

# Performance Evaluation (PE) Protocol

## VHDF-Canada

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The VHDF-Canada Performance Evaluation is designed for dogs 3 years and older that, more importantly than age, had significant hunting experience. The dogs are also physically mature and have ample stamina to cope with the demands of the day. They are fully developed mentally and gained a working relationship with the owner having learned to shift as needed between the always-changing demand in desire, cooperation and obedience. The successful dogs are those that work as a smoothly functioning team, and this teamwork is the joy of hunting-dog ownership.

### **1. Field Search**

In Field Search, two mature dogs exhibit range, pace and coverage that matches the conditions of cover, pace set by the hunter and weather for hunting upland birds. The brace of dogs will first search new ground where no birds had been planted, showing persistent desire to find game. The search typically last 1 hr. but will end once the judges have seen what they need to see. On a warm day, handlers should carry and offer water for the dogs in the field. Handlers must refrain from excessive whistling and talking to the dogs that can interfere with the brace mate. Dogs are matched male to female where possible.

The dogs are expected to have ample experience to match their use of nose to the conditions (e.g. approach cover from downwind). They will handle birds well, holding for runners, stopping to a wild flush, and remaining steady until sent for a retrieve. Retrieves are to hand with dog standing or sitting.

The two dogs are expected to hunt independently, backing each other's point and honouring the retrieves. If a dog does not back or honour on its own, but can be convinced to do so on one command, this is still considered adequate work with birds in the bag. If one or both dogs refuse to back or honour on command, one may be leashed while the other completes the point-to-retrieve segment.

If the dogs become too widely separated in search of game, one of the judges and one gunner is assigned to a dog and will follow that dog.

The dog's desire to work is shown by how the dog applies itself to find game with purposeful hunting yet in control of its motivation displaying cooperation. Desire, cooperation and obedience blend seamlessly in the capable and experienced versatile dog toward the goal of putting birds in the bag. The dog will recognize promising cover and search it, recognize old vs. new scents and respond accordingly. Once scenting a bird, the dog will shift its demeanor from an energetic and purposeful search to a cautious point and if need be following moving game. When planted birds sit tight and are hard to find by the handler a dog might be asked to relocate closer on point, which displays a superb interplay of desire to work, cooperation and obedience. To prevent a handler from controlling a dog by a direct stare, the handler is to carry an unloaded gun and swing as though shooting, allowing the dog to show its goal-oriented participation in the hunting team.

## **2. Independent Water Search**

For the Independent Water Search a 1+ ha pond is chosen with marsh vegetation bordering it. The dog is expected to begin a search of likely duck cover once sent and expand its search with purpose. This subject applies during hunting to a situation where a crippled duck landed in the pond but its precise location is unknown. A dog that shows independent initiative to search likely cover and/or open water and is making good use of the wind is immensely useful in such hunting situations.

## **3. Search Behind the Duck**

For Search Behind the Duck, the capability expected in AHAE is quite high already such that only modest additional expectations can be applied in PE. The PE dog will excel because of its hunting experience. A greater effort should be made to start the track on land to be able to observe a dog handling the two transitions, from land to water and from open water to marsh vegetation. A dog in PE is also expected to recover the duck or come close to doing so.

*Taken from the AHAE Search Behind Duck test protocol: a temporarily flight-impaired duck is released to lay a track a short distance on land, then on open water and finally in marsh vegetation where the duck can be out of sight. A few feathers mark the beginning of the duck track. The track begins on land 3-5 m from the water's edge unless marsh vegetation is so dense that the duck might disappear sideways or backwards and not enter the water as intended. This layout provides the realistic situation for the dog to cope with transitions in habitat: land, open water and marsh vegetation.*

*As soon as the duck disappears in vegetation or is far out in the pond (dogs use their noses, less so their eyes), the dog is shown the feathers and in a smooth release urged to track. The delay between the duck entering water and starting the track should not be more than a minute or two, especially on a windy day. Wind mixes the water layers and obscures the scent.*

*As with the pheasant track in HAE, the capable dog follows the track on the downwind side. If the dog crosses the track, desire to work and concentration is shown by how soon the dog returns to re-find the scent and proceeds along it in the duck's direction. Once in the marsh, a tracking dog can be heard if not seen.*

*The elements of a successful duck hunt can be shown by a dog that makes prompt progress along the track in the direction of the duck. Similarly, if a dog loses the track, it will apply its nose and desire-to-work to re-find the track. If the dog accidentally encounters a wild or previously released duck, a young dog in AHAE can be forgiven for this confusion.*

*If the dog moves the duck back out into open water and it becomes a duck chase, the judges may ask to have the duck shot by the handler or gunner, if a safe opportunity presents itself.*

*The dog does not need to recover the duck but if the dog finds it, it is expected to retrieve to hand. A dog that makes prompt and continuous progress along a duck's track has satisfied the goal of this test. In an actual hunting situation, the hunter would then follow the dog and as a team ensure that the duck goes in the bag.*

*On the flight-impaired duck the tape or paper becomes water logged and breaks away freeing the semi wild Call Ducks that are used in this testing. Once free of the wing constraint, the duck is able to move about, feed, strengthen its flight muscles and migrate.*

#### **4. Blind Water Retrieve**

In waterfowl hunting over water it often happens that several ducks fall from a flight where a dog might successfully mark one but after the retrieve needs to be sent in the direction of others. Such a send, a Blind Water Retrieve, is the end stage in VHDF-Canada testing from independent water entry in HAE, to purposeful water entry and expansion in AHAE, and finally a retrieve from or across water of a duck the dog cannot first see (blind) and locates by scent.

A dead duck is thrown into light cover or just in front of heavy cover out of view of the dog, 20-30 metres out depending on conditions. This test subject does not call for a search for duck in cover. Instead, it asks can the dog take a cue from the handler and swim toward an objective, island or cover? Once the dog arrives it should then be able to scent the duck easily and retrieve it.

The handler, but not the dog, can watch the placement or is told where the duck lies and can choose the most opportune position from which to send the dog. The dog should take the handler's cue and proceed promptly and directly to the objective or portion of cover to which it is sent.

#### **5. Game Drag**

The Game Drag is primarily a test of the dog's cooperation when out of eye contact and thus visual control of the handler. The ample scent of a dragged duck can be followed easily by any dog.

A few feathers mark the beginning of the drag track that is approximately 150 metres long and includes a bend. A handler should walk with the dog a metre or two and release the dog in a smooth transition onto the track. The key component is that the dog is out of sight of the handler either over a hill or in vegetation when encountering the dragged duck.

The judge who drags the game will simply remove the string, leave the bird lying and then walk on. The judge will position her/himself fully out of sight and out of the wind cone of the approaching dog but still be able to see what the dog does on finding the bird.

If the dog runs past the bird to the judge, s/he will simply talk to the dog in a calm voice and otherwise ignore it. The dog is expected to return to the bird it had found but temporarily ignored, and retrieve it. Once the dog is out of sight and well on its way back to the handler, the judge may rejoin the team. If the dog returns without the game, the judge will remain as the dog can be resend which naturally affects the evaluation.

The dog is expected to deliver the duck to hand.

## **6. Cooperation**

Cooperation is the hallmark of the domesticated dog and nowhere more important than in versatile hunting dogs. Cooperation should be mature and evident throughout the day in PE.

Cooperation is evident in a dog that exhibits a purposeful and even wide-ranging search and still stays in visual contact with the handler and follows with no or only subtle commands a new search direction taken by the handler. As in HAE, when judges are in doubt, they may ask a handler to veer away giving the dog a chance to clearly display cooperation.

Cooperation is evident in a dog picking up a bird without delay, and returning it directly to the handler. A cooperative dog makes periodic eye contact. This sometimes happens in contexts where the dog encounters difficulty and is asking the handler for help.

Cooperation is the behaviour by a dog to act against the dogs own interests (e.g. excessive squeezing of a bird on a retrieve) and instead act in the interests of the hunter.

## **7. Obedience**

Obedience reflects the response by the dog to commands from the handler. Obedience is a learned motivation that interacts with desire and cooperation to varying degrees depending on the setting. Obedience is particularly evident when the dog is in close proximity of the handler, while desire and cooperation take over to varying degrees as the dog hunts or retrieves at a distance.

As opposed to HAE and AHAE, full and non-slip obedience is expected of a mature and experienced dog at this PE stage. An experienced dog will be able to anticipate what is expected throughout the sequences of hunting in PE. If a dog slips, a simple command for the handler should suffice and serve as a lasting correction.

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