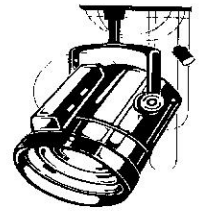


Spotlight on Field Trials

Walking Gun Dog Stakes

by Mike Aldrich



Having just completed the GSPCA National Amateur Gun Dog Championship (walking) and the AKC Walking Pointing Breed Gun Dog Championship I thought this might be a timely subject.

The information is again taken from The Amateur Field Trial Club of America's booklet "*Guidelines To Field Trial Procedure and Judicial Practice*" The question is "What is the expected performance of a dog in a Walking Gun (Shooting) Dog Stake?"

"Walking shooting dog stakes are held to fulfill the desire of those who wish to handle their dogs from foot. In this stake, a handler should walk at a hunting pace with the dog ranging ahead easily visible to the handler. The handler should refrain from running or jogging and should adapt his pace to that of the slower handler."

"A gun dog is a shooting dog and the shooting dog standards apply to him, but his handler is on foot and therefore certain standards are necessarily modified. A gun dog must display an intense desire to find and point game birds throughout the heat. Pottering or checking in with his handler (beyond that minimum necessary to keep directed contact) are evidences of lack of application to the task. He must have courage, stamina, and endurance for the quest and letting down or avoiding likely cover during his heat are distracting."

"A gun dog must show bird sense going to likely objectives with determination while covering the area in an efficient manner. He should indicate by his pattern that he is using his knowledge about hunting condi-

tion (such as the wind) and the habits of the game bird in a most productive way."

"While he is hunting, a gun dog must exhibit class in action. His gait should be smooth and fluid, seemingly effortless. He should have a high carriage – a high head, indicating his use of air currents for scenting birds, and a cracking tail conveying his merry, joyful and excited manner during the hunt. Class then is a synergistic, joyful image created by several actions and attitude exhibited by the dog while hunting."

"Throughout the hunting effort, a gun dog must quickly adjust his pace and range to prevailing cover conditions. When the cover is heavy and tight, he will naturally hunt closer, mindful of his subservience to the gun. When the cover "opens up" he should – naturally – adjust to the opportunity to hunt more distant, inviting objectives that may be productive. Natural adaptability is the mark of a superb bird dog, and excessive calling or racking by the handler to accomplish satisfactory ranging – either closer or wider – is distracting from the dog's performance. A gun dog should never range out of site for a length of time that would detract from his usefulness as a practical gun dog. By his actions, the gun dog must indicate responsiveness to his handler's commands."

"In his approach to game, the dog should quickly be able to distinguish between foot and body scent and use these to promptly determine the location of the bird(s). He should approach game boldly and point positively, indicating the location of the bird(s). In the case of running

birds, the gun dog must be able to quickly relocate and point the bird(s). An unproductive point detracts from the dog's overall performance. However, in the case of running bird(s), which are unproductively pointed then relocated, such an unproductive should be viewed as part of the natural process of hunting game birds and the effort will do credit to the dog's abilities." "Blinking birds and bumping are serious faults in a gun dog performance. Style on point is very desirable. However, intensity on point, throughout the approach and flushing effort by the handler is especially critical. The epitome is to have both style and intensity."

"A gun dog must continue to exhibit staunchness until the bird has taken wing and the handler has promptly fired a blank shot over his dog. It is necessary for a gun dog to remain steady to wing and shot, for it displays finished manners of a broke dog. Reworking marked birds is not to be encouraged for it adds little to the judges' evaluation as to how well the dog can hunt and find birds. Handlers, therefore, should encourage dogs who mark and go towards these birds to "go on" and search for other birds."

(The booklet "*Guideline To Field Trial Procedure And Judicial Practice*" can be purchased from the AFTCA Secretary, Piper Hoffman, 2873 Whippoorwill Rd., Michigan City, MS 38647. Contact Piper at piper.hoffman@aim.com for information).

