

A Beginner's Guide to Hunt Testing Your Wirehaired Pointing Griffon



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AWPGA
Field Committee

Preface

One day, many years ago, a person became the new owner of an 8-week old puppy. Visions of great hunting outings lay ahead, but how was this new owner to get there? This new owner was made aware of NAVHDA by the various breeders that he communicated with when looking for a puppy, so he sought out the nearest chapter. Fortunately, one was very close by. A few training days were attended, but being so new, he didn't know where to begin or how to progress. Nor did he feel very comfortable asking questions of these more seasoned owners; afraid he'd be thought less of. He managed best he could training his new puppy, and at 15-months old tested her in Natural Ability. His dog didn't put on the best performance that day, at least in his mind, but she performed well enough to earn a Prize III. Not bad for a greenhorn. That ended his testing until 3 years later when he ventured into AKC testing.

Testing in AKC events seemed like a huge undertaking after reading the rules and trying to figure out how to apply them. None the less, the first test was entered when his dog was 4 years old at the Junior level. After the first run, he was kicking himself because he had learned what he had been missing out on all those years. Running in an AKC test is actually pretty easy; in some respects easier than a NAVHDA test.

New owners, remember one thing. We all started out as a "newbie" in the dog testing venues. Don't be afraid to ask questions or go to tests just to watch. Find a mentor to help you through this transition and get out there with your dog.

Introduction

Many people just getting into the dog world are overwhelmed and perhaps even a little intimidated by the multitude of events you can participate in with their new family member. This booklet is intended to take some of the mystery out of hunt testing. There are a number of organizations you can test your dog with, but this booklet will focus primarily on American Kennel Club (AKC) and North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) sanctioned events.

American Kennel Club hunt tests are hosted/held by AKC member clubs. These clubs may be breed clubs or all-breed clubs and you can generally tell by the club's name which it is. Depending on the club holding the test and whether the test is being held in conjunction with another club event, the test may only be open for entries from a specific breed or it may be open to all AKC eligible pointing breeds. These tests are generally held over a weekend, with each day being an individual test. In some areas, two clubs will have their tests on the same weekend, at the same location, giving an opportunity to run your dog in four tests over a weekend. When these double/double test are scheduled, the hosting clubs work hard to prevent conflicts for the handlers, but they do occur. We'll get into AKC hunt test specifics a little later.

North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association tests are hosted/run by a NAVHDA chapter. Similar to an AKC test, a NAVHDA test is generally held over a weekend, but is only one test. It is open to any breed recognized by NAVHDA's registry. We'll get into NAVHDA test specifics a little later as well.

Regardless of the venue testing in, hunt tests are non-competitive events where your dog is evaluated by an established/written set of guidelines; your dog either passes the test or they don't. Both AKC and NAVHDA use a different numerical rating for the areas the dog is evaluated and these ratings determine whether the dog passes or doesn't.

AKC Hunt Tests

There are two types of AKC hunt tests the Griffon can participate in; pointing dog and retriever tests. As their names indicate, one tests the dog's ability to search and find game and point it (and a few other things) and the retriever test evaluates the dog's ability to retrieve game without the search aspect. The intermediate levels of pointing dog test do require retrieving, so keep that in mind. In pointing dog tests, your dog runs the field with another dog; referred to as a bracemate. There are three primary levels of testing with AKC; Junior, Senior and Master.

Junior Hunter: A Junior hunting dog must show a keen desire to hunt, be bold and independent, have a fast, yet attractive manner of hunting, and demonstrate not only intelligence in seeking objectives, but also the ability to find game. A Junior hunting dog must establish point on at least fifty (50) percent of the pointable birds it encounters. It is up to the Judge to determine if a bird is pointable given the specifics of the situation. No additional credit shall be given for steadiness to wing and shot. If the handler is within reasonable gun range of a bird which has been flushed after a point, a blank cartridge must be fired by the handler. Junior hunting dogs must hold point until the handler gets within normal gunshot range. This requirement should be tempered by practical considerations such as the dog's distance from the handler when it finds a bird. Junior hunting dogs must also show reasonable obedience to their handler's commands. Each run takes approximately 20 minutes to accomplish. Each time you run and pass, you are said to get a "leg". The dog must get four legs to obtain a Junior Hunter title.

Senior Hunter: A Senior hunting dog must show all of the attributes of a Junior hunting dog. In addition, the Senior hunting dog must be steady to wing on all pointed birds and must remain in position until the shot or they are released. A Senior hunting dog must retrieve. All birds that are pointed by the Senior dog in a bird field must be shot where safety allows. If gunning is being done on course, all birds pointed on course must be shot where safety allows. A legitimate attempt to retrieve all downed birds must be made. Conditions such as the type of cover where the bird landed, the terrain, and the condition of the downed bird, sometimes make a retrieve impossible, and this should not reflect negatively on the score of the Senior dog. Whenever it encounters its bracemate on point, it must honor. A dog that steals its bracemate's point cannot receive a qualifying score. Some commands are allowed during a dog's Senior level run. Each run at the Senior level take approximately 30 minutes to accomplish. If your dog doesn't have an opportunity to retrieve a bird or honor its bracemate's point, it will be given an opportunity to complete these tasks after all dogs have run in the field and is done in a controlled manner. A dog must have five qualifying scores to obtain his Senior Hunter title. If the dog already has a Junior Hunter title, he only has to have four scores.

Master Hunter: A Master hunting dog must give a finished performance and demonstrate clearly that it deserves to be qualified as such. This is the complete hunting companion that any hunter would be proud to own. It must be under its handler's control at all times, and handle kindly, with an absolute minimum of noise and hacking by the handler. A Master hunting dog must show a keen desire to hunt, must have a bold and attractive manner of running, and must demonstrate not only intelligence in seeking objectives, but also the ability to find game. The dog must hunt for its handler at all times at a range suitable for a handler on foot, and should show or check in front of its handler frequently. It must cover adequate ground but never range out-of-sight for a length of time that would detract from its usefulness as a practical hunting companion. The dog must locate game, must point staunchly, and must be steady to wing and shot on all birds and if it breaks, it cannot receive a qualifying score. Intelligent use of the wind and terrain in locating game, accurate nose, and intensity on point are essential. Whenever it encounters its bracemate on point, it must honor. A dog that steals its bracemate's point cannot receive a qualifying score. A Master hunting dog is not allowed to be held by the collar unless the Judge deems the situation

to be so unusual as to instruct the handler to collar the dog. A Master hunting dog must positively demonstrate its steadiness to wing and shot. All birds that are pointed by the Master dog in a bird field must be shot where safety allows. If gunning is being done on course, all birds pointed on course must be shot where safety allows. Gunning must be done by Official Guns only. A legitimate attempt to retrieve all downed birds must be made. Conditions such as the type of cover, where the birds landed, the terrain, and the condition of the downed bird, sometimes make a retrieve impossible and this should not reflect negatively on the score of the Master dog. All killed birds must be retrieved promptly, tenderly and absolutely to hand. The handler shall not command or signal the dog to retrieve until positive steadiness has been demonstrated. Each run at the Master level takes approximately 30 minutes. Like at the Senior level, if your dog doesn't have an opportunity to retrieve or honor during its run, it will be called back after all dogs have finished their runs and will be accomplished in a controlled manner. A dog must obtain six qualifying scores to get this title. If they have a Senior Hunter title, they must obtain five qualifying scores to obtain this title.

During AKC hunt tests, dogs are evaluated on a number of attributes during their run and these attributes are scored from 0-10. The following attributes are evaluated at the various levels:

<u>Junior</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Master</u>
Hunting	Hunting	Hunting
Bird Finding	Bird Finding	Bird Finding
Pointing	Pointing	Pointing
Trainability	Trainability	Trainability
	Retrieving	Retrieving
	Honoring	Honoring

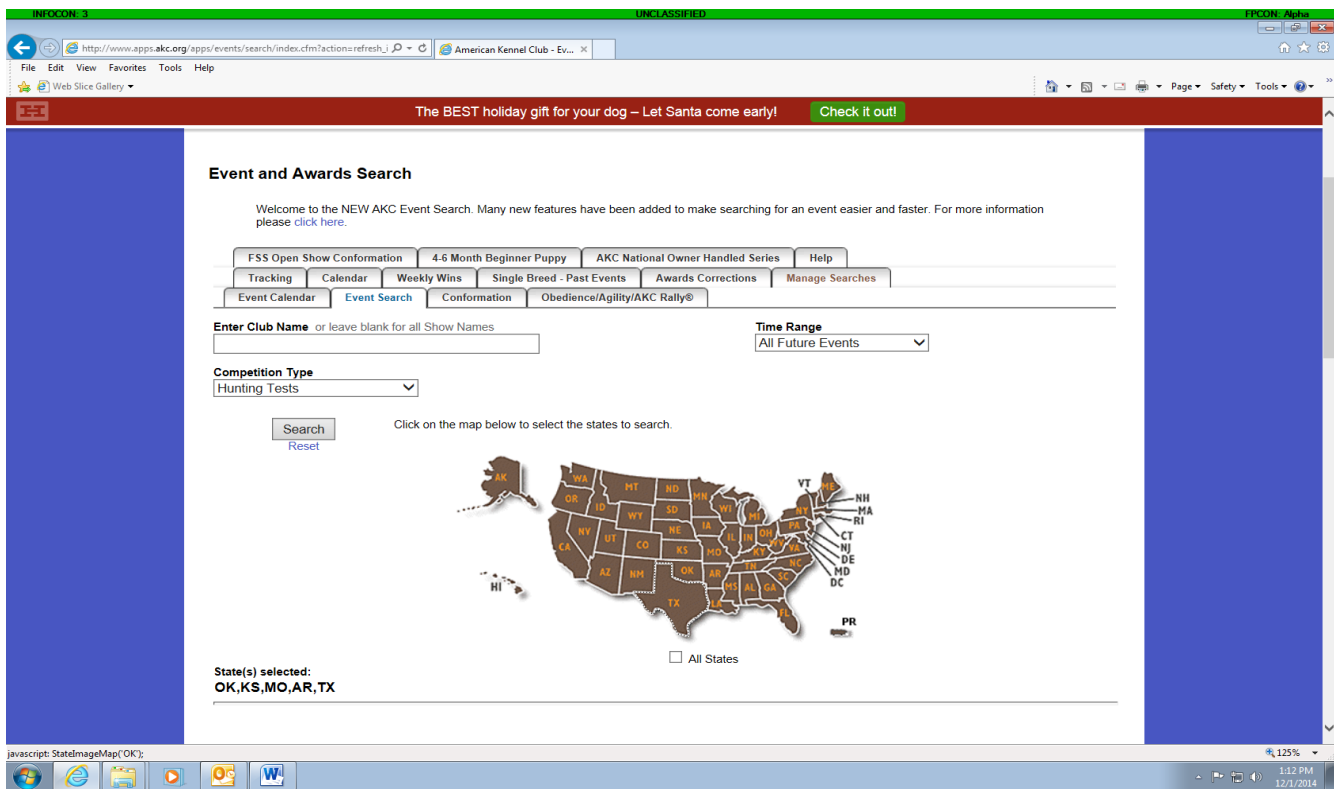
To receive a qualifying score, the dog must earn an average of 7 for each area evaluated. No one area may be scored less than a 5 to earn a qualifying score. If a dog is unsuccessful in an evaluated area, it will either receive a 0 or no score for that area.

For more detailed information, visit the AKC website and review the Pointing Dog Hunt Test Rules at: <http://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RHTPNT.pdf>

More recently the Griffon has become eligible to run in AKC Retriever Hunting Tests. During the retrieving test, your dog is expected to make a number of retrieves on land and in water. Depending on the level of test running, the distance your dog must travel to make the retrieve and the type of retrieve (marked vs. blind) varies. Like the pointing dog tests, the retriever tests are run at a Junior, Senior and Master level. To learn more about the retriever test, visit the AKC website and review the Retriever Hunting Tests Rules at: <http://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RHTRET.pdf>

There are also "Advanced" titles that can be earned from AKC hunt tests. They are the same tests as explained above, but have more stringent minimum scoring requirements.

You can find scheduled AKC tests at: <http://www.apps.akc.org/apps/events/search/index.cfm>
 Select the "Event Search" tab > On the Competition Type" drop down arrow, select "Hunting Tests"
 > On the "Time Range" drop down arrow, select "All Future Events" > Click on the individual states on the map you are interested in > Click the "Search" button.



Pay close attention to the results from your search. Your search will yield all hunt tests; pointing, retrieving, and spaniel. Look for a pointing breed in the hosting club's name to ensure you are selecting the correct testing venue.

NAVHDA Hunt Tests

There are four levels of testing in the NAVHDA system: Natural Ability, Utility Preparatory, Utility and Invitational. Like the AKC testing system, the higher level testing at, the more and more stringent the areas evaluated. Unlike AKC tests, there are more components to each test. There is no set sequence for conducting the groups of tests or for individual tests within a group. The decision on this matter is the responsibility of the Judging Team.

Natural Ability: The Natural Ability Test measures seven hereditary characteristics which are fundamental to the makeup of a good, reliable versatile hunting dog. The importance of this test cannot be overemphasized. The natural, inherited abilities of a hunting dog usually manifest themselves at an early age, and it is desirable to take advantage of this fact by testing dogs while they are still young. By so doing, the owner or trainer gets an impartial evaluation of the dog's strengths and weaknesses and thus is better able to map out a future training program for the animal. If the dog displays serious deficiencies, the owner may wish to obtain a new prospect. The conscientious breeder will study the dog's record in the Natural Ability Test, along with the records of its litter mates, with a view in making any changes in his breeding program.

The Natural Ability Test is organized into four main segments, or phases. 1) Field: each dog is hunted for a minimum of 20 minutes in the field and is evaluated on Use of Nose, Search, Pointing, Desire to Work, Cooperation, and Gun Shyness. No game is shot, and no retrieves are required during the Natural Ability Test.

2) Tracking Phase - The dog is given an opportunity to track a flightless running pheasant or chukar. Primary skill evaluated in scoring is tracking. Secondary skills are: Desire to Work, Cooperation, and Use of Nose.

3) Water Phase - The dog is tested for its willingness to swim. Primary skills evaluated are Water and Desire to Work. Secondary skill is Cooperation.

4) Judgment of Physical Characteristics: eyes, teeth, coat, and testes (when applicable).

There is no set sequence for conducting the four general phases. It is desirable, though not necessary, to test the young dog on tracking after it completes the field test because usually by then the dog has settled down and is better able to concentrate. Also, it is desirable to evaluate the coat immediately after the dog completes the water test.

Utility Preparatory Test: The Utility Preparatory Test (UPT) is just what the name implies. It is a test midway between the Natural Ability Test and the Utility Test. The dog's level of obedience and training should demonstrate that it is on its way to becoming a Utility dog. The Utility Preparatory Test is intended to help the hunter/trainer measure progress of his or her hunting companion on route to being a complete hunting dog. The test is intended to measure progress toward qualification in the NAVHDA Utility Test. Since the Utility Preparatory Test is measuring progress towards the Utility Test, it has less stringent levels of performance.

Utility judging standards fully apply in the Utility Preparatory Test up to the UPT performance limits. A handler will get a better understanding of the UPT Test and enhance their training preparation by reading through the Utility Test rules. Also, the handler and dog gain experience and appreciation of the hunting team concept through exposure to the UPT test.

The Utility Preparatory Test is divided into two groups. Each dog is hunted for a minimum of 30 minutes in the field and is evaluated on:

<u>Field</u>	<u>Water</u>
Search	Water Search
Pointing	Walking at Heel
Steadiness on Game	Steadiness by Blind
Retrieve of Shot Bird	Retrieve of a Duck
Retrieve by Drag	

The following are judged throughout the Utility Preparatory Test: Use of Nose, Desire to Work, Cooperation, Obedience, and Physical Attributes: eyes, teeth, coat, and testes (when applicable).

Utility Test: The Utility Test is designed to test a hunting dog's usefulness to the on-foot hunter in all phases of hunting both before and after the shot, in field and marsh, and on different species of game. This test is a challenging and demanding one, as befits the NAVHDA aim of "fostering, improving, promoting and protecting the versatile hunting dog in North America." It is not, however, an unreasonable test with unattainable goals. A very large number of fine dogs have already earned prize classifications in NAVHDA Utility Tests. It is interesting to note that the majority of these successful dogs have been owner-trained.

The Utility Test is divided into two groups. Each dog is hunted for a minimum of 30 minutes in the field and is evaluated on:

<u>Field</u>	<u>Water</u>
Search	Search for a Duck

Pointing
 Steadiness on Game
 Retrieve of Shot Bird
 Retrieve of Dragged Game

Walking at Heel
 Remaining by Blind
 Steadiness by Blind
 Retrieve of a Duck

The Following are judged throughout the Utility Test: Use of Nose, Desire to Work, Cooperation, Obedience, and Physical Attributes: eyes, teeth, coat, and testes (when applicable).

The three levels of NAVHDA testing do not lead to your dog earning a title. Your dog is considered to have passed one of these levels of testing if it earns a Prize. Your dog can earn a Prize I, II or III depending on a number of factors in the scoring system. For example, if your dog does not complete the duck retrieve, he will not prize no matter how well he did in the other parts of the test.

To learn more about NAVHDA testing and Prize classification, refer to the NAVHDA Tests Rules and Aims booklet at:

<http://www.navhda.org/sites/www.navhda.org/files/assets/testrule-2-2014.pdf>

The Invitational Test is the pinnacle of the NAVHDA testing system. It is reserved only for dogs who earned a Utility Test Prize I the prior calendar year. This test is currently held once per year in a couple different locations; one in Ohio and one in Iowa. Dogs who pass this test earn the “Versatile Champion” title from NAVHDA.

You can find scheduled NAVHDA tests on the NAVHDA website at:

www.navhda.us/testsked/listupcoming.asp?W_MODE=DATE

Upcoming Tests

Today's Date: Monday, December 01, 2014

Note: Those tests where the actual test grounds have yet been selected are listed as "To be determined" (Tbd)
 Click on the "Location Name" entry to view the test area in Google Maps

Upcoming Tests [Listed by Chapter](#) Upcoming Tests [Listed by State](#)

2014					
Dates	Test Location	Chapter	Tests	Secretary	Phone
Dec 12-14	Mohave Valley, AZ	Grand Canyon Of Arizona	NA/UPT/UT	Ted Hamilton	(928) 713-6941
Dec 12-14	Decatur, TX	Texas	NA/UPT/UT	Greg Kadesch	(817) 271-7878

2015					
Dates	Test Location	Chapter	Tests	Secretary	Phone
Feb 7-8	Lillington, NC	Tarheel	NA/UPT/UT	Richard Scott Caldwell	(910) 635-7208
Feb 28-Mar 1	Jersey, GA	Mid South	NA/UPT/UT	Jeff Lorenzini	(770) 251-9272
Mar 21-22	Hoffman Sandhills Gamelands, NC	Carolinas	NA/UPT/UT	Fred Rice	(573) 819-9542
Mar 21-22	Caldwell, TX	Lone Star	NA/UPT/UT	Megan Murphy	(281) 989-5933
Mar 21-22	Hoffman Sandhills Gamelands, NC	Carolinas	NA/UPT/UT	Fred Rice	(573) 819-9542
Mar 27-29	Lake Wales, FL	Florida Palmetto	NA/UPT/UT	Jo Ann Rogala	(727) 480-4942
Mar 28-29	Hustle, VA	Rappahannock	NA/UPT/UT	Alyssa Pease	(703) 765-5715
Apr 10-12	Maver, AZ	Grand Canyon Of Arizona	NA/UPT/UT	Dan Whitman	(623) 237-2790

A valuable NAVHDA event to attend is a Handler’s Clinic. Attending a Handler’s Clinic early in your testing will help take much of the mystery out of how your dog received the scores it did. In a

