

7 The Invitational Test

Purpose and Scope

At present the “Invitational” is NAVHDA’s highest level test. The Test is designed to evaluate an exceptional hunting dog in all phases of work and a variety of hunting situations.

Dogs successfully completing the Invitational Test, with a passing score, clearly demonstrate exceptional skill, ability and obedience. Qualifying dogs are awarded the title “Versatile Champion” further recognized by placing VC before their name in all records of NAVHDA Test Information Service and NAVHDA Registry. Entries to the Invitational must have DNA information on file or applied for, through NAVHDA, prior to the closing date for entry and the primary owner of each entry must be a NAVHDA International member.

Invitational Rules

The Invitational Test is not necessarily the same each time it is held, as the test may be modified for evaluation of exceptional hunting dogs in various hunting conditions or to fit the available grounds. All references to distance, size or sequence of events are very general and may be significantly different at any Invitational Test. The Invitational Test participants will be informed of the expected scenario well in advance of the test.

Dogs achieving a VC Title will not be eligible for entry in any subsequent Invitational Tests. All bitches will be inspected on the day of testing. Any bitch determined to be “in season” will be rescheduled for testing on the last day(s) of testing, after all males have run.

The Invitational Test is divided into two groups: Field and Water.

Field Work

Dogs will run in braces with handlers hunting together as a team for a minimum of sixty minutes. Dogs will be provided opportunities to find and handle game properly, which may include “stop to flush” situations. In every case dogs are expected to display steadiness through fall, as well as retrieves to hand.

In both the field and at the water, Invitational handlers are expected to remain standing throughout all retrieving sequences. Handlers may bend over to receive the bird, but kneeling, squatting or crouching while the dog is returning may lower the retrieving score.

Backing is also tested during the field search. To get a maximum score (4), a dog is expected to back without command. Judgment of backing ends when the dog is aware of the handler’s presence. Commands after an established back may reduce the dog’s steadiness score and when continued can result in a failing score. The backing dog must be off wind or down wind of sufficient distance, that in the opinion of the judges, the backing dog stopped as a result of seeing its brace mate rather than pointing game.

Should both dogs be on point on different birds, the dog that established point first will have its bird shot first. The second dog will be expected to remain on point and steady during this time. Handlers must carry an empty gun and swing on the bird in flight.

In the event either dog interferes with its brace mate, and in the Judges' opinion this interference is extreme, the dog may be ordered leashed during its brace mate's bird work. However, once a dog is leashed, it no longer can receive a passing score.

Any dog that leaves the field for more than 20 minutes is out of judgement and will not be allowed back in the field but will be allowed to participate in all other segments of the test.

Any dog that initiates a dog fight may be expelled from the field and cannot receive a passing score. A minor encounter with no further aggression will not be grounds for ejection.

Water Work

Double Mark

The Double Mark Retrieve test is designed as a realistic duck hunting scenario where two ducks are shot. The purpose of the test is to evaluate the dog's ability to 'Mark' and remember the location of a downed duck while remaining composed and steady during the flight, shooting and additional distraction during its retrieve of the second duck shot. The Test is then completed with an efficient retrieve of the first duck shot.

Requirements for this test are a body of water mostly of swimming depth, a minimum of 2-3 acres with no, or very little, vegetation. There will be a small six to ten decoy spread near the line, but not in line with the marks.

Test Dog: Prior to the test each day, a dog not entered in the Test will be run through the sequence. This measure provides participants a view of the test and assures Judges the marks can be seen and are positioned as intended.

The handler will heel their dog off lead, fifty to one hundred yards, on a clearly defined path to the water's edge. The handler will carry an unloaded break open shotgun. The use of a chain, choke collar or any other slip type lead will not be allowed while the dog is under judgment. Once the dog is positioned, the handler will be given two blank shells.

On signal from a Judge, the first mark will be thrown into open water at approximately 50 yards from the dog and handler. While the duck is in mid-air, the handler will swing and fire one blank at the duck. Shortly after the first duck hits the water the second duck will be thrown, its trajectory arcing across the line to the first mark and landing approximately 20 yards from the dog and handler. While the second duck is in mid-air the handler will swing and fire one blank at the duck. Once the dog has demonstrated steadiness to fall, the handler will send the dog to retrieve the second duck down (simulated cripple). After the dog picks up that duck, a diversion shot will be fired.

Once the dog has completed the retrieve of the simulated cripple, the handler will hand the duck to the Judge. Without touching the dog, the handler will re-position the dog and send it to retrieve the first duck thrown.

'Handling', as a means of directing the dog on a correct line to the duck is allowed during these sequences. A dog that completes the retrieves with efficiency, requiring only a minimal amount of direction, may receive a high score. Beyond this, any commands by the handler may reduce the dog's score. To achieve a qualifying score, both ducks must be retrieved to hand, in the order prescribed above, with a minimum of commands.

Blind Retrieve

The blind retrieve also represents an actual hunting situation in which a crippled duck has landed approximately 100 yards across open water, near the opposite shore and crawled up the bank some distance before expiring. To replicate this scenario a short drag will be laid from the water's edge to the duck.

The test requires a dog that has not see this duck fall or heard a shot fired to take directions from its handler to the area to locate and retrieve the duck to hand.

Test Dog: Prior to the test each day, a dog not entered in the Test will be run through the sequence. This measure provides participants a view of the test balances scenting conditions and assures Judges the setup is correct.

The test begins with the handler be instructed to heel their dog to a designated place at the water's edge from where they will direct their dog to the area of the dead duck as a means to locate and retrieve it to hand. A retrieve is required to achieve a passing score. A dog that completes the retrieve with efficiency, requiring only a reasonable amount of direction, will receive the top score. A passing score allows more hand, voice or whistle signals as well as more time. Thrown objects are not permitted.

Honoring

This test simulates a duck hunting scenario where two dogs are working from the same blind or position, taking turns in honoring the other's retrieve of downed ducks.

The test begins with a retrieving dog positioned near the water's edge. The handler of the honoring dog (the dog being tested) will be instructed to unleash and position their dog approximately 10 feet from the retrieving dog, at a designate spot near the shore facing the water then asked to stand to one side and behind his dog during the sequence.

On signal from a Judge, a shot will be fired, by the handler of the retrieving dog, as a dead duck is thrown into open water nearby. The honoring dog is expected to remain steady, while the retrieving dog completes this retrieve.

Scoring System for the Invitational Test				
Test	Index Number	Minimum Qualifying Score	Points	
			Max.	Min.
Field Work				
Search	5	3	20	15
Pointing	5	4	20	20
Backing	3	3	12	9
Field Steadiness	3	3	12	9
Field Retrieve	3	3	12	9
Water Work				
Heeling	2	3	8	6
Steadiness at Double Mark	2	3	8	6
Double Mark Retrieve	4	3	16	12
Blind Retrieve	4	3	16	12
Honoring at Blind	2	3	8	6
Overall				
Nose	6	4	24	24
Desire	5	4	20	20
Cooperation	3	3	12	9
Obedience	3	3	12	9
TOTALS			200	166