

# THE NATURAL APTITUDE TEST

## GUIDE FOR HANDLERS

### GENERAL

The object of the natural aptitude test (NAT) is to look for the natural working ability present in the hunter pointer retriever (HPR) gundog when exposed to working stimuli.

We are not looking for a “trained” gundog, but reasonable control is essential. The dog should return to you when called and be attentive to you when required. Every dog whether a pet or a working gundog **MUST** have control and discipline.

The NAT is divided into 7 parts, hunting, pointing, gunshyness, retrieving, swimming, tracking and biddability. Each part is judged and marked separately.

### HUNTING

This is very important in an HPR gundog. Your dog is run into the wind (the dog runs with the wind in its face) to give it the best chance of finding the game. A caged bird is placed in the centre of the ground for the dog to find. To pass the hunting test your dog **MUST** leave your side and show reasonable interest and eagerness to explore the ground and find any game present. The dog should show some quartering pattern (this is running from left to right across you covering the ground and smelling the wind) while being under reasonable control. Correct use of the wind is desirable and shows excellent natural ability. If your dog hardly leaves your side and shows no interest in the ground it will not pass the hunting test also if it is completely out of control, paying no attention or regard to your commands.

### POINTING

The game is unnaturally caged and has been handled so the reaction of your dog may be variable. As your dog is run into the wind it is given the best chance of finding the game. The dog must find the game by itself and at least acknowledge there is something interesting there. A strong point is desirable but not essential to pass the pointing test.

If your dog has to be led onto the game or shows little or no interest in the game it will not pass. It is, however, acceptable to guide the dog into the area where the game is placed as long as it has shown reasonable hunting drive previously. Aggressive behaviour towards the game is not acceptable and if your dog seriously tries to kill the game it will not pass.

After your dog has found the game you will be asked to gently lead your dog away and to hunt on forward.

### RETRIEVING

After the shot has been fired you must get your dog under control and either sit the dog or call the dog to your side. Your dog will now be given a simple seen retrieve. The judges will attract your dogs attention and throw a dummy (or retrieve article provided by you) a short distance in front of your dog where it can be easily seen. When asked by you, the dog must go to the retrieve, pick it up and ideally return to you. The dog must show a desire to retrieve to pass. This involves carrying the retrieve even if it does not come straight back to you. If your dog is not steady and goes to get the retrieve immediately it will not be penalised.

Your dog will not pass if it does not pick up the retrieve and carry it for a reasonable distance or shows no interest in retrieving at all.

## BIDDABILITY

This is the dog's reaction to you the handler and your instructions.

A biddable dog responds to you at all times, is attentive, willing to please and shows an obvious harmony with you.

Your dog will not pass if it is completely out of control and pays no attention to you for most of the tests. This will not be mistaken for youthful exuberance where the dog races around enjoying itself but paying some attention to you and acknowledging some of your commands.

## GUN SHYNESS

This is a test to see that your dog is not "gunshy".

While the dog is hunting away from you a shot is fired from a starting pistol held behind the judge's back. The shot is fired a reasonable distance from your dog, as this may be the first time the dog has heard a shot. Your dog's reaction will be noted. The dog must show no fear or panic at the sound but preferably stop and show interest in the noise it has just heard. The dog may ignore the sound completely and while this is not desirable it will not be penalised.

Your dog will not pass if it shows any sign of fear or panic or runs to you in an attempt to hide from the sound.

## TRACKING or NOSE WORK

This is to test your dog's ability to track and find wounded game.

A scent trail is laid by dragging some dead game (cut open) along the ground or spraying the ground with diluted blood. Your dog must follow the path of the trail with reasonable accuracy with its head close to the ground. You may assist and encourage the dog onto the trail initially and correct the dog if it strays but most of the initiative must come from the dog and it must show an ability and interest to track for itself. There is a retrieve at the end of the trail for your dog to find and retrieve if it wants, but this is not part of the test.

Your dog will not pass if it cannot locate the trail, continually loses the trail or shows little interest in tracking.

## WATER WORK

This is to test the dog's ability to enter water and swim freely.

A retrieve is thrown into water to encourage the dog to go in and swim. An easy entry will be selected and you may give the dog as much encouragement as you want, further articles may also be thrown in to get the dog interested to enter the water. Steadiness is desirable but not essential, your dog will not be penalised for being unsteady.

Your dog must swim out freely (out of its depth) for a reasonable distance to pass. Jumping around at chest level without losing contact with the bottom is not free swimming and your dog will not pass if it only does this. No desire to enter the water at all or interest in swimming is not acceptable and your dog will not pass.

Your dog does not have to complete the retrieve to pass as long as it has shown free swimming.