

## **Pointing Dog Hunt Test – Faults and Failures And How to Prevent It From Happening**

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Over the years of testing dogs with the American Kennel Club (AKC) and observing other handlers, it has become painfully obvious that you constantly see the same mistakes made over and over. The majority of these pit falls could have been prevented if the handler had an action plan to fall upon in times when things seem to be coming apart. Timing, like all dog handling, is of the utmost importance as well as being able to read and respond appropriately. Here we are going to discuss how you can save the dog from failing with the correct response on your part.

Controlling your dog's actions in the field doesn't seem to be that big of a problem until we get into a hunt test. Allowing a pup to run big and picking and choosing cover on its own is dangerous. In a hunt test we want your dog within range, and you being able to quarter and move the dog in and out of cover with very light handling. Yes, the dogs who hunt big find a lot of birds but get hyped up. As a result, the dog acts as if it is hunting for itself, working faster and faster, eventually busting birds.

Prior to a test, go into a field without any birds and with the help from the e-collar, and get your dog to respond promptly to quartering cues. You want to enter a test with a pup that you can maneuver and pull out of trouble spots with a simple "tweet" or "hup".

We are allowed to water our dogs anytime while walking the course. Use this stopping to water to slow down your dog's heart rate and respiration, which will control his emotion if he is beginning to concern you. Also, when you call him in for water, don't stand there begging for his compliance. Break his escalating momentum by commanding him to "whoa". You take control of the hunt test. Nothing says you cannot abruptly whoa your dog to give it a drink. Burn up some of the clock slowly offering water, talking to him softly, and interrupting his excited level, making him wait. If in doubt he understands you, "whoa" him again only a few steps after you released him. When you say the word "whoa", be very sure you state it as a true command, don't ask him to stop with a "whoa" command.

On the subject of watering, there are a few supplements that should be considered especially in warmer or high humidity days. A product called 'rehydrate' is a tablet dissolved in your water bottle. It is actually Pedialyte, which immediately sends minerals and sugar into the cells, not the digestive track. To

keep your dog from overheating and keeping his muzzle closed through out the test so he can scent through his nose, is a product called "Elements H". This is a glycol product that is given hours prior to the test. It drops the dog's core temperature 3-4 degrees. It is very safe and athletes use it for marathons. Do everything in your power to keep your dog comfortable, hydrated, and his mouth closed so he can scent better than his brace mate. It is basic knowledge but do not feed your dog till after the test. It draws a lot of strength from your dog and slows him down.

As long as we are speaking about the "whoa" command, when you feel your dog definitely is not going to stop, quietly state "whoa", such as an honoring situation. Don't allow your dog to continue right on and blatantly steal the point. So, you receive a very low score for honoring, but you may have enough points to carry you over into barely passing. Allowing your dog to steal the point is obvious failure, without trying to do anything about it.

In the event your dog has decided to absolutely blow you off and disregard your pleas, turn it into a training session. Yell "whoa", don't ask for the judge's acknowledgement, rush in, pick your dog up, place him back where he should be, then hold the collar. Your pup did fail, but he has learned a valuable lesson not to be test wise, which you don't get many opportunities to work on.

Heeling off from birds and developing into a delayed chase is a common occurrence. For the most part, if it happens, it is the handler's fault, for it can be prevented. Let us say you cap a bird and are instructed to heel your dog out of there. If you sense there is going to be a problem, with your leg, lightly rotate your dog around 180 degrees from the birds flight and command sternly to heeling your direction. Nothing says you cannot heel your dog for fifteen feet or so before releasing him. Watch his route of travel and be ready to get on him immediately, if he is still thinking about the bird.

Finding your dog on point with the bird directly under his nose is a setup where your pup is inclined to break and chase on the flush. There is a correct way to work this bird without a blow up. As you move in, quietly re-enforce his steadiness. Place one of your feet between the bird and the dog's nose and slowly nudge the bird into the air. You are not allowed to block the dog so don't go out of your way to make this look obvious. Practice this at home, but deliberately bump your dog's nose with your leg while saying "whoa".

In the spring we see a lot of birds who are molting and can't fly. To make matters worse we experience early season rains, all of which contributes to birds that have got to be thrown and the gunners doing their job. Two things happen when a bird is thrown, other than your dog considering breaking. The bird will either get blown apart due to the close shot and small shot pattern or, be missed

completely. Either way it is not a good situation. When a handler has got to reach down and throw a bird to prevent a missed bird from becoming a foot race, squeeze the air out of it prior to tossing it. If it is missed, it will not be able to run, for it will be out of breath, thus giving you ample time for a simple clean retrieve. It is wise to practice and rehearse in the spring throwing wing clipped pigeons.

Say you are confronted with a sloppy retrieve. Rather than panic and begin groveling, hoping your begging will work, simply walk backwards. One of the primary mistakes made is that the handler makes eye contact and stares at the dog when it is retrieving, signaling compliance. When you are dealing with a poor retrieve, walk backwards, and turn your back to the dog at about 10-15 feet away. Give the command to heel and slowly spin, the pup will step close to your leg trying to get your attention. Having a plan is considerably better than freezing and panicking.

In a hunt test do everything you can to relax. If you are the type that talks a lot when your nerves are a wreck, your dog will begin to disregard what you are saying in very short order. Your elevated heart rate and excited attitude will also be conveyed to your dog, so chew a big cud of gum to remind you to stay calm. When you are excited you are going to question your judgment, which will automatically throw off your timing. You're going to need good timing to save your dog in a tough situation.

Creeping in on walking birds has been one of the top reasons you see dogs fail. A lot of times you can save your dog from failing by quickly stating "relocating". After a few steps, "whoa" your dog. Don't panic nor get the deer in the headlight look. Take control of the situation, don't let your dog call all the shots and fail. Simply relocate a few steps, then whoa your dog in a firm, stern voice.

So, when running your dog in a hunt test, don't convey your nervousness to your dog, take complete control of your dog's action, have a plan to solve your dog's weak areas of the test. Practice the common faults where most dogs fail at home. In weather where your dog will pant easily, rely on the aid of supplements.