

The National Master Hunt Test Stake: Philosophy and Judging Guidelines

The Canadian National Master Retriever Club is committed to hunting and the CKC Hunt test events and devoted to the promotion, training, and best interests of retrievers. In order to carry out our commitment, dogs who have qualified according to the Rules and Regulations of the CKC will be invited to be tested in a non-competitive manner at the annual National Master Hunt Test Stake.

The National Master Hunt Test Stake will allow the talents of the dogs to be showcased in an atmosphere of good sportsmanship. At the National event there shall be input from three judges from different regions of the country and there shall be utilization of terrain, bird placement, and natural conditions to provide a significant challenge to the abilities of a master hunting dog.

These guidelines are not an exhaustive list and are not intended to dictate what tests are to be run or how the dogs should be evaluated.

Planning:

Judges should design tests that will allow them to assess dogs in each of the abilities to be tested; marking, style, perseverance and trainability. All of the requirements and rules pertaining to CKC Hunt Tests should be strictly applied, as well as the particular specifications of the Master National Stake. The National Master Hunt Test Stake shall consist of the following:

- (1) Two series of multiple land marks (usually triples)
- (2) Two series of multiple water marks
- (3) A minimum of two blinds and a maximum of three blinds on land
- (4) A minimum of two blinds and a maximum of three blinds on water
- (5) An upland test - every effort should be made to provide a realistic upland test. It is strongly encouraged that clubs use live birds for this test
- (6) An honor on land and an honor on water.

The National Master Hunt Test Stake will normally be held over a period of 4 to 6 days, allowing opportunities for a broad testing of dogs in many different circumstances.

Host Clubs are encouraged to bring in their judges on the preceding Wednesday to allow sufficient time for thorough planning and adequate work with set-ups. Host clubs are also encouraged to accommodate the judges at the same location if possible, in order to facilitate their discussions.

Before the judges begin setting up their tests, a discussion (in person or via teleconference) will be set up between the judges and one of the CNMRC Executive (who is not participating in the event). This call will allow the CNMRC representative to

walk the judges through the Judging Guidelines to be sure that they are current. At the same time, the Executive representative can provide clarification or answer questions on the guidelines. The Chief Marshall will also participate and bring forward any applicable guidelines for judges to consider throughout the demanding work of setting up the week.

Guidelines for Test Setup and Judging:

1. In the National Master Hunt Test stake, the scenarios for each test should simulate natural and realistic hunting conditions. Natural hazards, obstacles, hunting blinds (hides), duck or goose calls, decoys and other hunting paraphernalia should be utilized extensively. Most gun stations should be hidden and gunners, handlers and judges should be dressed in camouflage or appropriate hunting attire. Handlers are required to carry a gun on all marking tests.

2. National tests should be designed to showcase the impressive abilities of the participating retrievers and their usefulness in a hunt, not to trick or eliminate dogs. Common principles of good judging should apply:

a. The visibility of thrown birds in marked retrieves is of paramount importance, as marking cannot be assessed if the dogs cannot see the birds. Judges should review each planned set-up both first thing in the morning and later in the afternoon to ensure that conditions (ie like shade, lighting) are reasonably consistent throughout the test. Judges should also exercise caution to avoid a walk-up test set-up which may place dogs in variable positions which may then make it difficult to see/mark some birds in the air.

b. Dogs of all sizes and colors should remain visible to the handler during most or all of their path to a blind if they are on the correct line.

c. Hot blinds (blinds that are placed in the field before the marks go down and are retrieved after one or more marks are retrieved) should not be used unless they are sufficiently removed from the area of the fall and the gun station so that there is no chance that they will interfere with a dog's ability to hunt for a marked retrieve even if there are changes in wind direction during the test.

d. Two qualified test dogs should be run on each test to allow the judges and participants to understand the test, assess the conditions in the field and recognize the hazards. Whenever possible, one male and one female test dog should be run. Handlers that still have a dog in contention should not run a test dog. Judges should be aware of the test dog qualifications which may be reflected in a relatively easier or harder than expected performance. Judges should not hesitate to adjust their planned test set-up if required.

3. As is indicated in the CKC Hunt Test rules, marks and blinds should normally be 100 yards or less, and should never exceed 125 yards. Multiple retrieves over 100 yds in one set up should be avoided. Diversion shots, diversion marks and poison birds, if used should be kept for later in the week, and in accordance with the CKC rules for MH tests.

4. Where retired gun stations are utilized, gunners must be concealed on all sides or be completely brushed-in to maintain fairness for all dogs.

5. Be creative with the terrain and maximize available grounds. Utilize elevation to ensure visibility between handlers and dogs during tests; this applies to both blinds and marks.

6. Handler movement should be allowed within reason, and handlers with mobility issues should be accommodated whenever possible. Judges are reminded that many participants may have differing vision levels as well, and blind markers should be easily seen. These suggestions align with the national philosophy of providing everyone a chance to participate whenever possible.

7. Tests at the National Master Hunt test stake should approximate the same level of difficulty and require the same dog and handler skills as a typical weekend master hunt test, realizing that this standard may vary from region to region. It is acceptable and expected that the tests will become more difficult or complex as the event progresses.

8. Judges need to keep in mind that many factors intrinsic to National events may make it difficult for dogs to do their best work. Judges should resist the temptation of setting up difficult tests during the first few days of the event. This enables judges to maintain the judging standard rather than feeling pressure to dilute the standard and carry dogs that should have failed. ****le Avoid "Fatal Tests" Early On****.

Care should be taken by the judges not to set up blinds with such a narrow corridor of visibility that the blind retrieve becomes an unrealistic test of obedience that penalizes stylish dogs or eliminates dogs because of one miscast.

Evaluation of Performance:

Judges will score dogs as described for CKC Master Hunt tests, assigning them a numerical score (0- 10) for each ability for each series. Whenever possible, dogs should be called back to participate in another series to allow further evaluation. In accordance with CKC rules, judges should only drop dogs who have been assigned a zero score in an ability (marking, trainability, perseverance or style) for a series by all 3 judges.

Judges are also encouraged to allow all working dogs to complete any honor (unless they have had an obvious zero score (such as breaking or out of control behavior) as this will allow all of the judges time at the end of the day to share what they each viewed and give full consideration before making a final decision not to call the dog back.

However, it is possible for dogs to complete all series at the National but not achieve a qualifying score at the conclusion of the event. In such cases, as a courtesy, the Chief Marshall will advise these handlers in private, in advance of the ceremony. Detailed discussions of performance if desired can be provided after the awards.

The difficulty of tests should increase gradually throughout the week, culminating in more challenging tests at the end of the week. Remember, the scenarios for each test should simulate natural and realistic hunting conditions. Highly technical tests more normally seen in field trials should be avoided. Judges should feel no pressure to cut the field of dogs or to set up tests that will eliminate the average qualified dog to select for dogs with superior abilities because this is a non-competitive event.

In order to qualify and earn the title NMH a dog must have achieved an average score of at least 5 for each ability over all of the tests, and an overall average score of at least 7 across the abilities.

Judges are encouraged to discuss each series performance later that same day while memories are fresh. Judges can also use the first few days of discussion to review various aspects of performance, understand/resolve potentially differing expectations, and potentially consider other approaches or scoring methods.

Judges are encouraged to learn from their sometimes more experienced colleagues but are also reminded that they are each responsible for following the rules and guidelines and are encouraged to speak up to each other with their views. It is easy to lose track of the philosophy and guidelines during the heavy demands of judging a national event.

****Resolve Differences with Co-Judges****: It's important to discuss how to handle differences in opinion regarding test setups and evaluations. Establishing guidelines early can help resolve issues swiftly and amicably.

Callbacks should be generous, and in cases of uncertainty, the dog and handler should benefit. This approach is preferable to reinstating dogs that were not included in the callbacks. Given that the National is a week-long event, efforts should be made to progress dogs well into the week. Elimination during the first days of testing is undesirable and should be restricted to dogs that fail to complete all retrieves or those that commit a very serious fault leading to automatic elimination.

Judges are encouraged to make full use of all available scores (from 0-10). An early poor mark or blind may be scored much lower to reflect the work but given that there will be 12+ marks and 4 blinds to score through the week, there is ample opportunity for dogs and handlers to improve their average to a passing score. Consistency of judging also means that a handler and dog who perform well through the early week, then do poor work on a later, more difficult series may equally be able to average out through the week to achieve a qualifying score.

On the other hand, a dog who demonstrates relatively minor faults (such as creeping, noisy, poor bird delivery) repetitively throughout the week, may also merit a greater penalty as the week progresses.

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