

Field Work and Golden Retrievers

By Anne Everett

The following article summarizes the types of field events available to you and your golden retriever. You will see Golden Retrievers participating in all of these programs. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact one of the local clubs mentioned below, the Canadian Kennel Club or the United Kennel Club to find out when events are being run in your area. Then go out and have a look. You'll have a lot of fun, meet some wonderful people and see some truly inspiring dog work.

United Kennel Club Field Events

The United Kennel Club (UKC Inc.) is the parent club of the Hunting Retriever Club's (HRC) highly successful hunt program. The HRC is made up of a network of clubs throughout North America that hold UKC licensed field events. In addition, there are two Grand Hunts a year (a similar idea to the AKC Master National and the CKC National Master events). Although the basic training for UKC Hunts is similar to what is required to compete in the CKC hunt test program, there are some differences between the two events.

The HRC offers a Started Hunting Retriever title (SHR), a Hunting Retriever title (HR), a Hunting Retriever Championship title (HRCH), a Grand Hunting Retriever title (GRHRCH) and an Upland Hunter title (UH). In addition to the dog's work being evaluated, knowledge of gun handling and safety by the handler is also judged. Titles are awarded by points earned. For example, each started pass is worth 5 points, each seasoned pass worth 10 points and each finished pass is worth 15 points. A dog doesn't need a title at a lower level to enter higher level tests.

The SHR title requires 4 passes at the Started level. These tests are similar to Junior Hunter tests (back to back singles on land and water) except that a shotgun is always fired from the line. Some club's use primer loads, some use poppers. Whatever the case, the shot can be loud and is something that needs to be trained for. At the Started level the handler doesn't carry or handle a gun. Dogs do not need to deliver to hand at the Started level.

The Seasoned level is the next step. In Seasoned, dogs are required to do doubles, handle a diversion bird, run short blinds, honour, do a walk up and be shot over. At this level the handler is required to carry, load and fire the gun. Violations of safe gun handling practices will fail a handler, although the dog will be allowed to continue with a different handler. A HR title can be earned by a dog who earns a total of 40 points, at least 30 of which must be at the Seasoned level.

Finished tests are for the fully trained gun dog. At this level you can expect just about anything. Marks are generally multiple marks (2 or more) and blinds are tight to the marks. A HRCH title is earned by a dog that earns 100 points, at least 60 of which must be at the Finished level.

A dog may be designated as a UH if he/she earns 40 points in Upland hunts. Each pass is worth 10 points towards a title. To earn a GRHRCH a dog must earn an additional 200 points after achieving a HRCH title. 80 of those points must be earned from the Grand category i.e. by passing 2 Grand Hunts at 40 points each. Quite an accomplishment.

The main differences between the CKC hunt tests and the HRC hunts have to do with gun handling and the excitement level. The HRC hunts are as close to real hunting as you can get in a test situation. Shooting is from the line, your dog must follow the gun to mark the birds and often birds come out of the throwing station without a locator sound such as a duck call. Things happen FAST in Seasoned and Finished hunts. I've seen mellow dogs become ballistic at a HRC hunt, when their handler is firing a 12 gauge shotgun over their heads. Another difference is that you can talk to your dogs throughout a HRC test. This can help immensely in bringing a dog around on a wide multiple set up, as well as on stabilizing your dog during the honour, particularly if you are running a 'high roller'.

There are currently 2 HRC clubs in the Pacific Northwest that hold HRC licensed hunts. The Salt Chuck HRC is located on Vancouver Island and holds 2 hunt weekends per year. The Whistling Wings HRC is located in Northern Washington State and also holds 2 hunt weekends each year. As points earned in Canada and the US all go towards the same title, it makes it worthwhile to travel south for a test.

More information on the HRC hunt program can be found at these websites:

SCHRC <http://members.shaw.ca/schrc/>
WWHRC <http://www.whistlingwings.org/>

Canadian Kennel Club Field Events

1) CKC Working Certificate Program

The CKC working certificate program was developed as an alternative to field trials long before the advent of hunt tests in Canada. There are three titles that a dog can earn in the program. They are Working Certificate (WC), Working Certificate Intermediate (WCI) and Working Certificate Excellent (WCX). Only one test has to be passed at each level to complete each title.

The WC test consists of back to back singles on land and water. Retrieves are generally straight forward and dogs do not have to deliver to hand. They do however; have to bring back the bird over the line designated by the judges. The WCI test consists of a double on land and a double on water. There is also an honour on land. Retrieve distances in these tests are generally around 75 yds maximum. Distances are shorter on water.

The WCX tests consists of a walk-up with an honour to the land double, a water double, a land and water blind. Marks lengths are the same as in the WC and WCI; blind lengths are approximately 40-60 yds.

2) **CKC Hunt Tests**

The CKC hunt test program began in 1996 in Canada and is based on the highly successful AKC hunt test program. Like the WC program, CKC hunt tests were originally designed to provide retriever owners with a non-competitive alternative to field trials. The main purpose of the program is to “test the merits of and evaluate the abilities of retrievers in the field in order to determine their suitability and ability as hunting companions. Hunt tests must, therefore, simulate as nearly possible the conditions met in a true hunting situation.” (CKC Hunt Tests Rules and Regulations).

Five titles can be earned by golden retrievers in CKC hunt tests; Junior Hunter, Senior Hunter, Master Hunter, Grand Master Hunter and National Master Hunter. Local CKC clubs host tests where dogs can earn Junior, Senior, Master and Grand Master titles. The CKC Master National Club also hosts a National Master Hunt test held each year in different parts of the country by member clubs. This is a challenging 5 day event. Dogs which pass the NM will be awarded the title of NMH. Only dogs with a Master Hunter title and additional passes in the NM year, or dogs with a GMH title are qualified to run the NM event.

Junior dogs must be able to do back to back singles on land and water. Although most distances are about 75 yards or so, retrieves up to 100 yds can be seen at some tests. You are allowed to handle your dog if necessary (give it directions out in the field to a mark it has forgotten), but only on one mark. Dogs running in Junior must deliver to hand, but need not be steady i.e. it can held on a leash. It does help though if a dog walks reasonably well to line on leash. A dog that is on line and who continually jumps around on line probably won't see where the birds fall. Once a dog has passed three junior tests they receive the title of Junior Hunter.

Senior dogs are expected to do a land blind and a water blind, quarter in an upland test, complete double marks on land and water, as well as be steady and honour another dog. Senior dogs need to be trained to deal with a diversion shot and a diversion bird. Senior marks are generally no longer than 100 yds and cannot exceed 125 yds. A Senior dog is off leash when leaving the final holding blind. If a dog has a JH title it requires 4 Senior passes for a title. A dog without a JH requires 5 senior passes for a Senior Hunter title.

A Master dog is a finished gun dog. Master tests consist of a minimum of 3 series which include multiple land and water marks, land and water blinds, an upland/flushing test with a flush, diversion shots and diversion birds. Delayed marks are common and blinds are tight to the marks. Distances are generally the same as Senior. If a dog has a Senior Hunter title it requires 5 Master passes to title. A dog without a Senior title will require 6 Master passes to earn a MH title. Once a dog has earned a MH title it will need a total of 10 additional passes to achieve GMH status.

The major differences between the CKC hunt tests and the UKC hunts are gun handling and test set-up. In CKC hunt tests handlers are not required to shoot a gun, although they will be asked in the upper level tests to carry and shoulder one. Gun safety and handling is not judged. Duck calls are used as locator sounds for marks thrown and the shots fired generally originate from the throwing stations. If a shot originates from the line it is fired by the judge.

There are a number of Clubs on the Mainland and one on Vancouver Island that host CKC hunt tests. The GRCBC hosts 2 hunt test weekends every year

3) CKC Field Trials

Field trials originally evolved as a venue for testing hunting dogs during the off-season. They began as a sport for the very rich. Typical participants in the early days included families such as the Belmonts (of Belmont Stakes fame) and Eddie Bauer (the store mogul). Today, participants in field trials come from all walks of life. However, successful participants in this game all have one thing in common, they either spend a lot of time training their own dogs or they send their dogs to professional trainers.

There are 4 stakes in field trials, Junior (for dogs 2 years or age and younger), Qualifying, Amateur and Open. Junior Stakes typically consist of doubles on land and water. The marks are often very long, tight and technical. Angle entries and angle exits from water, as well as precise lines through patches of cover are all common. Handling on marks is not permitted. Qualifying Stakes generally include double or triple land and water marks, plus land and water blinds. Again mark and blind concepts can be very technical. A dog can earn the titles Junior Field Trial Retriever or Qualifying Field Trial Retriever based on points and a win in the appropriate stake.

Amateur and Open Stakes are where Championship points are earned. These stakes represent the very top levels of competition. Marks are very tight and technical (generally triples or quadruple marks) with lengths of up to 400 + yds for marks and blinds not unheard of. Amateur Stakes are restricted to Amateur trainer/handlers, while Open Stakes are open to both amateur and professional trainers. The titles Amateur Field Trial Champion (AFTCH) and Field Trial Champion (FTCH) have been earned by just a few golden retrievers. Dogs can also earn three star status (***) by placing or earning a CM in Open or Amateur Stakes, or by placing first or second in a Qualifying Stake. Achieving three star status is a worthy accomplishment in itself.

There are a number of differences between field trials and hunt tests. The first is that in field trials gunners wear white coats. In addition, guns are fired before the bird is thrown and the distances to the marks are generally much longer than in CKC hunt tests and HRC hunts. When you come to line you are allowed to show your dog the location of the guns before signaling the judges that you are ready. This type of line procedure is called lining and is not allowed in CKC hunt tests and UKC hunts.

To be successful in field trials you will need a high powered, hard going dog that is very trainable and able to take pressure. Field breedings are relatively common, but it may take you a while to get a “good one” during your search for a top flight competitive partner. If you are looking, focus on a litter from ***/FTCH/AFTCH lineage, preferably sired by a proven producer out of a female with advanced working titles. You’ll also need a mentor or two to get you started, plus access to a good training group. Before you put yourself under someone’s wing, make sure you are comfortable with their training methods.

Are field trials fun? You bet they are, if you’re competitive in nature and enjoy training very technical concepts. The basic training required to produce a good Master dog and a dog that can be competitive in Qualifying Stakes is identical. The main differences are in the set-ups and in the length of marks. It is a huge jump from Qualifying to Open/Amateur and it is here that a high powered dog and experienced training help make all the difference.

Conclusion and Contact Information

We hope that this article has given you some ideas about what type of field events you and your golden retriever can participate in. For more information on Canadian Kennel Club working certificate programs, as well as Canadian Kennel Club hunt tests and field trials contact the Canadian Kennel Club at <http://www.ckc.ca/en/>. Additional information on the United Kennel Club/Hunting Retriever Club hunt program can be found at <http://www.hrc-ukc.com/>