

HUNTING RETRIEVER CLUB, INC.

A Comprehensive Overview of the HRC Upland Hunt Test for
Judges and Handlers



Upland Hunt Test Guide

Introduction

This comprehensive guide to the HRC Upland Hunt Test was developed to assist judges in setting up quality licensed Upland Hunt tests, and to aid in proper evaluation of the retrievers participating in those tests. It's our hope that the suggestions and recommendations found in the Guide enables judges to put consistency and quality in their tests, and eliminate many of the problems that seem to surface in Upland events. It was developed with the approval of the HRC Executive Committee and in consultation with the HRC Field Reps, knowledgeable HRC Upland Hunt Test Judges, and experienced handlers and Upland retriever trainers.

The guide is designed to supplement the HRC Running Rules booklet. Recommendations for setup and evaluation are offered, and frequently asked questions are answered about all aspects of the Upland Hunt Test. *Italics* are used where the HRC Rulebook is quoted.

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UPLAND TEST GUIDE

Overview

“The Upland Hunt will be conducted according to the rules already established in this rulebook for the Finished Hunting Retriever”. (Rulebook page 48)

Test Description

“The Upland Game Test shall consist of a simulated walk-up hunt, a quartering test, and an optional tracking test”. (Rulebook, Page 48)

Planning for Success

BIRDS AND BIRD PLANTING

What birds are best to purchase or use for an Upland event?

Chuckars, when possible. They seem to hold the best and are much easier to plant. Bird selection should also be directly related to the cover conditions that will be expected at the Upland event. It serves no purpose to buy small birds and expect these birds to fight through two feet high cover to flush. It is also unreasonable to buy larger birds and expect them to be planted or hide in two-inch high grass. For the best results the birds should be able to move freely around in an enclosure prior to the event.

Although many clubs don't have the facilities to keep live birds, taking delivery of the birds the morning of the event will give you the strongest birds. Never crowd birds into cages, but allow the birds plenty of room to comfortably move about. Crowding birds into a cage that is too small can cause them to become weak and overheated. Cages that are too tall will also injure birds by allowing them to jump about, banging their heads off of the roof of the cage. Ask your bird supplier for help in the care, transportation and storage of the birds. Many game farms will loan or rent the proper cages for you to use on each type of bird. At the event always try to store the majority of the birds in an area where they can be kept calm and cool with small amounts of water. Only remove birds to smaller cages as needed throughout the event. Storing the birds where there is lots of activity will only cause the birds to become overly active creating weak and stressed birds.

Planting Recommendations:

Chukars:

Grab the bird from the holding box or bag by the breast with one hand and cover the bird's eyes with the other hand. Do not allow the wings to flop; this will only exhaust the bird. Once you get to the planting zone roll the bird along the ground much as you are bowling the bird then get away. The bird will become upright but will be still a little dizzy.

Pheasants:

Remove the birds from the holding box or bag the same as for chukars. Do not allow the birds to look around. This not only calms the birds it prevents them from trying to get away while you are planting them. Take the pheasant and tuck or fold the head under one wing while holding the bird between both hands. Before setting the bird on

the ground give the bird just a few shakes while holding the bird in both hands with the head tucked. As you place the bird on the ground, lay the bird on its side so the weight of the body is resting on the wing side the head is tucked into. As you set the bird down stretch both legs out as far as possible and hold on to them. While the bird is on the ground with the legs stretched out stroke the back of the bird. You will feel the birds legs relax and stay stretched out. You may now get away from the bird. If at anytime you start to release the bird's legs and he starts to pull the legs up toward the body stroke the bird longer. If he still doesn't relax enough to get away. Pick up the bird and start with a few more shakes and continue with the above procedure. After a couple of birds you will have it down. The bird planter controls upland events!

As the test progresses, the bird planter(s) should remain at a safe distance behind the judges as they proceed down the field. When using chukars, the planter(s) may be able to carry these birds in a game pouch. If pheasants are used, the planter(s) may need to follow down the sides of the field and plant each bird from a four-wheeler or other vehicle as needed. The planter will signal when the bird is ready and return to safety either behind the judges or back to the vehicle.

During the test, when the area has been reached where the birds are to be planted, have the handler and dog turn and face away. Every effort should be made to not allow the handler or dog to see where the birds are planted. The handler should place the dog at heel and the dog should remain at heel until called to begin quartering.

In the Flushing area, once the bird is planted, wait for the bird to show some sign of movement (such as the bird raising its head) before allowing the handler and dog to pursue the bird. As birds are planted throughout the day, you may need to adjust your planting technique. If dogs are catching birds on the ground, either wait longer before pursuing the birds, plant the birds easier, or move the birds to areas that provide better escape routes as the dog approaches.

Cover Recommendation:

Look for cover head height to the bird. This is all you need to hide the birds. Look for planting areas while setting up your test. If the cover is too sparse, bring in cover if needed for the planting areas only.

Bird Numbers Recommended:

Using the above procedures, a club can figure 2.5 birds per dog. Rotate the dead birds back to the walk-up if needed and use all the same type of birds. Your first dead bird will come from the set-up dog on Friday.

EQUIPMENT

A brief equipment checklist is offered below. Weather conditions, grounds, number of entries, etc. may require changes and/or additions to the list.

Upland Hunt Test Equipment Checklist:

# Bird boys _____	# Guns _____	# Gun stands _____
Bird Planter _____	# Dead Birds _____	# Chairs _____
#Gunners _____	# Poppers _____	# Holding blinds _____
# Live Birds _____	# Bird crates _____	# Bird Pouches _____
# Amt. Live Ammo _____	Tarp _____	Judges sheets _____
# Bird boy hides _____	# Wingers (?) _____	Marshal sheet _____
Release boxes _____	Drinks/Snacks _____	Four wheeler _____
Set up Dog _____	Test Dog _____	
Orange Hats _____	Orange Vests _____	

Special Instructions:

WEATHER CONSIDERATIONS

The best conditions are sunny with a slight breeze for the Upland event. The main concern is not the weather, but the condition of the birds. Once the birds get their flight feathers wet, they will not fly. Even birds launched from boxes that are soaked will drop like a stone. If you get rain don't panic. Just remember that the birds must be kept dry until the dog approaches. Have a tarp available to cover the birds if needed.

When planting, construct an area or brush pile where you can keep the birds dry. If they are dry, the birds will stay in the planting area. If their feathers get wet you are done. The holding boxes both on the quad and any other holding areas must be kept dry also.

You can plant dry birds in cover that has wet grasses as long as the area under the bird is kept dry. Try putting some dry straw or grass under the bird. Some type of shelter (over the birds heads) has to be made from grass and sticks. If you place the bird in this comfortable area it will not venture out into the wet grass until pushed by the dog. Using these methods, the test can be conducted in rain. It is recommended that judges have the bird planters construct several of these bird "hides" in the flushing area for two reasons; 1) handlers should not know exactly which hide the

bird is in so they won't tend to artificially direct the dog to the bird and 2) a hard-charging dog can easily knock over or destroy a hide as the bird is flushed.

Cold will not be a problem, but the birds may take a little longer to relax while planting. They will like to run like cold dogs do.

Test Set Up

Upland Hunt Test judges have several options to choose from when planning their tests. This guide will discuss the required Upland Test elements and present examples of test scenarios judges might wish to utilize. The level of experience in conducting Upland Hunt Tests of both the judges and the host club should be considered when planning an Upland Test. Obviously, due consideration should be given to grounds, equipment and birds available, and support personnel as well. One of the goals of this Guide is to provide comprehensive information and proven recommendations, which enables judges to set up fair, consistent, and reliable tests.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS

"The Upland Game Test shall consist of a simulated walk-up hunt, a quartering test, and an optional tracking test. The Upland hunting dog must be steady to wing and shot. Honoring of another dog is required. During this test the dog will be required to locate and retrieve game, as the Judges direct". (Rulebook page 48)

SEQUENCE

Normally, performing the Walk-up and Honor first will result in the least amount of walking for everyone. The quartering portion of the test is normally performed after the Walk-up and Honor are finished. If a Tracking test is used, it is normally performed in a separate location away from the flushing field.

HUNT AREA / TEST GROUNDS

The Upland test requires an area (of a minimum) approximately 50 yards wide by 200 yards long. Remember you will be fitting a walk-up, an honor, a beginning quartering area, flushing area for two birds, and any re-flushes into this area.

FIELDS OF FIRE

During all portions of the test the Judges will require the gunners to use live factory loads. This means during the walk-up and two required flushes, you must keep clear fields of fire in order that the gunners may safely shoot flushed or escaping birds. All handlers, field help, and spectators must be removed from these fields of fire. Remember **SAFETY** is our main concern when setting up these Upland Game Tests.

GUNNERS

To ensure the safety of everyone, the gunners must be instructed by the Judges they are never to shoot at any escaping bird before the handler has shot (this would apply as well to a Walk-up test where live birds are used). Only then, may the gunners react and shoot at the escaping bird. Gunners must never shoot at birds on the ground. Instruct each gunner that killing the bird is not a necessary element of the test. We are judging the steadiness of our dogs to wing and shot.

If gunners are used on a live walk-up bird, these gunners may be hidden. If hidden, they can be positioned in a tree line facing 90 degrees to the course along which the handlers are walking. By positioning your live gunners on both sides of the person throwing the live walk-up bird, you will be allowing these live gunners to shoot straight behind the bird as it is released. Judges should not “hide” these gunners such that they cannot in some way follow the progress of, and track the position of the “hunting party” walking toward them down the field edge. **Note: Gunners should be admonished that any thrown or released bird turning toward the “hunting party” is a no-bird and they are not to shoot!** The handlers will also be shooting at the bird with poppers as the bird flushes from the tree line and crosses in front of the handlers. With this set-up you will have better control when live birds are used during the walk-up portion of the test. In windy conditions, a winger may also aid in producing consistent live walk-up flushes. If a tree line or other cover to hide the bird thrower and gunners is unavailable, the judges can have the gunners and the handlers walking together towards the walkup bird. If dead birds are used on the Upland walk-up, it can be set up in much as any walk-up test is constructed at a regular HRC Hunt Test (see Walk-up Recommendations below).

Testing and Evaluation

WALKUP

“The Judges should look for the dog that walks attentively at heel and does not have to be loudly reminded to stay in position. Remember the hunter is trying to walk up or sneak up on sitting birds to get a flush and shot. A dog that runs ahead or has to be loudly controlled will most likely scare off the birds before the hunter can get within gun range. It is not necessary for the dog to sit when the bird is flushed or released, but it should not leave the retrieving line before being commanded to do so. The retrieving line in the Walk-up test is the point where the Handler and dog are when the bird is flushed”. (Rulebook page 49)

Walk-Up Recommendations:

The Upland Walk-Up should be performed in an area where the birds can be well hidden from the dog’s sight. Some suggestions would be a Walk-up along a tree line where the hunters will be entering a field and as a bird flushes from along the tree line. Another suggestion would be to launch a bird from a release type box located behind a bush or brush pile somewhere within the field. Both tests will produce the element of surprise for both the hunter and the dogs as the bird takes flight. Either dead or live birds (shot flyers or fly-away only) may be used in the honor. A pigeon is acceptable for a shot flyer or flyaway, but if dead birds are to be used they should be of the same type used in the quartering test.

H O N O R

“Honoring of another dog is required”. (Rulebook page 48)

Honor recommendations:

The Upland Honor may be combined with the Walk-Up portion of the test. Some example honor scenarios are given later in this Guide. It is not recommended that the honor be completed as part of the quartering test. Judges should consider the following: When we think of “honoring” we traditionally consider one dog watching another retrieve. We must put the honor dog in a circumstance where it **THINKS IT MIGHT BE CALLED UPON** to retrieve a bird it has seen flushed, shot, flyaway or fall to say it has “honored”. If Upland judges have elected to let two dogs quarter a field at the same time, they should not count on one dog seeing the other flush a bird to meet the honor requirement. Experienced Upland hunting dogs learn to work their part of a field and generally pay little attention to other working dogs or hunters.

Q U A R T E R I N G

“The Upland Retriever should hunt the available cover on its own, without continual coaxing by the handler. In general the dog should use its nose to hunt the cover, with eyes attentive, ears erect, and tail up. The dog does not need to run a pattern, but show a natural ability to hunt the cover and be under control. Hand, voice or whistle

commands are acceptable to begin the dog hunting, change the dog's direction or hunt areas, or keep the dog in gun range. However, a markdown should occur and the test failed if the dog is directed by the Handler for every change of direction and to every patch of cover.” (Rulebook page 49)

“The intent of the quartering test is not to demonstrate running a pattern, but to demonstrate natural tendency to hunt and be under control.” (Rulebook page 48)

The Upland dog should be able to hunt for the handler and find game. Those dogs that have hunted Upland birds will immediately begin to hunt on command from the handler. Be aware of the dogs that need excessive amounts of encouragement to leave the handler's side or enter cover that contains birds.

Give the dog a reasonable area at the beginning of the quartering field to free up and start hunting before planting any birds. Many times dogs have been kept at heel throughout their testing background. These dogs will not always jump right into the quartering. Plan your test so that you are able to shorten or extend this “warm-up” area according to each dog's progress.

Given a reasonable distance and amount of time, if the dog does not begin to “quarter” successfully, ask yourself why the dog will not begin to hunt for birds. Does the dog seem confused, or show any sign that would make you think this dog doesn't know what it is being asked to do? A dog that has to be cast from spot to spot, as you would see when a dog is running a blind, is not quartering as described in the above description. The dog should be eager to hunt all available cover.

Quartering Questions:

What if I need to blow my whistle to keep my dog in gun range? Is this allowed?

Yes. *“Hand, voice and whistle commands are acceptable to begin the dog hunting, change the dog's direction or hunt areas, or keep the dog in gun range.”* (Rulebook page 49) The success of the hunt requires that the flushed birds be within gun range. Any dog that is not kept in gun range will affect the success of the hunt and test.

How far from me, side to side, or out in front, must my dog quarter?

“The dog hunts in a radius ideally 10-30 yards to the side and in front of the handler.” (Rulebook page 43) The dog must be kept in gun range to produce birds while attempting to find game in areas that you will not physically have to cover yourself. The dog should be expected to move away from the handler some reasonable distance to show he is performing some type for hunting or quartering for game

Can I leave the line of gunners and quickly move up to my dog as he approaches the planted area (or release box) to help steady my dog?

No *“Excessive noise or intimidation to prevent a “break” should result in failure.”* (Rulebook page 40)

Recommendation:

Because we are also following the rules and recommendations that apply to the Finished Class when Judging the Upland, quickly moving toward the dog in an effort to gain control could fall under excessive intimidation. Be cautious and warn handlers that may be exhibiting this behavior. Instruct them that they may not be allowing you to judge their dog correctly due to their interference.

If the gunners do not kill my 2nd flush, will I still have to re-call my dog and quarter again?

Yes. *“The handler will shoot the gun (popper), and the gunners may kill the bird. If the dog does not immediately return to the hunting area the test is failed.”* (Rulebook page 48) The intent here is to see if the dog can remain under control and return to hunting in search of another bird. Dogs that do not demonstrate adequate control may, upon release, bolt and chase the last escaping bird.

Recommendation:

After the dog has reacted to the bird, it must now immediately return to hunting. To accomplish this, always begin by facing the dog away from the last bird as you ask the handler to release the dog to quarter again. This must be done after every bird the dog is presented with. Some examples are; after a bird is flushed and retrieved, a bird missed that flies away, or a bird caught on the ground by the dog. By turning the dog away from the previous hunting area before releasing the dog again to hunt, each dog is then given the best opportunity to have a new clear picture. Many times, when a handler is facing in the same direction that the previous bird flew, the dog will sometimes interpret the release command as a command to chase or retrieve that last bird.

What if my dog quarters behind me?

“The dog hunts in a radius ideally 10 to 30 yards to the front of the handler.” (Rulebook page 48)

Recommendation:

The intent of this statement is to illustrate where the dog is supposed to be looking for game. It also keeps the dog ahead of the gun as the handler moves down the field. Many times in actual hunting, handlers will walk past sitting birds unaware the bird is located right beside them. When the dog sweeps across the field the dog may catch scent of this bird and swing behind the gun. This dog would not be penalized in hunting nor should he be penalized here. We suggest that you have the handler reposition behind where the bird is located as safely and quickly as possible.

When the dog moves in and flushes a bird that is behind the handler before the handler and gunners can get repositioned, instruct the handler to stop the dog and shoot his popper straight up into the air. Also be sure to instruct the gunners not to shoot at the escaping bird. Many times the gallery and other support personnel are located directly behind the handler. We can't have any live shots fired in that direction.

What we are not expecting to see during the quartering portion of this test, is a dog that continually tries to come back to heel beside the handler, or a dog that moves or walks behind the handler in an effort to avoid the test by seeking safety behind the handler. This would not be an acceptable quartering performance.

FLUSHING THE BIRD

"The Upland Hunting dog is expected to flush the bird." (Rulebook page 49)

"The live bird is flushed (thrown or released) in full view of the dog. In all cases, a natural flush is preferred to the use of traps, pens, cages, or other devices designed to contain and then release birds during the quartering test. However, when conditions exist that prohibit the use of natural flushes (e.g., weather, poor birds, insufficient cover, etc.) such devices may be utilized but must be sufficiently camouflaged. When such devices must be used, the live bird is released (or thrown) in full view of the dog". (Rulebook page 48)

Flushing Recommendations:

The Upland test is a test to duplicate those events that will happen in a normal day of Upland hunting. Most hunters today are not located in areas where wild birds are available. Many of these Upland hunters' hunt game birds on a put and take basis. Whether the local game commission does this stocking, or a private hunt club does it, the birds will react much the same.

During the quartering part of the test the dog is expected to flush the planted bird. Caution should be taken on the Judges part to only plant one bird at a time, thus reducing the possibility of having extra birds left in the field by previous groups, or wasting birds on runaways at the club's expense.

If a dog catches a bird in the field, don't panic, adjust your planting style and wait a bit longer before pursuing the next bird. This is a normal occurrence when hunting any pen-raised bird, but understand that this is also normal for most hunters who hunt Upland birds on any game farm.

If you continue to have trouble with the same dog on the second planted bird, it may be time to send the dog back three dogs and give that dog a break. This should be done for several reasons: it gives you time to figure out what may be wrong with the planting style, it gives you another dog to look at to confirm or change what you are

doing, and also lets that dog take a break instead of forcing the dog burn its energy level.

Although you will do your best to have all good flushes, realize that during this test you can experience low flying birds, weak flyers, birds caught by the dog, and runaway birds. All of these conditions can be overcome with proper care of the birds and using proper planting techniques.

As a Judge, realize the problems and Judge accordingly. If the bird's flight didn't affect your ability to judge the dog's steadiness to wing and shot, then don't concern yourself and move on. If the flight did not give you the opportunity to Judge this dog fairly, make every effort to correct the problem and plant another bird.

QUARTERING QUESTIONS:

How do we judge the dog that chases a bird that seems injured and will not fly more than a few yards?

Recommendation:

Instruct the handler to release the dog and allow the dog to catch the bird if possible. Normally weak flights happen when a bird has been injured during planting or allowed to flap its wings while removing the bird from the holding source prior to planting. Allowing birds to flap their wings prior to planting can cause the birds to become weak and exhausted. Birds that have been allowed to get their flight feathers wet will also many times display the same results. Once the bird has been removed from the working area, plant another bird and continue with the test.

What if my dog catches a bird on the ground, will that bird count as one of my required birds?

No *"Each Upland Gun Dog must be presented with a minimum of two (2) birds to "flush" in the quartering test."* (Rulebook page 49)

Can I expect to see planted birds instead of traps used at the Upland tests I attend?

Yes *"In all cases, a natural flush is preferred to the use of traps, pens, cages, or other devices designed to contain and then release birds during the quartering test."* (Rulebook page 48) The wording is very specific in its language. Natural flushes should be used. *"The Upland Hunting Retriever is expected to flush the bird."* (Rulebook page 49) Rulebook wording allows the use of flushing or release-type boxes when "conditions exist that prohibit the use of natural flushes", but this should be the exception rather than the rule. Always plan to use a natural flush!

Recommendation:

As stated in the rulebook, it is the intent in HRC that Upland testing to be done with the use of natural flushes. However, everyone is also aware there are times that unforeseen circumstances prevent the use of planted birds, such as may

occur with poor weather conditions, poor birds, or insufficient cover. The allowances for the use of release type boxes were made to prevent the canceling of events, not to circumvent the rulebook. Judges should make every attempt to use natural flushes in these Upland tests and to test the dogs under natural conditions. At no time should judges attempt to use flushing boxes before removing all options for the use of natural flushes first.

What if flushing boxes were used due to poor weather and the bird was flushed in a way that my dog never had a chance to see the bird flush. Do I still get credit for that bird?

No *“During the quartering test, the live bird is released (or thrown) in full view of the dog.”* (Rulebook page 48) The intent of using flushing boxes was to aid during extreme circumstances to finish the event. The dog can not be tested on sit to flush when the dog hasn't seen the bird, any more than a dog could be tested on it's marking ability that also hadn't seen the bird.

As a Judge, if I am forced to use flushing boxes due to unforeseen circumstances, when is the best time for me to release the bird?

“The distance from the bird to the dog should be within scenting distance when the bird is released”. (Rulebook page 48)

Caution must be used when using these flushing boxes. Many times a fast working dog will wind a bird and move in on a flushing box faster than the Judges can react. If this happens, have the handler recall the dog as quickly as possible. Move in on the box if necessary to prevent the dog from accidentally releasing the box. Safety of the dog should be your only concern at this point.

If my dog gets to the box before the Judges can release the bird, or the box malfunctions, do I still get credit for that bird?

No. *“Each Upland Gun Dog must be presented with a minimum of two (2) birds to “flush” in the quartering test.”* (Rulebook page 49)

Recommendation:

The judges will move ahead down the field to the next available flushing box. If this happened to be the last box in the field, they may decide to just have you turn around facing away from the planting area while they relocate this box to another spot. It would serve no purpose to leave this box in the same location as before. Once you released your dog a second time at the same location, he would probably run directly to the box even faster than before. This could become a very unsafe condition.

STEADINESS TO WING AND SHOT

“The Upland hunting dog must be steady to wing and shot.” Rulebook page 48

After the flush is made the dog should come to a stop on its own or on the command of the handler.

Should we instruct the Handler to stop the dog before shooting at the escaping bird?

Yes *“It is not necessary for the dog to sit, but it should come to a stop within a reasonable distance after the flush to allow the handlers and gunners a clean and safe shot.”* (Rulebook page 49)

“Safety should be the Judge’s main concern in setting up the most realistic hunting test for the dog and Handler.” (Rulebook page 51)

Recommendation:

Judges must always have the Handler stop the dog prior to allowing the Handler to move the safety to the fire position on the shotgun. Safety should be our main concern during all HRC events not only for the Handler but also for the Judges, Dogs, Bird Planters, Gunners, gallery and all support personnel. The rulebook wording above is clear on the Safety aspect of stopping the dog in order that the handler and gunners will have a clean and safe shot.

What if the handler shoots before the dog is stopped?

The handler should be given a Safety warning for improperly firing the shotgun while the dog is still moving in the field. Any other such offence will be grounds for failure. Again the rulebook is clear: the dog does not have to sit, but should come to a stop within gun range (a reasonable distance) to allow the gunners a clean and safe shot. The intent of the rule is to not have the dog jump up or run into the sight pattern of either the Handler or gunners as they are attempting to track and shoot the bird. The Safest position for the dog after the flush is to be totally stopped before anyone shoots.

What if the dog has properly flushed the bird in gun range, but the Handler doesn’t shoot?

This does not constitute a flush as defined in our rulebook. *“The handler will shoot the gun (popper), and the gunners may kill the bird.”* (Rulebook page 48)

Recommendation:

When this happens, warn the handler, that in order for the dog to be properly tested on steady to wing and shot, the handler must shoot the shotgun (popper). Any additional non-shooting problems may result in failure of the test.

Upland Break Line:

“After the flush is made the dog should come to a stop on its own or on the command of the handler. It is not necessary for the dog to sit, but it should come to a stop within a reasonable distance after the flush to allow the handlers and gunners a clean and safe shot. A dog that does not stop on the handlers whistle or voice command should be assessed a markdown for a refusal, the severity of which will be determined by the conditions of the test and the individual flush. For example a dog that is merely repositioning or moving out of heavy cover to mark the fall better, and then stops on its own or on command, should not be marked down. Any subsequent refusals by the dog to stop will place the dog in increasing jeopardy of failure”. (Rulebook page 49)

Recommendation:

In the quartering test, much like all other tests throughout HRC, a dog's steadiness is judged by the amount of control he has demonstrated. In the Upland Test, once the bird is flushed, the dog is expected to come to a stop on its own or on a command given by the handler to show steadiness to wing. Anytime the dog will not stop, it is demonstrating a lack of steadiness to wing. The dog will be failed if the handler is unable to stop the dog and shoot, prior to the bird being considered out of gun range.

The point at which the bird is out of gun range now becomes the understood break line. The object of steady to wing is, for the dog to flush the bird, and then come to a stop to allow the gunner a safe shot at the bird within gun range.

Any bird allowed to escape out of gun range is a lost bird.

Controlled Break:

“A controlled break will result if the dog stops after the flush, then leaves, before being sent by the handler, to retrieve the downed bird or chase a fly away bird, and then is stopped by the handler.” (Rulebook page 49)

“The Finished Hunting Retriever may be failed for a “controlled break” and may be failed for excessive, consistent creeping.” (Rulebook page 39)

“The Upland hunting dog must be steady to wing and shot.” (Rulebook page 48)

Recommendation:

After the flush the dog is required to remain steady to the shot. Controlled breaks would be considered excessive if occurring on more than one bird.

RESUME QUARTERING

“The live bird is flushed (thrown or released) in full view of the dog. The dog is required to be steady to wing and shot. The handler will shoot the gun (popper), and the gunners may kill the bird. If the dog does not immediately return to the hunting area, the test is failed”. (Rulebook page 48)

Recommendation:

On every bird of the flushing test, the dog must display the ability to be steady to wing and shot. Whether the bird is killed by the gunners and retrieved, or the gunners miss the bird and it flies away, the dog must still demonstrate the ability to forget that bird and immediately continue hunting the field. There should be no pause on the handler’s part allowed for things like watering the dog, or praising of the dog at this point. Any hold-up or delay on the part of the handler could be used to erase the bird from the dog’s mind, thus giving this handler an unfair advantage from that of other handlers. When instructing the handlers to release the dog to begin hunting again, always instruct the handler to turn the dog 90 degrees away from the last bird before releasing the dog again to hunt.

Tracking (optional)

“Tracking. If the Judges use a drag scented path, it should not be less than forty (40) yards in length nor more than seventy-five (75) yards in length. It should also contain at least one distinguishable change in direction”. Rulebook page 49

“The Upland dog should be evaluated on its ability to find a scent trail and follow it to the bird. The dog is not required to stay exactly on the scent trail, but should demonstrate progress along the drag scented path to the dead bird or along the route of a running bird.

Voice or whistle commands may be used to encourage the dog to hunt, but hand signals should not be used once the dog is set on the beginning of the trail. Voice commands such as “back or “over” would not be acceptable, but commands such as “hunt’ em up” or “find the bird” are acceptable. Sufficient time should be given for the dog to work out the scent trail as long as it is making progress along the trail. If a dog strays completely out of the tracking area it may be called in and set again on the beginning of the trail. However, if the dog aimlessly hunts with no direction along the scent trail and has to continually be reset on the track the test may be failed. Once the bird is found it should be retrieved and delivered to hand”. Rulebook page 50

Currently the Tracking test is an optional portion of the Upland test, primarily due to the complexity of the set-up required for each dog to be tested correctly and fairly.

Recommendations:

When setting up a tracking test the best track is laid by a live bird walking in a harness at the end of a long pole. The person laying the track would walk along with the bird, making sure to keep the bird well separated from the set-up person's footprints. Somewhere near the end of the trail the bird would be led at a ninety-degree turn from the original direction to a spot where the trail would end and a dead bird would be placed for the dog to find and retrieve.

This set up will test the dog's ability to really track a live bird. Taking a dead bird and dunking the bird into a bucket of water then dragging it along a trail over and over, serves little purpose other than to test if a dog can find garbage. This trail is like following a dripping garbage truck down the street. Any dog that can smell can find this trail.

The difficulty of the Tracking test will increase with the dryness of the ground and the ability to judge the scenting conditions the dogs are experiencing. Many judges have little to no experience at presenting a dog with a proper track, and may choose to avoid the problems associated with this test.

To run a separate track for each dog, will also require sufficient land and proper planning to accomplish this portion of testing. Running dogs over the same track will only test dogs that track other dogs.

Many times you will see this phenomenon in a poorly constructed land blind. Judges have set-up in an area where the grass is too high and after the first few dogs run, the rest of the dogs are running this laid track with little or no handling required. The same thing will happen in a poorly constructed track, and one in which the track is laid down the same line time after time. Judges will be unable to tell if the dog is scenting the bird track or that of the other dogs.

Proper timing is a must in order to have the trail laid just prior to the dog arriving from the last holding blind. Allowing tracks to become old and dry can affect this test dramatically.

Example Honor and Quartering Scenarios

The scenarios presented below are examples of testing judges might wish to consider.

HONOR SCENARIO 1

There is a new dog in the holding blind. As the hunting party returns to the line, the new dog now becomes the Working Dog (WD). The Honor Dog (HD) is the dog that has just finished quartering. The hunting party (WD, HD, Gunners and Judges) prepares to enter the field. Typically, this setup is run so that the WD and HD enter the field abreast and about 10 yards apart. There is one gunner on each side of the hunters (WD & HD), also with a spacing of about 10 yards. The hunting party will position themselves to approach the walkup as directed by the judges. On a signal from the judges, the walkup bird is launched from a winger. If the bird is a live flyer, the gunners should wait until the WD handler has stopped his dog and fired before shooting the bird. The HD handler should also shoot after the WD handler has shot.

After the WD is released to retrieve the walkup, the HD's test is complete. HD handler indicates to the judges that his/her gun is safe, places their dog on lead, and retires. The hunting party, which now consists of the WD, judges and gunners moves towards the quartering area and begins to quarter.

Upon completion of the quartering/flushing portion of the test, the hunting party returns to the starting point where the WD now becomes the HD, and the test begins again.

HONOR SCENARIO 2

Two dogs are brought to the line, #1 and #2. We have previously designated, odd #'s take the right side and even numbers go left or we flip a coin for each pair to determine which side of the field each dog will hunt. In this case dog 1 goes right and dog 2 goes left. When everyone is ready the handlers proceed to the edge of the field with dogs at heel. There are two bird launchers hidden 10 to 20 yards into the field with a flighted pigeon in each. At a certain point, unknown to the handlers the bird on the right is released and the handler on the right must shoot. This can either be a fly away or the gunners can shoot the bird after the handler shoots. If the bird is killed dog 1 retrieves it. Once delivered to hand the handlers again proceed with dogs at heel. Then the left hand bird is released and if killed the dog on the left retrieves it. The walk-up accomplished the handlers proceed a bit further into the field where they will be asked to stop and face away from the field with their dogs so the first bird for flushing can be planted, either on the left for #2 or on the right for #1.

HONOR SCENARIO 3

Two hunters and dogs enter the field heading toward where the flushing test will be performed. While walking along a tree line with both dogs at heel, a bird “flushes” (thrown or launched) from the tree line in front of the two dogs. Both handlers shoot at the escaping bird. The dog closest to the tree line is the Honor dog, while the dog farthest away from the tree line is the working dog. With this set-up the working dog will retrieve the bird without crossing the path of the honor dog. After the retrieve is made the working dog will return to the starting point of the test where he will then assume the Honor position for the next dog running. This Honor dog will continue and begin quartering the flushing field in search of the planted birds. In the above scenario the dog starts the test at the working walk-up position. When the walk-up is thrown this working walk-up dog retrieves the bird and returns back to the holding blind where he will wait for the next dog. The dog that was in the honor walk-up position then continues down to the quartering part of the test and finishes. When the next new dog comes to the line he will enter also at the working walk-up position and the dog in the holding blind will this time honor and then finish the quartering part of the test. By conducting the test this way the new dog doesn’t come in on a cold honor, but retrieves the walk-up bird. Each dog that has already picked up the walk-up bird before will now be honoring the new retriever.

QUARTERING SCENARIO

Upon successfully completing the walk-up portion of the test, the dog is released to quarter. After an appropriate distance has been covered, such that the judges are satisfied they can adequately evaluate the dog’s quartering abilities, the dog is called to heel and turned away from the flushing area while a bird is planted. It is then released again to quarter and produce the flushed bird. Handler stops dog on flush, shoots popper, then gunners are released to shoot bird. Dog completes retrieve if bird is downed, then this procedure is repeated for second flush. Remember, the dog must show it is willing to continue to quarter after each flush (including any trapped or fly-away birds).

This scenario is highly recommended for its ease of implementation, simplicity, and efficient use of grounds, birds and personnel. Knowing that a bird has been freshly planted (which significantly improves the chances it will flush as intended), and knowing it’s location allows the judges to more effectively evaluate how the retriever responds to scent it encounters, and how well it finds and flushes the bird. It removes many inconsistencies that have plagued Upland tests and allows judges to concentrate on the performance of the retriever in a more controlled environment.

QUARTERING SCENARIO 2

Although the HRC Rulebook does not specifically mention two dogs running the quartering test simultaneously, this Upland Guide would be incomplete were it not to offer a discussion of the subject for a couple of reasons. First, a few judges and clubs run this scenario, and secondly, new and aspiring Upland judges will at some point think about doing it and should be aware of what is involved in quartering two dogs at the same time.

Setting up a quartering test where two judges must watch and control the work of two dogs (and possibly additional gunners) at same time is simply not recommended for anyone other than highly experienced judges and/or clubs, and in areas where a considerable amount of Upland hunting and training is the norm. An honest assessment of the two-dog quartering scenario quickly leads to the conclusion that it is easy for problems to occur in the test that outweigh any benefits gained. With those thoughts in mind, the following should be considered prior to considering setting up this test:

A larger, at least wider, test site (course) is required, preferably with some type of natural barrier (such as a ditch or cover change) to help define the portion of the field each dog must work within. Additional bird planters or gunners may be needed. Judges must discuss what they would do (and how they would judge it) in the event one dog or handler causes interference with another or a bird flushed in one part of the course flies into the other. It is still highly recommended that birds be planted individually in turn for each dog to alleviate the possibility of both dogs flushing birds at the same time. For safety, judges must keep the dogs working abreast of one another and consider the consequences of a fast dog working with a slow one.

Addendum

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- 1) Because I am running a pointer in this event that has been trained to remain steady until the flush and shot. Will I as a handler be allowed to step in and flush the bird for this dog considering that he is not a flushing dog?**

No. The dog must flush the bird in an HRC Upland Hunt Test.

- 2) What if during my test an escaping bird from another field lands or flies across the field I am working in?**

The dog must remain steady and under control at all times. Judges may ask that you call your dog to heel, and in the event they feel your dog was unfairly interfered with, may declare a no-bird and ask that you re-run your dog.

3) What if my dog leaves the working field and flushes a bird somewhere along the edge outside the marked test area?

As instructed, dogs should remain in the test area and work within gun range unless released to retrieve a bird.

4) Can I call my dog to my side anytime to water him during the test?

No. Judges will take weather conditions into consideration and set the length of the test appropriately. Some handlers might want to call a dog to heel to re-gain control or intimidate the retriever.

5) Will I be responsible to carry the birds during the test?

Yes, if instructed by the judge.

6) Can I have someone else shoot for me during this test?

No, with the exception of Handlers with physical handicaps (see Rulebook page 52, item 35)

7) What are the Upland clothing requirements (including blaze orange)?

Normal Upland hunting attire can be worn, and local hunting laws and regulations should be checked and followed to meet blaze orange requirements. Usually this is a minimum of an orange hat for all participants in the field. In addition to blaze orange hats, blaze orange vests are recommended.

Handler Instructions and Briefing

Welcome the handlers.

Introduce yourself and your co-Judge.

Cover the mechanics of the gun being used and gun safety requirements and instructions.

Cover the mechanics of the test and the areas to be worked.

Explain the blaze orange requirements.

Explain how birds will be removed from the field.

Cover the Walk-up, Honor, Quartering and flushing of two birds, Steady to wing, Steady to shot.

Cover the requirements and objectives of each area to be tested.

Explain that the handler is required to shoot first at all birds.

Ask that handlers to verify they were given only poppers when handed ammunition.

Explain the role of the gunners and when they will be shooting.

We will be looking for Finished level control and steadiness during the walk-up.

Gunner Instructions and Briefing

“Safety will be our main concern when using live gunners throughout this event. As gunners, you must understand that your responsibility is to only shoot at birds once the handler has acted upon the bird by shooting his or her popper shell. At no time will you ever shoot at any bird before the handler.”

THE FOLLOWING “GUNNERS RULES” WILL BE IN EFFECT:

Allow the birds to escape high above the dog before shooting at any birds - Never shooting across the handler or dog.

Never shoot at a bird a dog is chasing.

Shoot only those birds that are escaping to your side of the field.

Remember that we do not need the bird killed to allow us to properly judge any Upland dog.

Never shoot at a bird on the ground no matter where it may be located.

Be aware of the gallery location. All escaping birds headed in the direction of the gallery will be considered lost birds and a Safety will be called.

Do not shoot at birds out of gun range.

Always carry your guns unloaded until the test starts for each dog.

Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction during the test.

The shotgun safety shall be left on until you are ready to shoot at the bird.

After each flush and shot, check your gun for safety and continue with the hunt.

For safety sake, when in doubt don't shoot!

Explain where and when the gunners will enter the test area and each gunner's position.

Explain the testing sequence and procedures to follow if a no-bird is declared for a dog.

REMEMBER GUN SAFETY