

Hunt Tests What Lies Ahead?

by Anne Everett

After their appearance in Canada in the mid 1990's, CKC hunt tests have grown in popularity and numbers. While hunt tests offer a wonderful venue for people interested in something more than the WC program, (but not in field trials), a few misconceptions have arisen about the program that need to be addressed.

The opinion that hunt tests are starting to become too difficult and that they are becoming dominated by field trialers is occasionally heard. While this may be true in the AKC program particularly at the Master level, it is not true here in Canada. As a competitor who has run CKC Master stakes since the inception of the program, I can safely say that participation by serious field trial competitors in Master is infrequent, and it is almost non-existent in Senior. Field trials and Hunt tests have managed to stay generally separated in terms of competitors and dogs. Problems have arisen in the past in the judging arena, where, as with any new program, judges need to be trained and mentored. Unfortunately a number of the judges used in the early stages of the hunt test program had not been properly educated in hunt tests and hunt test judging and as a result put on a field trial type test, rather than designing a hunting scenario. This situation has improved dramatically in the last few years as more educated judges move up through the hunt test judging ranks.

Contrary to some beliefs, the degree of difficulty of hunt tests is not increasing, rather this writer feels it is decreasing somewhat. Junior, Senior and Master level tests should not be gimme's and some golden retrievers are simply not capable of earning a Senior or Master title. Before anyone gets upset, try to put this in context. It is the same as saying not every golden retriever is capable of earning a breed championship. I'm not going to start to debate the merits of show vs. field goldens. That is a long road that we have all been down before. However, we do have several distinct types of dogs in the breed and what game you are most interested in will probably determine what line/type of dog you purchase. My deepest admiration goes out to the breeders striving for a true dual purpose dog (CH/SH or CH/MH). In my opinion, that is where the future of this wonderful breed lies.

To run a dog successfully at Senior or Master level, a huge amount of training must be put into the dog and you must have a willing pupil. It's the same as training a dog for an OTCh in the obedience ring, or a TDX in the tracking field. If the dog isn't interested in the work and you don't teach the exercises to your dog, the dog doesn't learn them. A comment that best illustrates this point this was made to me last summer by the owner of a very nice golden, who remarked to me after going out on a water blind that "this obviously isn't going to get done just training one day a week". Bingo! I felt like hugging him, because rather than denigrating the test or trashing the judges, he recognized what he had to do to achieve his goal! In other words "train, don't complain".

I have often heard the comment that we want to keep people in the game. That is a very worthy goal for a wonderful sport. However, it is not a goal that will be met by diluting the program until titles don't have much meaning. It will be achieved by setting tests up that evaluate dogs according to the standard set out in the CKC rule book. There are certain things Senior and Master level dogs need to be able to do to meet the CKC rule book standard. A couple of years ago I wrote an article for Golden Tails which outlined what a Junior, Senior and Master dog must be able to do to successfully run at those levels. I will gladly provide copies to anyone who is interested. If you make sure your dog has learned the required skills and you know the rules for your stake then you will maximize your dog's chances of passing.