go straight to the bird, pick it up and return it directly to the handler. Style of entry into the water e.g. a leap or slow steady forward movement is immaterial. The place of entry may be a short distance on either side of the blind. The dog should move forward directly into the water and toward the duck. Running the bank prior to entering the water for the retrieve may reduce the retrieve score. The dog should swim around or through the decoys without paying undue attention to them, pick up the duck without hesitation and return it to the handler, without delay. The return may be via either a land or water route. Shaking upon emerging from the water should not be penalized unless the game is dropped in the process. The handler must stand back from the water's edge so that the dog must carry the duck out of the water. Use of hand signals to direct the dog to the duck may reduce the

retrieve score. If necessary, the handler may ask a Judge to hold his or her gun while giving directional signals, but it must be returned to the handler prior to delivery of the duck. If the dog ignores any commands given, the score in obedience will be lowered.

To receive a 4, the dog must bring the game within a reasonable distance (about one step). Additional commands or steps, thrown objects, dog avoidance behaviors or the handler moving forward to encourage the dog will lower the score accordingly. A single encouragement is allowed at the pickup of the duck. To receive a minimally passing score, the dog must bring the duck out of the water on shore and within a short distance the handler can easily walk to and pick up the duck with no more than 3 additional steps. The handler may choose to “handle” the dog that has gone off course with voice, whistle or hand signals, however, this will lower the score. **The standards and judging criteria for the retrieve are the same as stated in Section 3.8.**

## 6.5 Field Search

*The dogs are evaluated on use of nose, desire, cooperation and obedience.*

Each dog will be hunted for 25 minutes over typical hunting terrain where strong flying game birds have been released under the direction of the Judging Team. Ideally, part of the course on which the test is conducted should be a woodlot, shelter belt, or some other dense cover. When entering heavier cover, the dog should range in such a way as to maintain contact with the handler while searching the cover thoroughly. Whether the dog shortens its range of its own accord based on experience or shortens the range on command is not relevant. The efficiency of the search determines how the dog is scored. During the search, the handler will carry an unloaded, break-open shotgun. Judges may direct the handler on a natural hunting route which will utilize available cover and terrain. By directing the handler, the search of the dog who is working with the handler can be better evaluated. The dog’s search should show some maturity and purpose at this stage of development. As always, desire is critical for a productive hunting dog. Desire is shown by the dog conducting its search in an enthusiastic manner, checking likely cover and using wind to its advantage. Age is not a factor in evaluating a dog in the GDT.

An efficient search will have the four basic elements: Enthusiasm, Independence, Coverage, and Productivity. **Please refer to Section 3.3 Search, for a detailed description of these elements.**

## 6.6 Pointing

*The dogs are evaluated on use of nose, desire and cooperation.*

Judgment of pointing begins when a point is established and ends when the dog is aware of the handler’s, gunner’s, or Judge’s presence. The pointing stance must be intense, convincing and unmistakable as a point and, in the end, the point must be productive. **Please refer to Section 3.4 Pointing.**

## 6.7 Steadiness on Game

*The dogs are evaluated on cooperation and obedience.*

The highest score in steadiness requires that there be quiet confident teamwork between dog and handler through to steady to wing (See diagram in Utility Test, Section 7.9.) Before moving towards the pointed bird, the handler should direct the gunners to be in position to shoot the bird once flushed. Once gunners are in place, the handler can close the gun and move in to locate and/or flush the bird. A quiet caution, e.g. “whoa,” may be given without lowering the score. A raised voice, harsh voice or commands through body language or hand signals, is to be construed as a command and will lower the steadiness score. If, after a point is established, the handler cannot produce a bird, he or she has the

### **Steady to Flush**

Judging Steady to Flush begins when the dog is aware of the presence of either the handler, gunner or Judge. Think of Steady to Flush as behavior during the flushing period. The judgement ends when the bird leaves the ground.

### **Steady to Wing**

Judging Steady to Wing begins when the bird leaves the ground and ends when the gun is fired.

option to either order the dog forward in an attempt to find the bird or heel the dog off and move on. Once the bird is flushed, the handler should mount and swing the gun on the bird as if shooting. Judges should ensure the handler understands the requirement to mount the gun and swing on the bird. Failure to swing the gun on the bird may result in a lowered steadiness score. At a minimum, the dog must permit the handler to move in front to flush the bird.

## **6.8 Retrieve of Shot Bird**

*The dogs are evaluated on use of nose, desire, cooperation and obedience.*

Since dogs are not required to be steady to shot, great care must be taken to shoot flushed birds safely. As such, there is no need to fire in the air on unsafe, bumped or wild flushed birds. Only pointed birds will be shot.

A good versatile dog happily and promptly retrieves shot game. Once directed by the handler or at the shot, the dog should go directly to the bird, pick it up and return to the handler. For a 4, the handler may give a single send command and a single encouragement at pickup for the dog to bring the shot bird within a reasonable distance (about a step). Additional commands or steps and dog avoidance behaviors will lower the score accordingly. To receive a minimally passing score, the dog must bring the bird within a short distance the handler can reasonably walk to and pick up the bird with no more than 3 additional steps. If there is no opportunity for a retrieve during the search, the dog, at the Judges' discretion, may be held while a bird is shot for judgment of retrieve before leaving the field. Nose will be judged in the event the dog fails to mark the bird, or if a bird is running after being shot. **The standards and judging criteria for the retrieve are the same as stated in Section 3.8.**

## **6.9 Retrieve of Dragged Game**

*The dogs are evaluated on desire, cooperation and obedience.*

The versatile dog should be a reliable retriever of game under all hunting conditions, even when out of sight of the handler. The drag is purely a mechanical means to get the dog from point A to point B, i.e. from the start of the drag to where the dragged dead game is left out of sight of the handler. This is most easily done when the track ends in the woods or brush. After the initial command to retrieve there should be no commands or encouragement. A cold game bird (Chukar, pheasant or duck) will be provided for the drag. Ideally, the same duck used in the "Retrieve of Duck" sequence should be used. If fur is preferred, the handler must provide a cold, furred game animal that is in good condition. The drag track is not a test of nose because of the obvious path left by the dragged game and the foot track of the Judge dragging the game. This test is strictly a retrieving test and demonstrates only the dog's desire, cooperation, and obedience.

To lay the track, a few soft feathers (or) fur are pulled from the bird and put in a small pile to mark the spot where the drag begins. The game will be dragged by a Judge approximately 50 yards and left in a location that is out of sight of the handler. The game should not be left in a hole or depression. The placement of the game should ensure the dog will be feeling "all on its own" and out of visual contact with the handler. This is important since some dogs, when they feel they are out of sight, abandon the search or mishandle or bury the game. After leaving the game to be retrieved, the Judge should then continue walking in the same direction to a point of concealment 15 to 20 yards (depending on the density of the cover or terrain) from the game on the downwind side. The concealed position should allow the Judge to observe the dog's actions when it arrives at the game. If an Apprentice is participating in the drag, he or she will drag the game and follow immediately behind the Judge. When the Judge is concealed, a signal will be given to start the test.

The handler should bring the dog up on a lead and the Judge will point out the feathers (or) fur at the start of the drag and give the handler a general direction in which the game was dragged, but the Judge will not explain to the handler where it is. The handler will then send the dog. If required, the handler may take a few steps with the dog to ensure the track is well taken. Once released, the handler must stand still, remain motionless and silent. The way the dog works the drag matters little. This can vary widely with the weather, the dog's experience, and temperament. If there is a side wind the dog may run the drag on the down-wind side. Some dogs work with their

head high, others with their noses very close to the ground. The dog should go to the game, pick it up and directly return to the handler. After being sent, the dog is on its own and no additional commands or encouragement are permitted. If a dog returns without the game, the handler may restart the dog one time with the best score possible being a 3. If the dog comes back without the game and goes back to the drag track without a command, it should not be considered a restart but may affect the score.

For a 4, the handler may give one send command, and the dog must bring the dragged game within a reasonable distance (about one step). Additional commands or steps and dog avoidance behaviors will lower the score accordingly. To receive a minimally passing score, the dog must bring the game within a short distance the handler can reasonably walk to and pick up the retrieved game with no more than 3 additional steps. If the game is found and then left, mutilated, or buried, the drag score will be 0 as will the overall cooperation score, no matter how precisely the track is followed.

**The standards and judging criteria for the retrieve are the same as stated in Section 3.8 except that contrary to the other retrieves in the GDT, the handler is not allowed to provide any encouragement to the dog during the Retrieve of Dragged Game.**

## **6.10 Judged Throughout**

### **Physical Attributes**

Evaluation of physical attributes will take place immediately after the water retrieve, when the dog's coat is wet. **This phase of the test is described in Chapter 3.7.**

### ***Use of Nose***

During the Gun Dog Test, the dog must demonstrate not only a good nose, but the ability to use it to find game, intelligent use of the wind and the ability to positively identify bird locations and differentiate them from old scent.

### ***Desire to Work***

The desire to work must be evident throughout the Gun Dog Test. Desire to work is not to be equated with speed or aimless running. It is instead a mental toughness demonstrated by persistence, determination and a will to get all jobs done.

### ***Cooperation***

By the time a dog has reached the Gun Dog Test, it is expected to have done some hunting and had considerable training. It should by now have reached a high degree of willingness to work with the handler. The cooperative dog is purposeful and self-assured. It should always demonstrate that it is hunting with and for the handler. The intelligent, cooperative dog does not need a lot of commands in the field. It should anticipate its handler's wishes and movements. It should come around with minimal commands when its handler changes direction and should maintain contact without being overly dependent.

### ***Obedience***

A good versatile hunting dog must always be controllable. Obedience on the part of the dog is important to the safety of the dog, to the relationship between hunter and landowner and to the relationship between the hunter and other members of the hunting party.

## 6.11 Scoring System and Judges' Scorecards

Scoring System for Gun Dog Test					
Judged	Index Number	Max Points Attainable	Prize I	Prize II	Prize III
<b>Water</b>					
Walking at Heel	2	8	6(3)	4(2)	2(1)
Steadiness by Blind	2	8	6(3)	4(2)	2(1)
Retrieve of a Duck	3	12	9(3)	6(2)	3(1)
<b>Field</b>					
Search	5	20	15(3)	15(3)	10(2)
Pointing	4	16	16(4)	12(3)	8(2)
Steadiness on Game	3	12	9(3)	6(2)	3(1)
Retrieve of Shot Bird	3	12	9(3)	6(2)	3(1)
Retrieve of Dragged Game	3	12	9(3)	6(2)	3(1)
<b>Judged Throughout</b>					
Use of Nose	6	24	24(4)	18(3)	18(3)
Desire to Work	5	20	20(4)	15(3)	10(2)
Cooperation	3	12	9(3)	6(2)	3(1)
Obedience	3	12	9(3)	6(2)	6(2)
<b>Total</b>		168	141	104	71
Minimum score for each prize classification is indicated in parentheses.					



## NAVHDA GUN DOG TEST

CALL NAME:

CHAPTER:

DATE OF TEST:

NAME OF DOG:

AGE ON TEST DATE:

BREED:

SEX:

OWNER:

MEMBER:

HANDLER:

MEMBER:

REGISTRATION #:

### PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:

1. Eyes: (out) (in) ectropic, entropic, other defects

2. Testes

3. H.D. X-rayed

4. Bite and Teeth

Butt Overshot Undershot Extra Missing

List ID Number(s) of Involved Teeth

### COAT:

#### Density

Dense

Medium Dense

Open

#### Harshness

Harsh

Medium Harsh

Soft

### TEMPERAMENT:

NORMAL

SENSITIVE  
"Recovers Fast"

SHY  
"Recovers Slow"

### COMMENTS:

NOSE	DESIRE	COOP	OBED	TEST	SCORE	POINTS
				Walking at Heel 3 2 1	2	
				Steadiness by Blind 3 2 1	2	
				Retrieve of Duck 3 2 1	3	
				Search 3 3 2	5	
				Pointing 4 3 2	4	
				Steadiness to Flush		
				Steadiness to Wing		
				Steadiness Total 3 2 1	3	
				Retrieve of Shot Bird 3 2 1	3	
				Retrieve by Drag 3 2 1	3	
				Use of Nose 4 3 3	6	
				Desire to Work 4 3 2	5	
				Cooperation 3 2 1	3	
				Obedience 3 3 2	3	

PRIZE CLASSIFICATION TOTAL

JUDGE'S NAME (Print Name)

SIGNATURE

JUDGE #

- ☐ Check here if this is an Apprentice Card  
☐ Check here if this is the Senior Judge's Card

Primary	Secondary	Where Applicable	An Judge's Score Be Consensus (if different from A)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>