

Sunday, March 21, 2010

Sunday was devoted to the dogs' functions. Torben Poulsen (TP) was invited to give the participants an idea of the Danish test system and which dog qualities are requested for an Danish field test.

TP has great experience with the breed, both as a dog handler, a breeder and a judge, and he spent a lot of time in the Danish Retriever Club in various positions of trust. Over the years TP has been absorbed in the work with dogs and particularly the hunting with dogs. He has had great success himself with his own dogs, including one Champ and one Longchamp of the breed.

Initially, TP went through the Danish field test system. As this system is somewhat different from that of the other Nordic countries, it was important to describe all parts of the test system. First of all, TP presented a survey of the different kind of tests available in The Danish Retriever Club.

Utility test: A test thoroughly demonstrating how far the dog has got as regards obedience training. The retrieving test takes up fairly little time of the test, but is still one of the judging items of fairly great importance.

Qualification test: A test with tasks that lie between the utility test and the field tests. Some tasks include hunting game, and some are with regard to obedience. Furthermore, judgement of the exterior is included.

Field tests:

B-tests: Divided into 3 levels: beginner's class, open class and winner's class.

A-tests: Qualification from B-tests required being able to participate in A-tests. To be divided into 2 classes: Open class and winner's class. 1st prize for an open A-test gives the right to qualify for a winner's A-test.

Working tests: Today more working tests are arranged in Denmark than previously. They are divided into 3 levels: Beginner's class, open class and winner's class. The tests are carried through on dummies.

Danish championship (special tests):

Young dogs' championship. Built up with 6 posts, score is given for each post. A certain level is requested to be allowed to go on to the next post. Dogs are ranked with a 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th winner at the test. The test to be carried through with game hunting as for a B-test.

Retriever championship. Built up with posts. Is carried through on winner's class level. Is run with cold game, as a B-test. Takes 2 days.

Top-class test: Dogs must qualify to participate in this test. It is run over two days with live game, as an ordinary winner's A-test.

Subsequently, TP went through the characteristics, which the judges emphasise, once they judge a dog's performance during a test. For this purpose he had got out the relevant parts of the judge manual of the Danish Retriever Club. He went through the manual and presented practical examples of situations that could help explaining why the dogs got the different awarding of prizes they did. Rules are always a dry

subject, however, TP managed to present it in an exciting and relevant manner, spiced with the many examples he gathered through his long life as a judge.

The Danish Retriever Club

Guide to judgement of field test B

Revised 2004 in accordance with revised field test rules and guidance.

Introduction

B-tests are normally held outside the actual hunting season. The tests are planned and conducted in a way that simulates situations from real hunting to the best possible extent – all considering that under the circumstances the dogs may reasonably be judged as hunting dogs. Game used for B-tests has already been shot or otherwise put down, and has often been kept in the freezer.

B-tests are in practice planned as a number of situations that – in a sought realistic hunting manner – form the basis of the judgement of the dogs' training and abilities as retrieving hunting dogs. This takes place with a quality judgement of the individual dogs in "beginner's class" and "open class" and a competition judgement in "winner's class".

Generally

In "beginner's class" and "open class" the judgement is a quality judgement, where the individual dogs – judged on the basis of a hunting aspect – are awarded a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd prize, no prize or a "D" to have made disqualifying faults.

"Winner's class" is conducted as a competition class, where the equipages (dog and handler) are competing against each other in order to find and rank the best as the winners – on the basis of an equivalent hunting judgement.

The awarding of prizes / rankings are 1st winner, 2nd winner, 3rd winner and 4th winner, if the quality is high enough according to the judge. 1st winner may be awarded a certificate, if the quality of the dog justifies a title as utility or long champ. In case more than one dog shows certificate qualities, they may be awarded champ class. This goes also for dogs not ranked as a winner. Other dogs that carry through the test may be awarded first-class honours.

In "beginner's class" the tests are very simple. Above all the dogs' willingness to work and retrieve will be tested and judged.

In "open class" the tests are more comprehensive and the demands for dog and handler are more. Special importance is attached to the cooperation between dog and handler. The combination of the dog's self-dependence and obedience, its ability to retrieve game and its spontaneous and correct retrieving will be prioritised as the most important qualities.

In "winner's class" the demands for the participating equipages are considerably higher than in the "open class". Even though the test situations may often be compared to those of the "open class", then the

element of competition is a deciding factor in the judgement of the best dogs for awarding of prizes and ranking in “the winner’s class”.

Guide to judgement of “beginner’s class” and “open class”.

The below guide to judgement of “beginner’s class” and “open class” is a summary. Naturally, the judges must grade the standards and judge more favourably in “beginner’s class” as in “open class”.

General judgement standards are:

Stay put

It is to be expected from a hunting dog that it will obediently and calmly pass across the country with its handler. Repeated commands and corrections from the handler to call the dog “to heel” must have an influence on the final awarding of prizes. If the dog goes “off-hand”, it has twice as much influence in the quality classes (brings on a nil) and it is eliminating in winner’s class.

Free search

The dog that independently carries through the search and covers the area efficiently, will be highly judged. The problem must be solved in an independent manner, the game must be retrieved immediately and with no considerable support from handler. An ineffective search dependent on others will weigh on the final awarding of prizes. A distinct aversion or no will to do an independent search will be a burden in the quality classes and eliminating in winner’s class.

Rapidity and endurance

The dog should work at a pace corresponding to the land conditions and the scents being there. The dog must show courage and cunning towards vegetation and other kinds of hurdles. It must be energetic and have stamina all the way through – otherwise it may have an influence on the final awarding of prizes.

Abilities to find game

The dog must show “good nose” and thus the ability to find the game. The intelligent combination of “scent” and “good nose”, and the ability to find and stick to the scent of game must be highly judged.

Marking

The dog must be able to notice and remember where one or more pieces of game fell, and then to find and retrieve the game – without guiding or comprehensive search.

Independent and direct marking to be highly judged. If the dog is supported by handler, it may influence the final awarding of prizes.

Ease at post

The observant dog, watching things and remembering where the game fell must be highly judged.

If a dog is sitting easily at its post and is subsequently dependent on handler's support to do the job there must be a punishment when awarding.

The dog must not be distracted by shooting. If the dog turns out to be "shooting-scared", it will be disqualifying, and the judge must stop further participation in the test.

If a dog shows "unease at post", it must influence the awarding of prizes. Repeated or persistent "whimpering", "howling" or "barking" will disqualify in quality classes and eliminate in winner's class.

Gun fire retrieving

If a dog – without the handler's permission – when guns are fired - or by visual contact with game - leaves its place by the handler.

Gun fire retrieving affects the results in quality classes and is eliminating in winner's class. Repeated gun fire retrievings will exclude the dog (brings on a nil).

Directing

In "open class" "directing" is included as part of the test, and the dog must be judged by its ability and willingness to be directed to where the game fell. The dog must be prepared to follow the handler's directions.

If it shows lack of obedience, it will influence the awarding of prizes. If it goes "off hand" it has twice as much influence in the quality classes (brings on a nil), and it is eliminating in winner's class. A "direction" in open class must include at least one change of land. By obedience is to be understood that the dog shows that it understood the directing events and thus it can easily be directed through these changes of land.

"Off hand" means that the dog – on several attempts – is not reacting to the handler's commands.

Water trials

The dog must be given a high score, if it - without hesitation - goes into water and solves the tasks efficiently. Poor swimmers (splattering, etc.) to be punished. If the dog refuses to go into water, it will be disqualifying in the quality classes and eliminating in winner's class.

Retrieving

The dog must retrieve the game spontaneously, carry it in a smooth, but solid grip and at good pace bring it home to the handler. With no hesitation the game must be delivered to handler's hand on his command. Change of game means a burden in quality classes and is eliminating in winner's class. Repeatedly it will exclude the dog.

Strong grip or chewing, thus harming the game, is a disqualifying / eliminating fault. If there is any doubt whether the dog harmed the game, the dog must be given the benefit of the doubt – and it should be given more chances.

If the game is harmed the handler must be told immediately.

Relation to other dogs

In open class the dog must show that it can concentrate on doing its retrieving jobs simultaneously with another dog trailing on the same land. The dog must not disturb the other dog's work e.g. by chasing it ("searching its tail" and "stealing its scent") or by trying to "steal game". When more dogs are cooperating, it will have a negative influence on the awarding of prizes, if the handler is shouting, undue blowing the whistle or in any other way is disturbing the dogs' work unnecessarily.

If a dog demonstrates direct aggression to another dog, it will be excluded from further participation in the test, as it is a disqualifying / eliminating fault. If the dog physically attacks the other dog the judge must report the incident to the field test committee.

Judgement and awarding of prizes in "beginner's class" and "open class"

As mentioned in the introduction the judgement in "beginner's class" and "open class" is a quality judgement of the individual dog. On the basis of the described situations a judgement will be made of the dog's willingness to cooperate with the handler, its abilities to find game, manner, temper, intelligence and ability to work independently.

Awarding of prizes

On the basis of this the judge will weigh pros and cons of dog and handler, and this will lead to the final awarding of prizes.

Guide to the judgement of "winner's class"

As mentioned "winner's class" generally incorporates the same situations as is the case in "open class", but the requirements for the dogs are considerably higher. Furthermore, competition among the participants is an important issue here.

The following pros to be given high priority:

- The dog's "ability to find game" is very important
- Ability to mark and independent trailing to be highly judged
- Rapidity and manner combined with spontaneous retrievings and immediate handing over to be highly judged
- The dog's obedience and cooperativeness and a calm and discreet handling must be major assets to the final judgement.

If any severe faults are made to a degree that leaves out the possibility of awarding then the dog must be expelled.

Examples of severe faults:

- The dog fails on a job, and a rival solves the problem
- The dog shows weak and unsatisfactory retrieving
- There is "unease at post" or the dog does not properly "stay put"
- Handler does not control the dog, or handling is noisy.

Likewise, there will be no awarding and further participation in case of “eliminating faults”.

Examples of eliminating faults:

- Leaving the handler without permission when retrieving
- Significant disobedience
- Hard-mouthed
- Change of game
- Repeated or persistent whimpering, howling or barking
- Refuses to do water trailing
- Bad temper

Awarding of prizes and ranking

Among those dogs that completed the test the judge / judges will weigh pros and cons, if any. This forms the basis of the dogs’ ranking among themselves, and of the awarding of “certificate”, “Champ Class” and “first-class honours”.

Judgements:

TP had questions and comments on the point system in winner’s class and the table showing which faults and failures burden the dogs in different ways in the individual classes. Below copy and paste from The Danish Retriever Club’s home page:

Point-guide:

0 points – disqualification

1-5 points – the very insecure and imperfect performance - the job is not done

6-10 points – the insecure performance, where the dog has difficulties in doing the job

11-15 points – the solid performance – where the dog is confident in doing the job. Minor faults to be accepted.

16-20 points – the convincing performance, where dog and handler work perfectly together. The job is done perfectly – and the performance is characterised by the dog’s merits.

Instructions on using the point-system:

1. The dog’s performance must be placed into one of the 4 groups:

1-5 points – job not done

6-10 points – job done – with difficulties

11-15 points – job done confidently – minor faults

16-20 points – job done convincingly – no faults

2. Then the dog is given its score in the chosen group
3. For the possible final those dogs will qualify that carried through the test thus achieving the highest score on the very day, irrespective of their scores at the individual posts. Number of dogs for the final to be decided by the judges on the day. Subsequently, the judges will decide how many of the dogs that carried through the test can be awarded Champ Class.

First of all, it is judged how the dogs did the job within the grouping, then points are assigned. The point system is open to anyone.

Field test table

Guideline table for the judgement of faults and failures at the Danish Retriever Club's field tests.

B means severe faults.

BB means "no awarding" and brings on a nil.

D means "disqualifying faults" (beginner's and open class)

E means "eliminating faults" (winner's class).

Faults	Beginners	Open A	Open B	Winners A	Winners B
Refuses to go into water	D	D	D	E	E
Repeated whimpering / barking	D	D	D	E	E
Goes off hand	BB	BB	BB	E	E
Aggressive behaviour	D	D	D	E	E
Afraid of gun fire	D	D	D	E	E
Hard-mouthed	D	D	D	E	E
Gun fire retrieving	B	B	B	E	E
Repeated gun fire retrieving	BB	BB	BB	BB	BB
Resistance to retrieve dead or wounded game	B	B	B	E	E
Changes game	B	B	B	E	E
Steals game from another dog		D	D	E	E
First dog down				B	

Not staying put	B	B	B	B	B
Runs away from handler without permission	B	B	B	E	E
Slow trailing with no initiative	B	B	B	B	B
Eye-wipe				B	
Ineffective search	B	B	B	E	E
Bad / careless handling of game	B	B	B	B	B
Locks on delivery	B	B	B	B	B
Chases live game				B	B
Loud / noisy action	B	B	B	B	B
Disobedience	B	B	B	B	B
Lack of water passion	B	B	B	B	B
Bad marking	B	B	B	B	B
Does not want to trail in scrub	B	B	B	B	B

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The expression “first dog down” is used in connection with A-tests where a dog is sent for a bird which it should be able to find – but where the dog does not succeed in retrieving the bird.

Eye wipe is used about the dog that finds a bird, where another dog failed. A dog trailing slowly and ineffectively will be burdened.

Noisy action will burden the dog when awarding.

Judgements of practical training:

After the introduction of the different rules and principles for the judgements of the individual classes, everyone went out to see the practical training of the day. Dogs were invited to do exercises in all 3 classes, and then TP came up with a judgement and directions as to the criteria, and what could have been better.

Beginner’s dog was first, with to single markings and a free search. The limitations of the land made it impossible to test the dog on water, but all participants were informed that water is an obligatory element

both in beginner's and open class in Denmark. The dog carried out all test to the letter, and the judge and spectators got what they came for.

Then it was open class coming up. One direction, one single marking, one double marking and free search with mate. Again impossible to test on water. Out of consideration for the time one dog carried through all the tests, while the other dog entered the scene only for the free search. Again the tests went on very well, and everybody had great opportunities of enjoying good dogs' work in the front row. It is rather unusual for Danish tests that the dogs are sent out together for the free search, and here our Nordic guests could see a cooperation of high calibre. Both dogs made a concentrated effort in a systematic manner, and they were not in one another's way whatsoever. Therefore, the search was cleared efficiently in time as set for the test.

The hardest thing was to show a winner's class difficult enough. However, it resulted in a triple marking, a direction with distraction and a large search. Again the dogs did the job very well, everything seemed so easy, but the land sets limitations to the challenging tasks. No doubt on that day anyone had the opportunity to see good dogs working at 3 levels, and with this experience the participants went back to the premises of the Danish Retriever Club, to have lunch.

After that it was time for reflection. The delegates from the other countries estimated what they normally judge for at their tests:

Sweden:

Beginner's class includes a larger search than the Danish tests, one double marking, immediate search and one directional free search. The dogs are allowed at the Swedish tests from 9 months' old. No qualification needed for registration in young dog's / beginner's class.

Open class:

2 dogs are tested during the entire test. When one dog trails, the other one is tested for inactivity. Often there will be some walk-up tests, and the dogs are always tried out on both a water and a land directing. As for the Danish tests there are also double markings in open class in Sweden. In free search the 2 dogs are not working together, but they seek individually. The dogs must pass one trail one time to be awarded in open class.

Winner's class (top-class):

Many of the tests from open class are repeated, but with higher level of difficulty and demands for handling / obedience. The dogs' work is judged as quality judgements, contrary to Denmark, where it is a more competitive class. To achieve the title of Swedish Hunting Champion the dogs must pass a practical test on hunting (i.e. on live game). They either pass or fail. No awarding of prizes. Top-class tests are only carried through in the autumn in Sweden. The dogs are tested on dummies in top-class.

Finland:

The system is in many ways set up as the Swedish one. The most significant difference is that Finland introduced a qualification test (anlägsprov) which the dog must pass, before it can run for the field trial.

Furthermore, the dogs are tested on game in all classes. In Finland the dogs must pass a trail test in beginner's class. There are very few flatcoats in winner's class in Finland.

Norway:

Just like the Finns the Norwegians borrowed a lot from Sweden, when setting up their test system. The trail is completely left out. In Norway they also have a qualification test to be passed before running for the field trial. The dogs are tested on dummies in beginner's class, on game in open class and on dummies in top-class.

It varies how the individual Nordic countries nominate for tests, how they link to show championships and how they judge utility qualities. Denmark is the pioneer country here sticking to the fact that a show championship, before it can be released, needs a field test awarding. There is no other way to become a Danish champion. In the same way, a show awarding is linked to the release of a Danish utility and hunting championship. Furthermore, we demand that a dog must have achieved a good-utility result to be able to run for the utility class at a show, where certificates are at stake. So in Denmark the ambition of a useful dog with a functional appearance is evident in our test system.

In Finland there is also a requirement for a field test awarding in order to become a Finnish Champion. No demands as to utility qualification to be able to compete for certificates at a show.

In Sweden they went in another direction and arranged championships for the dogs that cannot be awarded in the other discipline. Here they have "bracket championships" both for the dogs that only achieve merits at a show, and correspondingly for the dogs that only achieve merits in the field trial. The linked championship still exists, so there are several ways of making a champion – in both disciplines.

In Norway there is no link between show championship and field trial results.

England:

Brenda Hutchison (BH) attended the day's program, and at the end she told about the English demands for their champions. There are two kinds of champions in England: Show champion and full champion. A full champion also has a merit on field trial. The system is very different in England, as most tests are A-tests – to which you must qualify. A gundog working certificate has been introduced, and it can be achieved on a hunting day. Around 4 dogs run for the test, and it includes testing the dogs' most basic retrieving qualities. The dogs passing get an A or a B certificate. The difference being whether the dog carried through the test with or without lead. Directing is not included in the testing. On English field trials (A-tests) the dogs are awarded A, B or C.

BH explained that very many dogs do not take an active part in tests. Some attend to working tests and are tested here either on dummies or game, but most dogs are never tested. BH was worried because several things indicate that the breed is splitting up. Many owners and breeders have no interest in field trials or hunting, but concern themselves with agility, obedience and shows instead. Some also go for working tests on dummies.

The Norwegian participants recognised this description.

In BH's opinion it is most important for the breeders to decide, whether they want to breed specialists or generalists and always to keep in mind that a title is not the same as a dog's DNA. Titles are not inherited with the same consequences as goes for DNA. The gene pool is so negligible small in the breed that you have to be very careful using only the same males / lines of the breed. The responsibility of the genetic development of the breed lies with the breeders, and consequently there was a severe request from many of the listeners that the breeders' took a closer look at the genetic variation in a combination, rather than titles, in order to secure the many-sided flatcoat also in future. The request is hereby passed on.

The day was waning and a long, intensive weekend with flatcoats was gone. Personally, I am sure that all participants got new knowledge and inspiration. It was quite fantastic to discuss the breed and the principles for the future, with delegates from all the Nordic countries and from the home country of the breed. Everyone was very knowing, qualified vigorous people making the weekend quite special. Thank you very much to all those backing the arrangement and contributing in the international forum.