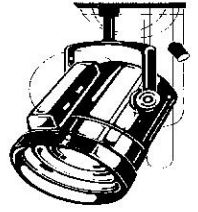


Spotlight on Field Trials

by Mike Aldrich



In upcoming issues of the Journal I will try to answer frequently asked questions about Field Trial issues. The first question is:

What is the expected performance of a dog in an All Age stake?

The following is taken from the Amateur Field Trial Clubs of America publication, "Guidelines to Field Trial Procedure and Judicial Practice".

The familiar, capsule description of the all-age dog, attributed to old-time trainer Jim Avent, declares that he (or she) is a dedicated hunter of upland game birds which "runs off—but not quite". The all-age dog is a free spirit and fills up all the available country (plus a little) in a bold and sometimes reckless manner, yet ultimately acknowledges the control exerted by his handler and courses to the front in such a pattern as to maintain periodic, suitable contact with the handler. The really intelligent and accomplished all-age dog exhibits the knack of "showing" at strategic, distant, forward points on course during the progress of his heat. He may frequently pass from view, only to show again after a lapse of time, or to be discovered by handler or scout pointing game.

The all-age dog should incorporate the direction of the wind and the lay of the land in his hunting effort, enabling him to range to the fringe of contact with his handler. He must possess a superior nose, allowing him to hunt from objective to objective at a very fast pace. In an ideal all-age performance there is little or no time for extended probing or rechecking of coverts.

A successful all-age dog is not a straight line runner. Despite his speed, power and extended range, he must be hunting as he goes. He must take the edges and apply his superior olfactory powers to pick up vagrant scents that might lead to the discovery of game.

The all-age dog should exude animation and happiness with the task at hand. He should display loftiness of head and tail in his gait, maintaining this appearance in cover and on bare ground, despite

traveling with the utmost speed and drive. He must not be deterred by punishment meted out by cover or weather.

No matter how far flung and well executed the casts – no matter how beautiful and powerful the stride – no matter how lofty and animated the carriage – no matter how strong and indefatigable the heart – this running machine must have foremost in mind the discovery and near perfect handling of game. He should stand proud, rigid and intense on his birds, showing confidence that he has them exactly, and in front. Quite often he must maintain this posture for many minutes, and remember his training, before handler or scout discovers him on point. He should be fearless at approach of his handler and the field trial party, and he should maintain keen interest, intensity, and upright posture and good style while the handler flushes and the shot is fired. If birds cannot be flushed and relocation is required, he should proceed when released with dash and determination to search out and pin running birds, exhibiting powers of nose that take him straight to the quarry.

The all-age dog must voluntarily and cheerfully back on sight a bracemate on rigid point. However, the judges should attempt to see the backing situation through the eyes of the moving dog, taking into account the less acute eyesight of the dog and the possible interference of cover, terrain and background as he approaches the scene. The approaching dog should get the benefit of any doubt about his ability to see clearly the pointing dog. In an all-age performance, a back should be accomplished if the opportunity presents itself and the bracemate is in the vicinity, but a race should not be interrupted and a dog returned from a distant cast in order to achieve a back.

In an all-age dog, stamina is a watchword. Regardless of whether the heat is a half-hour or three hours, prime consideration should be given the competitor which can convincingly finish the allotted time with range and speed undiminished. Emphasis should also be placed on the dog's ability to find and handle game in

all parts of the heat, but particularly in the latter stages when fatigue may take its toll on olfactory powers.

(Quoted from John S O'Neill, Jr and Collier F Smith in "The All-Age Field Trial Dog In America")

What should the judges do when no dog in the stake meets the All-Age standard?

In any given All-Age stake, it may be very difficult to place a dog which totally meets the exalted standard; therefore, out of necessity, there will frequently be a need to accept a dog whose qualities and character can only begin to approximate this standard. The standard, when applied, should examine the total performance of the dog with range being kept foremost in mind. Range is the "sine qua non" of an all-age dog and it should take precedence over and not be compromised for a short, practical, methodical, unexcited, uninspiring performance, no matter how immaculate the bird work of the latter.

(The booklet "Guidelines To Field Trial Procedure And Judicial Practice" is a publication of the Amateur Field Trial Clubs of America and can be purchased from AFTCA Secretary, Piper Hoffman, 2873 Whippoorwill Rd., Michigan City, MS 38647--- contact Piper at piper.hoffman@aim.com for the additional information.)

Footnote: One may not fully understand or visualize what is described in this article. But keeping in mind what the description says, mount up and follow an all-age stake with seasoned judges and then pay attention to the placements.

