

**RETRIEVERS**

**JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH 2011**

# ONLINE

**THE MAGAZINE OF FIELD TRIAL AND HUNT TEST RETRIEVERS**

*Volume XXII*

*Winter 2011 Issue*

## CHANGING TIMES



**Inside this issue —**  
**Property Management 101**  
**Revisiting the Tune-Up**  
**EIC Update**  
**Judging Survey Results**  
**Mark/Blind Setups**  
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# C ontents

Winter 2011

## 5 Are Your Setups Well Designed?

by Dennis R. Voigt

*Here are 10 ideas to consider to design setups to progress your dog in your daily training.*

## 7 EIC in Labrador Retrievers

by Sue Taylor, DVM

*A comprehensive update on the symptoms, genetics, diagnosis and testing for Exercise Induced Collapse syndrome. A must read!*

## 12 Three Advanced Mark/ Blind Setups Without Remote Devices

by Dennis R. Voigt

*Three examples of Training Alone without remotes on advanced Blind and Mark setups. These are great to introduce a dog to concepts.*

## 14 Retriever Property Management 101 – Part 1: The Land and Water

by Dennis R. Voigt

*Part 1 has tips for prospective buyers and those developing their properties on basic needs for the "home" pond and different types of land and its management.*

## 18 Variations on the Two Short Marking Setup with a Blind

by Dennis R. Voigt

*A favourite setup to work on short retired guns in front of longer birds gets embellished with a Blind and produces many options to run.*

## 20 Revisiting the Tune-up Concept

by Dennis R. Voigt

*Are you taking advantage of the power of the Tune-up and 3-Peats in your training? This article will help you reinforce lessons by repeating concepts without repeating blinds.*

## 22 Retrievers ONLINE Judging Survey

by Ted Shih & Dennis R. Voigt

*Surprising unanimity among Professionals and Amateurs on the major things that need to be addressed to improve field trial judging, plus a start on solutions.*

## 27 Classified Ads

*Be sure to check out some excellent breedings in this issue, as well as recommended products. Also see the notice about advertising in 2011.*

*Spring issue deadlines May 1 and mails mid-May*



*Find a long roadway or a narrow strip in a nice field like this and do some advanced marks and blinds while training alone. The Training Retrievers Alone article on page 12 has more information on how.*

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## ARE YOUR TRAINING SETUPS WELL DESIGNED?

by Dennis R. Voigt


**D**esigning setups that are effective in improving your dog's skills and your teamwork is an on-going challenge. Our goal is always to progress our dog. Dogs can progress from any setups with a lesson, even if it is just environmental experience. A lesson can be from a setup which produces success because success is always beneficial. Good lessons also can occur when dogs are corrected for a wrong decision. A lesson might be learned from effective help when a dog gets in trouble. Clean, well-designed setups will increase the probability that you will have good lessons. I always distinguish between tests designed to evaluate performance and training setups designed to teach. While I do believe there is a role in training for tests, the majority of field work should be teaching setups. So what makes a good well-designed setup? There are thousands of examples of good and bad setups. We could share many examples to illustrate that but could be more confusing without being on site. I've seen various Internet examples that were misleading or created a misconception while trying to illustrate setups. Instead, let's look at some basic principles. Here are 10 things to consider when designing your training setups.

### Ten Things to Improve your Setups

1. Try for a clean lesson. Start with asking what lesson/concept/ experience do I want to teach?
2. Try to design so that it is easy to read your dog's decisions.
3. Try to make a quality setup that the experience of running will be memorable for your dog.
4. Try to make the lesson(s) repeatable. This means that if several dogs run the same setup there should be a high probability the lesson will be repeated for each dog. Secondly, the setup should be possible to replicate elsewhere to reinforce the lesson.
5. Try to repeat a lesson (2-3X) in the same setup whenever possible. Beware that components of the test do not contradict or cancel each other. For example, you might be better to do a short bird and then ask them to drive across water 2X rather than teach them to drive across water 2X and then ask to stop short in front of water.
6. Related to #5, try to have factors in concert as opposed to factors which cancel each other. For example, if the shoreline is tempting, you would want a downwind or a crosswind onto shore.
7. If an intervention or correction is likely, try to make the design so that the response is good. This means that when you see your dog makes the incorrect decision, you can intervene effectively while being seen and heard and that it is reasonable your dog will respond. Sometimes that intervention will be helping or recalling or handling

with or without pressure. Your dog's level will determine which will be most effective but a good design will help greatly.

8. Try to design setups which can be run in different ways depending on a dog's level. A flexible setup can help us tailor how we will run each setup with each dog (see the article in this issue on *Two Short Marking Setup with a Blind* for an example).
9. Try to take advantage of the key features in the field or the water at the site. While many setups can be designed in a particular location, there are often key features which utilize that site best. If you are at a rare or unique site, maximize its one-time features.
10. Except for #9, try for setups in each location that you can return to later (during the season but perhaps even a year) that will be worthwhile repeating. Usually, I would try to enhance the setup or complicate on a return in order to reinforce the key lessons and also progress.

Continually strive to progress. Aim for excellence which can be defined as better than average but be careful about perfection as a goal. In the end, you may progress slower striving for perfection than striving for excellence. 

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## EXERCISE INDUCED COLLAPSE IN LABRADOR RETRIEVERS

by Susan M. Taylor, DVM, Diplomate ACVIM (Small Animal Internal Medicine)

Professor of Small Animal Medicine, Western College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Saskatchewan

A syndrome of exercise intolerance and collapse (EIC) has been recognized in otherwise normal Labrador Retrievers. Investigators from the University of Minnesota (Ned Patterson, Jim Mickelson, Katie Minor), the University of Saskatchewan (Sue Taylor, Cindy Shmon), and the Comparative Neuromuscular Unit at the University of California (Diane Shelton) have been researching this condition for more than 15 years.

This article will summarize some of what we have learned about the syndrome of Exercise Induced Collapse in Labrador Retrievers.

### WHO GETS IT?

The syndrome of exercise intolerance and collapse (EIC) is a common inherited disorder in Labrador Retrievers. Black, yellow and chocolate Labradors of both sexes are affected. Signs often first become apparent in affected dogs when they are young - usually between 5 months and 3 years of age (average 14 months). Littermates and other related dogs are commonly affected but depending on their temperament and lifestyle they may or may not manifest symptoms. Affected dogs are otherwise normal and are often described as being extremely fit, muscular, prime athletic specimens of their breed with an excitable temperament and lots of drive.

### HOW COMMON IS IT?

**EIC is the most common reason for exercise/excitement induced collapse in Labrador Retrievers that seem otherwise normal and healthy.**

EIC is common in Labrador Retrievers, and now that we have identified the causative mutation we can test for the condition. Current data from the first 10,000 Labradors tested shows that 30% to 40% of all Labradors tested have been carriers (with one copy of the mutation: E/N) and 3% to 14% of dogs have been affected (with 2 copies: E/E) and susceptible to collapse. This wide variability in proportion of affected dogs results from evaluation of samples from different populations of dogs (dogs competing in shows and trials versus dogs being tested pre-breeding and veterinarians testing collapsing dogs). Interestingly, the prevalence of carriers is not different between field trial /hunt test dogs and show dogs.

Most (>80%) affected Labradors (E/E: 2 copies of the mutation) experience at least one episode of collapse by the time they are 4 years of age. Most competitive dogs are unable to continue training and competing at a high level but if trigger activities can be avoided, dogs with EIC live normal lives. A few genetically affected (E/E) dogs never do exhibit collapse, perhaps because they do not engage in the required strenuous activity with extreme excitement that is required to produce

collapse. DNA testing is the only way to know for certain whether a dog has EIC.

### OTHER BREEDS

The research laboratory at the University of Minnesota has tested 100-300 samples from many of the other common retriever breeds - they have tested Golden Retrievers, Flat-Coated Retrievers, Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retrievers and Curly Coated Retrievers. They have also tested other working and sporting breeds including American Water Spaniels, Newfoundlands, Portuguese Water Dogs and Border Collies. So far, the mutation has only been found in Labradors, Curly Coated Retrievers, Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, German Wirehaired Pointers and Pembroke Welsh Corgis.

### DESCRIPTION OF COLLAPSE

Dogs with EIC can tolerate mild to moderate exercise, but 5 to 20 minutes of strenuous exercise with extreme excitement induces weakness and then collapse. Severely affected dogs may collapse whenever they are exercised to this extent - other dogs only exhibit collapse sporadically.

The first thing noted is usually a rocking or forced gait. The rear limbs then become weak and unable to support weight and dogs may continue to run while dragging their back legs. Some of the dogs appear to be uncoordinated, especially in the rear limbs, with a wide-based, long, loose stride rather than the short, stiff strides typically associated with muscle weakness. In some dogs the rear limb collapse progresses to forelimb weakness and occasionally to a total inability to move. Muscles of the rear limbs are relatively flaccid during collapse, and there is loss of the patellar reflex during an episode and for a short period during recovery. Manipulation and palpation of the muscles, joints, and spine during or after an episode does not seem to cause discomfort.

Some dogs appear to have a loss of balance and may fall over, particularly as they recover from complete collapse. Most collapsed dogs are totally conscious and alert, still trying to run and retrieve during an episode but as many as 25% of affected dogs have had at least one episode where the owner reports that they appear stunned or disoriented during the episode.

**Dogs worsen after exercise.** It is common for the symptoms to worsen for 3 to 5 minutes even after exercise has been terminated. A few affected dogs have died during exercise or while resting immediately after an episode of exercise-induced collapse. An affected dog's exercise should ALWAYS be stopped immediately at the first hint of uncoordination or wobbliness.

## Veterinary Evaluation of Affected dogs

Nervous system, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal examinations are unremarkable at rest in dogs with EIC as is routine blood analysis at rest and during an episode of collapse. These dogs do not experience heart rhythm abnormalities, low blood sugar, electrolyte disturbances or respiratory difficulty that could explain their collapse. Body temperature is remarkably elevated during collapse (average 107.1F [41.7C], many up to 108F [42.2C]), but this magnitude of body temperature elevation is common in normal exercise-tolerant Labradors without EIC as well. Dogs affected by EIC hyperventilate and experience dramatic alterations in their blood carbon dioxide concentration (decreased) and their blood pH (increased) but these changes are also observed in normal exercising dogs as they pant to blow off heat. Testing for myasthenia gravis is negative as is testing for hypothyroidism, hypoadrenocorticism (low cortisol) and malignant hyperthermia.

## Recovery from collapse

Most dogs recover quickly but the recovery is gradual rather than instantaneous. Dogs are normal within 5 to 25 minutes. Dogs are not painful during the collapse or after recovery. Massage of the muscles or palpation of the joints or spine does not cause discomfort.

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO COLLAPSE ON A GIVEN DAY

**Ambient Temperature.** Hot weather is not necessary to induce EIC-related collapse, but if the temperature is very warm, collapse is more likely. Affected dogs are less likely to collapse in cold weather or while swimming, but dogs have exhibited collapse while breaking ice retrieving waterfowl in frigid temperatures and dogs have drowned when experiencing EIC -related collapse in the water.

**Excitement.** Dogs that exhibit the symptoms of EIC are most likely to have intense, excitable personalities, and it is very apparent that their level of excitement plays a role in inducing the collapse. Dogs with EIC are most likely to collapse when engaging in activities that they find very exciting or stressful. This can include retrieving or chasing live birds, participation in field trials, training drills with electric collar pressure and quartering for upland game.

**Type of Exercise.** Routine exercise like jogging or hiking is not very likely to induce an episode in dogs with EIC. Activities with continuous intense exercise, particularly if accompanied by a high level of excitement or anxiety most commonly cause collapse. Activities commonly implicated include pheasant hunting, repetitive “happy retrieves”, repetition of difficult retrieves especially where the dog is having trouble finding a bird or is receiving or anticipating electric collar correction, and excitedly running alongside an all terrain vehicle.

**Body Temperature.** Body temperature is normal at rest in dogs with EIC and is dramatically increased during collapse (often >41.5 C, >107.6F). Temperatures are not different from

those seen in unaffected Labrador Retrievers doing the same type and amount of exercise. Dogs lose body heat through panting, so all dogs with these dramatic elevations in body temperature will pant hard in an attempt to cool off. Although the elevated temperature after exercise may play a role in EIC related collapse (making dogs more dependent on dynamin1 function – see below), and may even contribute to the death of some affected dogs, inability to properly regulate temperature is not the underlying problem in dogs with EIC.

## DIAGNOSIS OF EIC

Until October of 2008, EIC could only be diagnosed by systematically ruling out all other disorders causing exercise intolerance and collapse and by observing characteristic clinical features, history and laboratory test results in affected dogs. Even today, any Labrador Retriever with exercise intolerance should always have a complete veterinary evaluation to rule-out treatable conditions such as orthopedic disorders, heart failure, anemia, heart rhythm disturbances, respiratory problems, low blood sugar, low blood cortisol, cauda equina syndrome, myasthenia gravis, and muscle disease. Genetic (DNA) testing can now be easily performed to confirm a suspected diagnosis of EIC. Because there are so many potential causes of exercise intolerance in dogs, there has been a recent tendency to call the EIC syndrome caused by homozygosity for the dynamin-1 mutation *dynamin-associated EIC* (d-EIC).

## Inheritance

EIC is a hereditary condition, with littermates and other related dogs commonly affected. EIC is inherited as an autosomal recessive trait which means that both the sire and the dam must be at least carriers (E/N) for one of their offspring to be affected. In 2007, the genetic mutation responsible for susceptibility to EIC was identified. This is a mutation in the gene for dynamin-1 (DNM1) that causes a change in the amount or function of the dynamin-1 protein in dogs that have two copies of the mutation (homozygous: E/E: affected). The scientific papers state that this mutation is “highly associated with EIC” – this is the wording required until experimental studies on the actual amount and function of DNM1 protein in the brains of dogs with EIC can be completed.

## Mechanism of Collapse

Dynamin-1 is a protein expressed only in the brain and spinal cord where it plays a key role in repackaging neurotransmitters into synaptic vesicles (packages) for release. DNM1 is not required for neurotransmission during low level neurological stimulation, but when a heightened stimulus creates an increased demand for release of CNS neurotransmitters (as with intense exercise, a high level of excitement and perhaps with increased body temperature) DNM1 becomes essential for sustained synaptic transmission in the brain and spinal cord. Dogs with 2 copies of the EIC mutation (E/E) run out of pre-packaged neurotransmitters and are susceptible to collapse in those conditions.



## Testing

***DNA testing for the genetic mutation causing EIC susceptibility can now be performed.*** This is a reliable test for the actual mutation so results are definitive and accurate - determining with certainty whether a dog has one copy of the mutation (E/N: carrier), 2 copies of the mutation (E/E: affected) or no copies of the mutation (N/N: clear). Instructions for collecting and submitting samples for testing, sample shipping and the necessary forms are available on the website of the **Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at the University of Minnesota** (<http://www.cvm.umn.edu/vdl/ourservices/canineneuromuscular/home.html>). In addition to testing blood samples, cheek swabs can be submitted by veterinarians from adult dogs or weaned puppies, and litters of newborn puppies can be tested by sending in dewclaws. Frozen stored semen can also be tested from deceased sires.

## LONG TERM OUTLOOK

Dogs symptomatic for EIC are rarely able to continue training or competition. It seems that if affected dogs are removed from training and not exercised excessively the condition will not progress and they will be fine as pets. They are able to continue to live fairly normal lives if owners limit their intense exercise and excitement.

It is important that owners of dogs with EIC be made aware that the dog's exercise should be stopped at the first hint of uncoordination or wobbliness as some affected dogs have died during collapse when their owners allowed or encouraged continuing exercise. Not all of the EIC deaths have occurred in dogs rated as severely affected based on their historical number of episodes of collapse or the amount of activity required to induce previous episodes of collapse.

## TREATMENT

The best treatment in most dogs consists of avoiding known trigger activities and activities that involve intensive exercise in conjunction with extreme excitement especially in hot weather. Most dogs that are retired from training/competition or trigger activities like upland hunting live the remainder of their life without exhibiting any further episodes of collapse. Owners/trainers must always keep in mind the importance of ending exercise at the first sign of weakness/wobbliness if it does occur since these dogs are susceptible to collapse and death from EIC.

Medical treatment with the anti-convulsant Phenobarbital (2 mg/kg every 12 hours) has been effective at preventing or decreasing EIC episodes in some affected dogs when restricting participation in trigger activities was not an option. In particular, some field trial dogs have been able to re-enter training and competition at a high level during Phenobarbital treatment. The actual mechanism underlying the effectiveness of Phenobarbital in dogs with EIC is uncertain. It is possible that this drug just "takes the edge off" and decreases the dog's level of excitement, thus making it less likely that they will have an episode. This drug should only be administered with strict veterinary supervision and monitoring.

A few EIC affected male dogs have experienced an improved ability to tolerate intensive exercise without collapse after neutering. Again, this improvement may be a result of a decrease in the general excitement level of the dog.

## UNDERSTANDING TEST RESULTS: THE INHERITANCE OF EIC

Validated testing for EIC is only available through the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at the University of Minnesota in North America. Any other laboratories offering the test (unless they send samples out to the University of Minnesota) are violating patent infringement regulations. Further information regarding EIC and EIC testing can be found on the University of Minnesota VDL website.

The test will determine whether a dog is:

Clear of EIC (*no copies of the causative mutation: N/N*)

A carrier of EIC (*has 1 copy of the causative mutation: E/N*)

Affected by EIC (*2 copies of the causative mutation: E/E*)

## EXPLANATION

Every dog gets 2 copies of every gene - one from its dam and one from its sire. The mutation in the gene that causes EIC is inherited as an autosomal recessive trait, which means that **all affected** dogs (*those showing signs of collapse*) have 2 copies of the mutated gene - one that they got from their dam and one from their sire.

**Clear dogs are dogs that do not have any copies of the mutation (N/N).** These dogs do not have EIC and will not show signs of EIC-related collapse

**Carriers, by definition, are dogs that have one copy of the mutated gene (E/N)** that they got from either their dam or their sire and they have one normal copy of the gene that they got from the other parent. These dogs do not have EIC and will not show signs of EIC-related collapse. They will pass their copy of the mutated gene on to approximately half of their puppies.

**Affected dogs have 2 copies of the mutation (E/E).** Both of their parents are either carriers (E/N) or affected by (E/E) EIC. Affected dogs have EIC and most will show signs of exercise intolerance or collapse when participating in trigger activities with a high level of excitement/stress (>80% collapse before 3 years of age). A few genetically affected dogs (E/E) never exhibit any signs of EIC. Affected dogs will pass a copy of the mutation on to each of their offspring.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR BREEDING

**Carriers have one copy of the mutated gene and one copy of the normal gene (E/N).** They will pass a copy of the mutated gene on to approximately half of their puppies.

- if a carrier is bred to a clear dog, none of their pups will be affected by EIC, but about half of their pups will be carriers.

- if a carrier is bred to another carrier, about 1/2 of their pups will be carriers, 1/4 of their pups will be non-carriers (clear) and 1/4 of their pups will be affected by EIC and susceptible to collapse.

- if a carrier is bred to an affected dog, about 1/2 of their pups will be carriers and 1/2 of their pups will be affected by EIC.

**So you can see, if you have a carrier dog or bitch, it is very important to know the EIC status of any dog you are breeding to.**

## TESTING LITTERS

When the dam or sire of a litter is a carrier of EIC, it is desirable to test the litter at birth to learn the EIC genetic status of each puppy. This knowledge may determine which puppies go to which homes. Entire litters can be tested using dewclaws snipped off and placed in individual tubes. Care should be taken to not cross-contaminate dewclaws from one pup with blood from another pup during dewclaw collection. The results from dewclaw DNA testing will be 100% reliable but will not be eligible for verified permanent identification (VPI) registration with OFA. Blood samples or cheek swabs for VPI registration can be collected for testing from weaned older puppies (6-7 week old) if their microchip or tattoo is verified at the time of testing.

## CERTIFICATION OF EIC STATUS

Testing for EIC is performed by the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL) at the University of Minnesota. The fee charged by the laboratory is \$65.00. Cheek swabs are the most economical way to test adult dogs and weaned puppies as they can be sent through the regular mail with no special handling. Test results will be provided directly to the veterinarian submitting the sample and also to the owner.

The VDL does not maintain a list that can be accessed by individuals interested in a dog's EIC status.

The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals ([www.offa.org](http://www.offa.org)) does, however, host EIC data and provides OFA numbers for EIC clearances just like they do for hips, elbows, eyes, centronuclear myopathy (CNM) results and other heritable conditions. Results will only be listed on the OFA website if owners authorize the public release of their results. Owners must FAX or mail their EIC test result form (obtained from the VDL) to the OFA to have their result posted. The fee is \$15 for individual dogs or \$30 for a litter – there is no charge for posting results from affected dogs. This list of EIC status for tested dogs can be accessed at <http://www.offa.org/search.html>.

**Breeders are cautioned that simply reading on an advertisement or website (other than OFA) or being told by a dog owner that a dog was tested EIC clear is not necessarily reliable information. Owners of potential breeding dogs should be encouraged to obtain OFA certification to document their test results and make them available to others who might be interested in breeding to their dogs one day. If a dog does not have their EIC result listed on OFA you should ask the owner to provide you with a copy**

**of the laboratory result they obtained from the University of Minnesota VDL.**

## **COLLAPSING LABRADORS THAT DO NOT HAVE EIC**

Occasionally, we hear about dogs experiencing recurrent episodes of uncoordination or collapse with exercise that are not EIC affected – they are either EIC carriers (E/N) or EIC clear (N/N). In many cases there are abnormal physical findings detected at rest (heart murmurs, muscle atrophy, pain, etc) helping to distinguish these dogs from dogs with EIC-related collapse. In others the collapse episodes are subtly different from EIC-related collapse. For example, the age of onset may be older, the episodes may be more sudden in onset (less progressive as exercise continues), the episodes may involve all 4 legs at once (instead of rear legs first), muscle tone may be increased (instead of decreased), mentation may be abnormal (instead of normal) or affected dogs may seem painful during an episode (unlike EIC). The episodes of exercise intolerance in these dogs can be attributed to a number of different disorders including joint pain, heart failure, anemia, heart rhythm disturbances, laryngeal paralysis, lung disease, low blood sugar, low blood cortisol, cauda equina syndrome, myasthenia gravis, and muscle disease. It appears that one of the most common disorders causing episodes of exercise intolerance or collapse after exercise that can be confused with EIC in Labrador Retrievers is an atypical seizure disorder.

**Atypical Seizures / Paroxysmal Dyskinesia.** An episodic movement disorder that may be a form of focal motor seizure has been commonly recognized in Labrador Retrievers. This disorder has been called atypical epilepsy, paroxysmal dyskinesia or episodic dyskinesia. Most Labrador Retrievers presenting with these episodes have idiopathic epilepsy. The episodes in some dogs are most likely to occur upon waking or being startled, but in many dogs episodes seem to be triggered by exercise, excitement or hyperventilation, leading to confusion with EIC. Signs are different, however, from typical EIC episodes. Some dogs simply stagger and look dazed or confused for a few seconds or minutes and then recover, without ever falling over. Others have a 2 to 5 minute episode (occasionally longer) where they appear anxious and are unable to stand erect and walk but are able to crawl to their desired location. Some dogs seem to have a severe loss of balance during episodes. Affected dogs maintain consciousness and can obey commands during episodes. Some dogs have a dramatic decrease in their episode frequency when treated with chronic oral anticonvulsant therapy and some affected dogs develop more classical generalized tonic-clonic (loss of consciousness, falling to their side, paddling) seizures later in life.

**Heat exhaustion / Heat stroke.** Before we were able to test for and diagnose EIC, there were many who felt that EIC collapse episodes were simply a manifestation of recurrent heat exhaustion or heat stroke. The collapse episodes we see in dogs with EIC are, however, very different from collapse episodes associated with heat stroke. Heat stroke severe enough

to cause collapse in a dog is life-threatening. Recovery, if it does occur, is slow and prolonged (hours to days) even with intensive treatment. Many affected dogs progress to kidney failure and death. Laboratory evaluation reveals a dramatic increase in the muscle enzyme CK. Mentation changes that are severe, progressive and persistent (for hours to days) occur in 80% of dogs collapsed due to heat stroke. Significant blood vessel wall injury leads to blood clots forming within blood vessels, disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), low blood platelets and damage to multiple organs. In contrast, dogs with EIC-related collapse show no laboratory abnormalities and they recover quickly - happy and running around within 5 to 25 minutes. Besides the severity of collapse episodes, the recurrent nature of EIC-related collapse and the fact that collapse can occur even on days with moderate or cool ambient temperatures helps to distinguish EIC from heat-related illness.

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DISCLOSURE: Dr. Taylor is a patent owner of the genetic test for EIC and receives a portion of the proceeds from this test. Updated January 9, 2011 

## SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT EIC FACTS

1. EIC is the most common reason for exercise and excitement induced collapse or wobbly gait in Labrador Retrievers that seem otherwise normal and healthy.
2. Most dogs with EIC exhibit a characteristic pattern of collapse starting with rear limb weakness. They may continue to walk or run while dragging their back legs. EIC collapse progressively worsens as the dog continues to exercise and may even continue to worsen for a few minutes after exercise is halted.
3. All exercising Labrador Retrievers will have high body temperatures after strenuous activity. It is not unusual for both EIC affected dogs and EIC unaffected dogs to have temperatures greater than 107 F (41.7C) after 10 minutes of retrieving.
4. EIC-related collapse is not painful and typically resolves after 5-25 minutes of rest.
5. A severe episode of EIC collapse can be fatal.
6. Most (>80%) dogs that have EIC are observed to collapse at least once before the age of 3 years. A few genetically affected dogs never collapse – probably because they never experience the right mix of exercise and excitement.
7. Activities involving continuous intense exercise with excitement or stress are most likely to trigger episodes of EIC-related collapse.
8. The only way to know for certain whether or not a dog has EIC is through DNA testing.
9. A mutation in the gene for dynamin-1 (DNM1) causes susceptibility to EIC. EIC is an autosomal recessive inherited trait, meaning that to be affected (and susceptible to collapse) a dog must have two copies of the mutant gene – one inherited from each parent.
10. DNA testing for the DNM1 mutation is available through the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL) at the University of Minnesota. Testing can be performed on cheek swabs, blood, or puppy dewclaws. Results will determine whether a dog has EIC (2 copies of the mutation: E/E), is a carrier of EIC (1 copy of the mutation: E/N), or is clear of the mutation (N/N).
11. Results from EIC testing performed at the VDL can easily be posted on the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals website ([www.offa.org](http://www.offa.org)) along with hip, elbow, eye and CNM certifications, making the results available to breeders evaluating the suitability of listed dogs for breeding purposes.
12. Unfortunately many owners have not yet posted their dog's EIC test results on the OFA website, making it impossible for interested parties to verify the test results. If owners wish to have their result listed they simply need to send the VDL test result plus a nominal fee to the OFA.

**THREE ADVANCED MARK/ BLIND SETUPS WITHOUT REMOTE DEVICES**

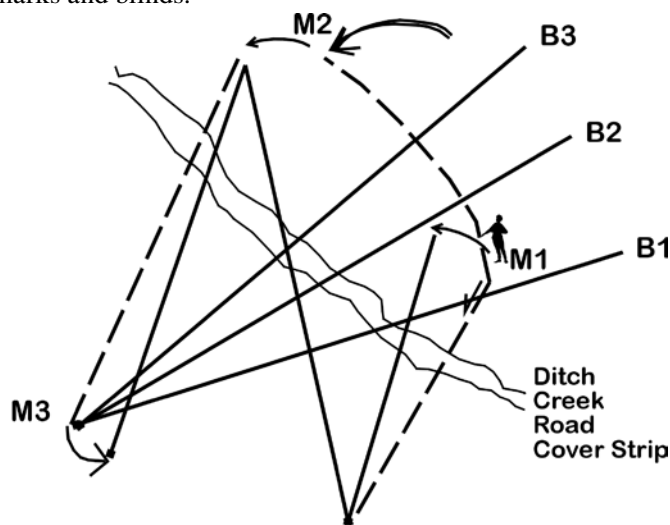
**Suitable for both Field Trials and Hunt Tests**

*by Dennis R. Voigt*

The *Training Retrievers Alone* column this issue features three advanced setups that are not described in my TRA DVD and Book ([www.ybsmedia.com](http://www.ybsmedia.com)). They can be used for either hunt test or field trial training by simply adjusting distances and props such as duck calls or camo or white coats. However, I do think there is merit in first doing these retrieves with a white handling jacket to ensure that the dog sees the marks and sees your casts well. The terrain will affect distance but I would suggest that blinds be a minimum of 150 yards for hunt training. Field trial trainers can progress to 300 yard plus blinds. These setups are suitable for dogs that are doing cold blinds with diversions in the field, so they are labeled “advanced.”

**3 Marks & 3 Blinds Across a Long Narrow Hazard**

This setup exposes your dog to crossing a long strip at various angles with both marks and blinds. The long strip can be a safe ditch, a creek, a road, a cover strip. It could also be a long channel of water or even a long isthmus in a pond which you can walk around. Figure 1 illustrates the basic pattern and sequence, but please note that all angles can be made more square or more acute by adjusting the location of the line, marks and blinds.



**Figure 1.** Basic pattern and sequence for the 3 Advanced Mark and Blind setup

**Procedure**

These marks involve Stand Alone marks and Send Back Marks. Recall that Stand Alone marks are marks that you throw for your dog while you are out in the field (“Standing Alone”) and you dog is back at the line. You throw and release your dog remotely, he gets the bird, delivers to you, you leave him there at that spot and you move on to the next location for the next mark. A Send Back mark starts like a Stand Alone but after delivery, you send the dog back to the line for the next

mark. Then you move on to the location of the next mark and do a Stand Alone.

In this case, I would pre-plant the blinds at B1, B2 and B3. In the diagram, one blind is tight behind a mark, one tight in front and one wide in front. Another time you might have angles to the strip much less square. Proceed to M1 location and throw M1 as a Stand Alone. Send your dog back to the line, move to M2 and do another Stand Alone. Finally, move to M3 and do the last Stand Alone across the strip.

Now run the 3 Blinds from near where you received M3 or you can adjust the angles. You can optionally retire any mark by crouching behind an umbrella or stepping behind an object. You can even step behind that object to throw for advanced hunt test dogs familiar with that procedure. You can also optionally leave chairs or stickmen at M1 and M2 as distractions. I like to throw birds on the marks but plant bumpers for the blinds. I have also put scent along the ditch or cover strip as a distraction.

When finished you have done 3 marks and 3 blinds and crossed a strip hazard 7 times. Good use of the 3-peat concept!!

**Converging Short or Retired Marks**

This double Mark and Blind setup practices picking up two tight converging marks – always a challenge – and doing a Blind with Distraction. You can run this in various ways which I will describe here. My favourite bird to throw for this setup is a hen pheasant because it blends in, has little scent and often requires thoughtful check downs on a mark. But you can use bumpers or ducks or pigeons.

**Procedure**

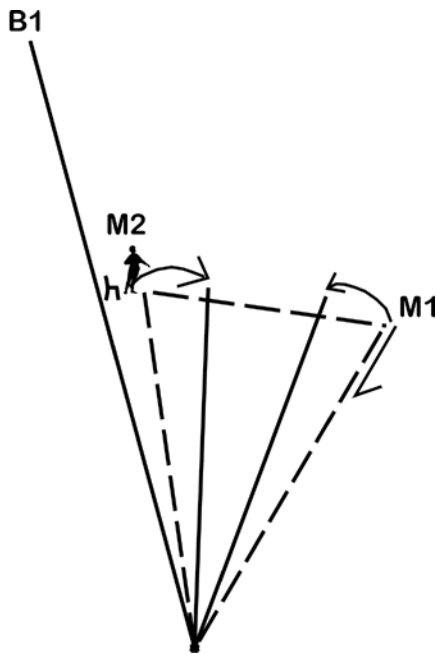
See Figure 2. I generally plant B1 in advance. You may at this time also put out a white stickman or chair at M2.

**Simple version:** Leave the dog at the line and walk out to M1 perhaps 70 to 125 yards. Throw M1 as a Stand Alone and optionally retire behind an umbrella. Release your dog to get the mark, and when he delivers do a Send Back. This where you send back to the line and stop him there for the next mark. Next, move to M2 and throw the converge again, optionally retiring. After your dog gets M2, return to the line and run the blind.

**Medium version:** Go to M1 throw mark. Walk to M2, throw M2 and have dog pick it up as a Stand Alone. Return to line with dog and run M1 as a delayed memory bird. Run Blind.

**Advanced Version:** Go to M1, throw mark, Walk to M2, throw mark. Return to line. Send for M2 and then M1. Run Blind.

**Complication:** You can do all three versions by first running the blind before any marks. This helps set up the check down



**Figure 2. Procedure for Double Mark and Blind setup**

birds because your dog first runs long and then has to come back and check down short twice. This is really where you want to progress to and the reason the blind is ultimately a part of the setup.

### Check-down Marks

Check-down marks are those where your dog has to run a moderate distance and then check down on a mark short of a longer visible gunner or short of a longer retrieve. This can be challenging and even deceiving to the dog when he thinks the longer gunner is the one who threw the shorter bird. This is difficult to train on and not get into a mess because it's always touchy correcting a dog on an over run. Check-downs require calm, cool and collected, thoughtful dogs. Pressure or wildness

#### Discussion on Guidelines for Short Birds

One of the Guidelines that I have when training for difficult short retired birds with longer birds behind is that I don't like to run tight past a short bird on a mark when I am going to come back and run it later as a memory bird. This winter, we were training and I had set up a quad with a medium flyer, a very short "in your face" dead bird, and two longer birds, one of which was run as a single first under the arc of the short not yet thrown bird!!! Training partner A said, "I thought you had a guideline that you didn't run past a short bird you will pick up later." I answered that the short bird hadn't been thrown yet and it wasn't a short retired but rather a wiper or breaker bird. Training partner B joked that Dennis has an explanation for everything. Perhaps true, but the reality is that I also don't like to shoot wiper birds at the first because it encourages head-swinging and not watching longer birds. Whether all of your guidelines always or ever sink in to your dog's mind, the most important thing about such guidelines is that they encourage consistency in your training approach. Consistency is a key to help dogs understand your "rules and standards." In the Short Bird Marking Setup described here, you can expose your dog to a variety of sequences but still follow your guidelines.

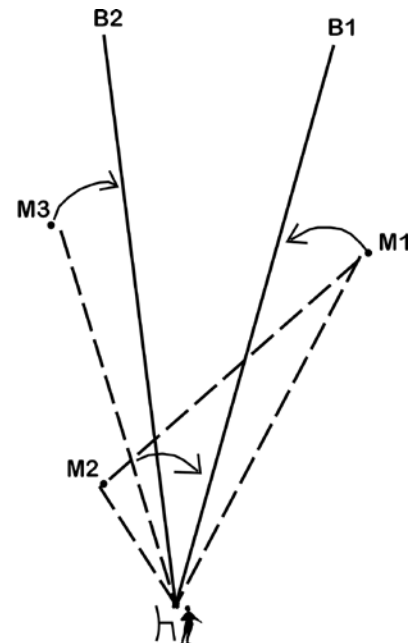
(yahoo dogs!) encourages over runs.

This setup is designed to help a dog experience check-down marks that are shorter than a longer retrieve. Instead of using deceptive visible gunners, I use a previously run long blind or line. Have a look at the Sidebar discussion on *Guidelines for Short Birds*.

### Procedure


Pre-plant two blinds as shown in Figure 3. Try about 30 degrees apart. For a new exposure to your dog make the blinds twice as long as the marks, for example 120 yards for blinds and 60 yards for marks. You will progress to 150%, for example 120 yards for the blinds and 80 yards for the marks. For field trial training, you could progress to 300 yard blinds and 200 yard marks.

Run B1 first. Then walk to M1 and do a Stand Alone mark. The dog has to check down in front of the blind he has just picked up. Sometimes, I will plant multiple bumpers at B1 to tempt a dog to return to B1! Leave your dog at M1 and walk to M2 and throw a Stand Alone mark. The dog has to check down in front of the starting line. Next run B2. Walk to M3 and throw another Stand Alone so that the dog has to check down in front of B2. You can optionally retire on all marks by crouching behind an umbrella.



**Figure 3. Check-Down marks procedure**

### Summary

These three examples show you ways that you can introduce your hunt test dog or field trial dog to advanced concepts while Training Retrievers Alone. Of course, you can also practice these concepts with remote devices or a group of fellow trainers or helpers. But, the lesson I have learned is that, often, these Training Alone techniques are highly effective and valuable to do first and introduce the concept. For those of you that have to train alone much of the time, this is just more evidence you can progress your dog and have fun doing it. Educate your dog with effective, efficient methods and enjoy your time afield. 

## RETRIEVER PROPERTY MANAGEMENT 101 — PART 1: THE LAND AND WATER

*by Dennis R. Voigt*

“**G**oing to the Dogs” takes on a new meaning to the general public when they hear that people buy properties and then spend tens of thousands of dollars to “develop” it for dog training. It used to be that only a few Professionals and Amateurs had property that was developed for retriever training. These days, there are many Amateurs that develop their property by manicuring the land and building ponds for retriever training.

In practical terms, the vast majority of private properties used for retriever training are multi-purpose. Usually, they are “home” properties with a place of residence and serve other uses such as providing for crops, hunting and fishing, livestock and non-dog related recreation. Nonetheless, suitability for retriever training is becoming an important consideration when shopping for land. Can you build a pond? Will there be adequate water supply? Are there enough open fields and suitable terrain? Are the neighbours going to be an issue? Will the property be safe for dogs?

Over the years, I have seen many private properties tailored for retriever training. These have varied from small acreages to very large complexes. I have learned something from all of them. I have also gained an appreciation of how much effort people put into their property development and maintenance. I have observed some very good ideas put into action and some others that flopped. Two things that I have learned are that, until you have a property, you are unlikely to realize:

- All that is involved to develop and maintain it, but also
- How much pleasure and value you can receive from it

In this 2-part series, I discuss some of the perils, purchases and pleasures from having a property suitable for “going to the dogs.” It’s kind of a ‘heads-up’ for those considering buying. It’s also a brief summary of some key things I have learned that might be a benefit to current owners. Certainly, every time I am on a new property I ask “what can I learn here to take home?” I think most property owners are always looking for ideas to achieve a multi-use property that has many benefits.

### The Home Pond

Training water dogs requires water! A home pond is often a key requirement of a new property and the ability to build one is a major consideration for many people. Many properties will require the construction of a pond and then rely on run-off, springs or drainages for water supply. In other cases, there may be an existing pond but rarely will it not require shoreline work, manicuring, points or other development. In all cases there are two major questions.

Firstly, can you get permission and permits to develop or modify. The rules and bureaucracy for this varies hugely among jurisdictions. Even with an existing pond, you may encounter

severe restrictions on what you can do under various local/ state/ province or federal acts and statutes. Do your homework carefully.

Secondly, reliable water supply can be a real issue. Again, you may need to obtain expert advice. Talk to nearby pond owners, learn about annual water table deviations, study current vegetation, hydrology and soil structure. Building in clay, peat, sand or gravel all provide entirely different challenges. Do not assume that you can divert water from a creek. In many cases, this will be illegal. In some cases, you may be able to pump from a nearby water supply. Few owners rely on pumping ground water from deep wells to fill ponds. The cost of the well and the energy to pump adds on significant dollars. However, I know a considerable number of landowners who added wells after their ponds were constructed and they had a major investment in them. In order to maintain their investment they developed wells for reliable water supply.

Many ponds require water control structures. At a minimum they will need spillways. When it comes to dealing with water control including seasonal floods, be sure to consult experts unless you have a lot of experience. The engineering for a proper dam or outlet is often pricey but nothing like the cost of replacing an entire dam that blows out a couple of times in a flood. I have seen some ingenious water control devices so, again, do your homework.

In all cases, you will need to do local research to find the best pond developers. Most pond diggers do not have experience with the requirements for a dog training pond and you will have to work with them on a daily basis. The biggest difference with dog training ponds is the need to have a shoreline that provides good entries and visibility of your dog at entry. Also, access for maintenance is very important. Suitable digging equipment varies depending on the situation from draglines to various types of hydraulic excavators. Usually, the bigger the machine the higher the cost per hour. In some places, bulldozers can be used to move a lot of dirt before the water seeps in. In almost all cases, bull dozers, small and large, will be needed after excavation to landscape the shore and surrounding structures like berms, dykes and mounds. The time to dig and the price per hour varies greatly but any significant pond can easily take a week of digging and a week of manicuring and dirt moving. That’s an absolute minimum of 45 hours each so if rates averaged \$100/hour, that’s almost \$10,000. In reality, it will likely take twice as long as you think, rates will be much higher than \$100/hour, you’ll need to pay for float charges, water control structures, dirt hauling, seeding, permits, engineering and other unplanned expenses. Thus, I haven’t seen many \$10,000 ponds that were significant but I have seen others that were over 20X that price, so beware.

People often ask about designs for ponds and what their pond should look like. For starters, every pond has to be

matched to the local lay of the land to optimize its design. Much depends on the suitability of the valley or lowland to be able to put in various features. Some ponds, by necessity, will have to be long and narrow but others more square. I wrote an article about features to consider in the May-June 2010 issue of *Retrievers ONLINE*. Have a look there for some ideas. Consider the type of “other” water nearby that is available in the area. More than likely, other water is likely to be more “natural” than your man-made pond. Thus, you will probably want to build more technical water that is clean and has “concept” structures such as points and compartments and angles and islands and re-entries that are often difficult to find naturally but necessary for teaching both young and old dogs. Thus, I would want any home pond to have such features. This doesn’t mean that your design will not have some aesthetic value. I think you can do a lot to design a pond that is nice to look at. After all, your home pond is likely to become the center piece of your entire property.

Home ponds will attract wildlife like you won’t believe if properly developed. They may also provide trout, bass or pan fish fishing. Many ponds can be used for hunting waterfowl in the off-season. My ponds provide nesting, rearing or staging for over 10 species of ducks, geese, a dozen different shore-birds and waders, frogs, salamanders, snakes and many aquatic insects. Even if I didn’t train dogs there, they would provide a great deal of pleasure. I hunt ducks and geese on them and fly-fish for trout. Ponds epitomize a multi-use property value and add immeasurably to your investment.

Here are a few tips about construction:

- Lay out the design on paper and view desired features such as entries, water blinds and 3-peat potential from various angles.
- Before constructing, mark out on land the outline and walk around to view your features.
- When designed, cut the outline with a mower and flags to guide the excavator.

- Getting rid of soil can be a problem. A hole produces more dirt than it looks like it should. Use that dirt to construct berms and mounds. Make your berms much bigger than you think – big enough to drive a truck on! Berms and land mounds will provide excellent topography and terrain to enhance your pond area. Note that some of these mounds will be 100-300 yards distant and may require trucks to move soil. I traded topsoil and peaty soil from the pond for moving costs.
- Design some small compartments around the edge – they provide re-entries, better entry challenges, swim-by ponds and access.
- Offshore islands that can be thrown to provide a wonderful training concept. But beware that island vegetation maintenance can be a headache so develop them wisely. I think a few are worth it.
- If you think water levels will drop during the season, consider having points at different levels of height so that your pond actually changes during the year to give you variety.
- Realize that you will have to cut vegetation around the pond. How close can you get to the water with machinery and how much will be hand-work? Don’t underestimate the potential for invasion of both shoreline and emergent vegetation. Learn what species will be likely and how they might be controlled. For example, cattails thrive in shallow water and spread rapidly but are inhibited from getting started by deeper water. I have found that partial sequential cutting of vegetation can help produce different looks on your pond during the season. Thus you get more value out of your pond.

## Land Management

This is another area where the local situation strongly dictates your options. Many properties have wooded areas and open fields in addition to wetlands. Don’t discount wooded



Part of the Home Pond with hay field beyond, a long berm (on the left), round bales and a cover patch

areas as inconsequential to a “dog training” property. They provide different backgrounds and boundaries, and can help break up fields into discrete areas. Perhaps most importantly, they will add diversity and different ecosystems which will increase wildlife on your property and greatly increase its recreational potential. Of course, if you live on the prairies or some other plains, trees might be at a premium but shelterbelts, poplar groves, swales, ravines and sagebrush should all be considered as more beneficial than negative.

The woodlands on my acreage have provided a lot of other recreation. Primarily, it has been used for hunting for deer, woodcock, grouse and rabbit. I have done lots of upland hunting there with my dogs including basic training for that in the off-season. We also use our woods and fields for horseback riding, ‘roading’ the dogs by ATV/ UTV or on foot, for nature hikes, birding and photography.

The basic categories for fields are pasture, crop, hay and wild fields. Pastures can provide for some great training but recognize that the grazers (cows, horses, sheep and goats) determine the cover more so than you. You may need to actively intervene with weed control, rotation and other treatments. In addition, pastures require fencing and this may limit your options and use of adjacent land. Of course, barbed wire and electric fences have their negatives. Fences also require up-keep for livestock. If you have sufficient acreage you can lease your pasture to a farmer/ rancher to defray costs; or, perhaps you have your own group of cows or horses. In both cases, you should be able to train your dogs amongst the livestock without fearing negatives for either dogs or livestock. I have only a relatively small pasture for a couple of horses and too small for big setups. But, it is always perfect cover for Double-T, Drills and Patterns work.

Crops can be problematic. Depending on how much acreage you have, you may not be willing to tie up fields during the growing season with crops such as wheat, barley, corn or beans. I know I can’t afford not to have access for 3-4 summer months, even though income from such fields (either crop or leasing) would help offset costs. If you have big acreage, corn fields that have been harvested are certainly worth the experience but even there, the harvesting and stalks and stubble have to be dealt with in a way that they do not provide hazards to the dogs. I’d rather seek out neighbours each fall that have suitable fields and ask permission. For those that only use their fields seasonally in the non-growing season, corn may be considered along with some specialty crops such as milo or any of the

sorghums. A strip or two of the latter can be planted in hay or wild fields and add good diversity for both dog training and wildlife habitat.

Hay fields are a really serious consideration for dog training properties. In most locales, you can continue to train on them for about 10 months or more of the year. Often there is only a short period when hay is too thick and high to run dogs and when such activity would be detrimental to the crop. Much depends on the forage species grown. Hay fields that have a lot of alfalfa and tall species like brome and timothy can get much too thick. I have hay fields that are very diverse with orchard grass, minimal alfalfa, lower species like trefoil and red clover and relatively thin growth. I choose not to fertilize to get rich crops. This means the hay is best for beef rather than dairy cattle but it is also good enough for horses if cut, dried and baled properly. Most importantly, it suits dog training much of the year. The huge bonus for the hay fields is that I make a deal with the tenant farmer to harvest the hay using round bale machinery and then leave the bales in the field until just before the snow flies. This saves me having to maintain haying equipment, harvest, move and store. My horses get a small portion from the section that is best. I also can specify to the farmer to leave patches.



*A patch of uncut hay provides a good cover change for mark and blind work*

In each field I mark out rectangles of approximately 2000 square feet. These provide very valuable cover patches when doing marks and blinds. In return, I lose a little on the lease rate, but gain on tax breaks, and have great round bales fields at my disposal much of the summer and fall. I own the land so if I want to cut a trail through the hay or around the field I can. The feasibility of this arrangement will vary around the country but hay fields can be an excellent way to improve your dog training property.

Wild fields, that is, fields not pastured or planted to crops can be very valuable for both dog training and other uses like hunting, hiking and habitat. In most areas, they will require considerable maintenance because vegetation will grow too tall for training or it will gradually convert to undesirable species. What are desirable species? Firstly, they are the ones that do not present hazards to the dogs such as briars, brambles, sand spurs and those with thorns or thistles. Poisonous species are, of course, also on the no-no list. Secondly, low maintenance species are desirable. Many species of grasses are relatively



*A strip of planted cover, such as milo, can provide a nice feature in a plain field and also attract wildlife.*



short or grow in clumps as opposed to those that form dense, high cover. A few clumps of high grasses are valuable variety but thick stands may require 2-3 cuts a year – worse than the best hayfields! Prolific native species, such as goldenrod, if left untouched will eventually provide cover that is too thick and tall. But one well-timed cutting, perhaps in strips will not only control them but produce excellent patterns for training. I have found that cutting taller cover so that the “left” strips are only a few feet wide and the cut portions 10-30’ wide are ideal. The cover strips look fairly big to the dog but they crash through them in a stride. Consequently they learn that entering cover even at an angle is no big deal. They soon learn to deal with cover almost as if it wasn’t there. The picture below is of one of my wild fields as cut last year. The cover photo of this issue shows a hay field in northern Ontario owned by Howard Simson and Lise Langois that is used by the local field trial club and leased by professional trainer Kevin Cheff. It is a hay field, cut in this same way and embellished with round bales left behind, roadways and nice rolling hills. It is ideal for training and testing.



There are also some desirable species to plant. Grasses such as the fescues do not naturally get very high or thick. Check out the local roads department. They can tell you about roadside mixtures that grow well in your area. They want the same features as you do – low cover with low maintenance. These mixtures will also be your first economical choice to seed your pond areas, berms and mounds after construction. Just be careful that you don’t get those mixtures that have a lot of species like vetch that grow in thick tangles and can easily trip up your dog when running through. Some of the native short grass or mixed grass prairie species are low in height and make good dog training cover. Look at the Little Bluestem or some of the southern broom grasses. The prairie species that grow tall such as Big Bluestem, Switch grass and Indian grass will eventually grow too tall and thick for dog training. However, in one of my wild fields, I have planted a long strip of such prairie species with a few gaps in it. It adds a nice feature to the field and when all the species, including the prairie flowers are in bloom it is a wonderful place. I make a point of driving past it on my daily roading with the dogs throughout the summer and fall; another example of making a property multi-use. Incidentally, if you do any upland hunting your wild fields can be well used for planting released pheasant, chukars


and other quail for a nice fall hunt.

Size of fields depends partly on topography. However, in general, you will get more mileage out of five 10 acre fields than one 50 acre field, especially if the smaller fields are different in cover. Most fields should have dimensions of at least 300 yards for field trial training but you can find good setups in smaller fields and you may want one bigger one. I have about 60 acres of fields on my 118 acre property. There are two larger hay fields, a smaller hay field and adjacent pasture, a large wild field and a smaller one. There are two ponds and several ditches and hedgerows. One pond is major and has good technical water and a maximum swim of 300 yards. I can back off from this pond about 250 yards in one direction and 150 in two other directions. The other pond is partially forest ringed and is best for hunt test type setups, as well as shorter water setups including tune-ups and chinese drills. As a bonus, it provides the best duck hunting. With this diversity, I can find good setups in any wind and I can vary my “looks” enough to train there day after day.

Home properties encourage you to learn how to milk grounds and come up with new setups. There are only so many super blinds and super marks but you will learn to take advantage of seasonal changes, returning to a setup and complicating, doing flip-flops, working the wind and using an earlier setup to theme or practice a concept. Finally, through seasonal cutting, and even moving bales, adding structures and using mounds you can further exploit your property.

Finding an ideal property that can serve for your dog-training needs while also providing other benefits can be a real challenge. Some may find it easier to find the property and build the appropriate residence and facilities. Other will seek the facilities and the right home and try to develop the property more. Many just want to find the best almost ready-to-go combo. Land prices, proximity to services and schools, location of neighbours, commuting distance, local bylaws and year round weather all provide constraints but help determine the “right place.” Once you find the dream spot, the work begins but so does the pleasure and satisfaction.

Next issue, in part 2, I will discuss important equipment for maintenance and use of your property, as well as the facilities that you will need to consider if you have truly “gone to the dogs.” With no disrespect to Mark Twain who said: “Buy land – they’re not making it anymore,” we can at least make land more valuable and more multi-use for our needs.

Here’s hoping you have as much property pleasure as I have had. 

### **Information for Subscribers**

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VARIATIONS ON THE TWO SHORT MARKING SETUP WITH A BLIND

by Dennis R. Voigt

I have described my Two Short Marking Setup previously in *Retrievers ONLINE*. It is a Favourite Setup to practice short retired marks in front of longer visible gunners. It is a teaching-type setup that repeats the short check down mark concept twice in one setup without repeating the same key retrieve.

**Review**

See Figure 1. The basic procedure is to throw M1, then M2 and a “dink” bird off line (M4) to allow M2 to retire. With the young dogs, I delay the retire until the dog is on line with M4 and watching. Send for M2. Next, throw M1 again followed by M3 (retired) and, again, delay bird M4. Get M4, M3 and finally M1.

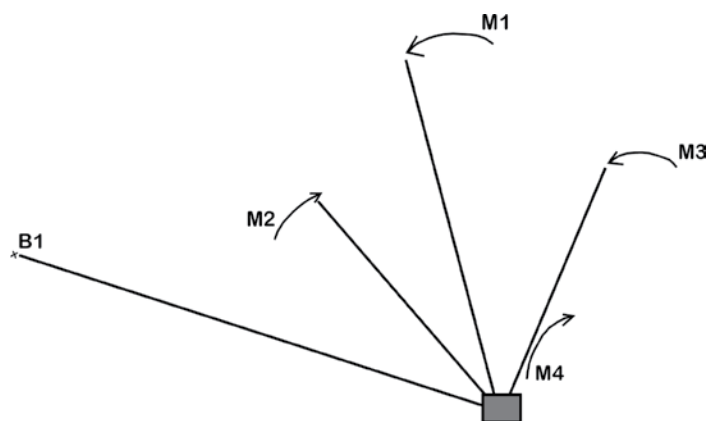


Figure 1. The basic Two Short marking setup with an added blind

This winter we started our Amateur group training as always with the idea that we would theme our training for a week or two on concepts such as long retireds, short retireds, converges, inlines, poison birds and so on. For the first 8 days or so, we themed some very long marks and some long retireds, especially off of flyers. Next, we moved to short retired marks and we started doing walk away marks and the Two Short Marking Setup. One day we were doing a second Short Marking Setup and we added a Blind off to the side. This year, we again have an interesting and promising group of dogs with everything from FC to all-age placed trial promising dogs to 2 year olds seeking the big time. It was fascinating how each

trainer modified how they ran the Two Short Marking Setup with Blind for each of their dogs as they attempted to teach the best lesson for where their dog was at.

I thought it would be educational to describe for you how this one setup can be run in so many different ways. The lesson for you is that good designs are valuable to teach key concepts but be alert to modifying how you run each of your dogs in order to maximize benefits. Follow along using Figure 1.

**Marks with a Blind After**

This is the Basic procedure to work on two short retireds as described above. The blind is then run. I would do this for a dog that has had lots of marks and success and needs the balance and control of a blind after marks.

**A Blind with Marks After**

Several times a year you might encounter a test where you have to come to line with all the guns visible but run a blind first. That is what we are doing here. Have all the guns visible, run the blind and then do the marks in the conventional way. I like to do this with an excitable dog that needs to have some control work before the excitement of marks. Of course, every all-age dog should have at least some exposure to this concept.

**Poison Bird Blind and Marks**

Start the setup off with a poison bird. The simpler version is to have M3 thrown and run B1. Have M2 hide during this. The tighter more advanced version is to have M2 as the poison bird and run B1. Continue the rest of the marks in a more conventional way. This procedure puts a lot of control into a marking scenario with visible guns.

**Interrupted Triple**

Interrupted marks are where you throw several marks, pick up one or two and then interrupt that by doing a blind before running the last mark(s). You can do this in several ways with this design. For example, you could shoot M1, M3 and M4. Pick up M4, run B1 and then get M3; again, another way to add control in a marking setup for the dogs that need it.



The Two Short Marking Setup with a Blind off to the side

It also stretches memory.

### Delayed Triple

Delayed triples are where you shoot two marks, pick up one and shoot another and then pick up all. For example, you could shoot M1 and M3 and M4. Pick up M4 and then shoot M2. Pick up M2 and then pick up M3 and M1. This puts lots of memory on M3 and M1. Delayed triples (or quads) are good for having the memory of a full-fledged triple or quad but the success of a couple of go-birds. Here you might omit M4 altogether but still do B1 at the end, depending on success.

### Primary Selection

Primary selection is when you determine which bird you will retrieve first but it is not the last bird thrown. There are lots of ways this design could be used to work on this. For example, you could shoot M1, M2 and M4. Select off of M4 and go for M2 first. Initially, such selection would best be done without retiring M2. It would be more challenging to select off of M4 and get M3 if thrown together. For a wrinkle, you could shoot M1, M4 and M3 and select off M3 to get M4. This is all just line communication to develop teamwork and 'go where sent'. Again, the Blind can be done whenever it is best for that dog, either at the end or a part of the communication and thus interrupted.

### Ideal Selection

Dave Rorem talks about Ideal selection as being able to pick up any bird you want whenever you want. For him, this is often the short bird last if the dog's inclination is to go long first. This setup can be used to practice this. You could pick up the M4, a shorter bird, and longer birds (M2 and M1) and even the B1 before picking up M3 last. This is a chance to practice the ultimate in line communication.

Don't forget that all these sequences can be done as singles. Just the act of retrieving various sequences in succession as singles can be very educational for your dog.


### Quadruple and Blind

Once your dog is beginning to master this setup in different locations, you can attempt the entire quad with the blind stuck in anywhere from first to interrupted to last. Beware, the benefits of testing your dog this way may be appealing but may offer fewer benefits than success at a simple level with some dogs.

### Delayed and Interrupted Quad

As just described, when you want to really progress your dog that has shown he is ready, you can run the full quad. By running it as a delayed quad or interrupted you can do custom work on your dog's weaknesses while attempting to progress.

### Summary

It is always important to ensure Basics skills first before challenging. Given sound fundamentals, it is important to progress your dog wisely by striving for the next level. Always seek to improve without testing and over doing it. This setup is a great example of one that can be used to do that and at the same time develop Basic skills for the less advanced dogs. Believe it or not, there are even other ways to run it that I have not described. The lesson? Always be thinking about maximizing the benefits of each setup for each of your dogs by doing custom procedures. 



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REVISITING THE TUNE-UP REPEAT CONCEPT

by Dennis R. Voigt

I have often thought that the “Tune-Up Drill” is rather poorly named. Firstly, unlike drills like the Lining Wagon Wheel or Split-Casting Drill, there is relatively little structured procedure to the Tune-Up. Certainly, there are some principles of design and some guidelines for running them but there are literally hundreds of possible tune-up drill designs. Secondly, while there is some merit in tuning up a dog with this exercise because of its discipline, it has much greater values for teaching about navigating water features, hazards and objects. I don’t wish to complicate the use of Tune-ups by renaming them but I would like to revisit the concept behind tune-ups.

The original Tune-ups, as developed by Rex Carr, varied from a simple version that incorporated a swim-by and was able to be profitably taught to young dogs at the end of Basics to extremely complex tune-ups involving over 20 retrieves and a variety of concepts. Such Tune-ups could take over 30 minutes and were run up to 6 days in a row. More recently, some of us, including Mike Lardy in his DVD’s and articles, have been advocating simpler 5-7 retrieve Tune-ups that featured a key concept or two and would usually be run over 3-5 days. Different tune-ups of this nature might be run 2-3 times per year per dog. While most tune-ups involve water, effective tune-ups can also be designed on land.

I have now seen a variety of tune-ups designed by trainers that have merits as a series of blinds but do not really effectively develop the skills in the way that “repeat concept” tune-ups can.

repeating the retrieve by moving the target destination and/or the starting line. This procedure is illustrated in Figure 1 for a 3-peat that crosses a road (or a cover strip or a ditch). It could also be a 3-peat that practices crosswind blinds or side hills or entries. In Figure 1 we see Blind #1 crossing a road at an angle. The line is moved slightly to a different blind which increases the angle across the road. Finally, for #3, the angle is quite sharp. The successive angles teach a dog through repetition but without the perils of simply running back to the same spot. The repetition helps teach the dog and we have multiple opportunities to deal with weaknesses.

While I coined the term 3-peats over 10 years ago, this training method has become more widely used only in past 5 years or so. The concept is old and has been practiced for a long time but not as a mainstay of a way to do cold blinds. The idea can be used on both blinds and marks, but the two, three and four-repeats have their genesis in the Tune-Up Drill. The lesson I would like to emphasize is we should be looking to design tune-ups that emphasize “multi-peat” retrieves that repeat a concept but not a retrieve. Tune-ups that do so can teach dogs how to deal with angles and entries and exits and re-entries in an extremely helpful way. Tune-ups that involve 4-5 unrelated concepts are really a different exercise albeit not without merit. Chinese Drills, for example, feature a variety of concepts and distance and tend to be run from the same location and not repeated as much. There are great for transition dogs that need to just come back and then go again and deal with a variety of factors. Tune-ups are better to teach concepts of how to navigate particular situations.

In Tune-ups, we can start off on Day 1 and through high standard handling “show” the dog the true line to each spot. As the dog begins to understand the concepts, angles and decision

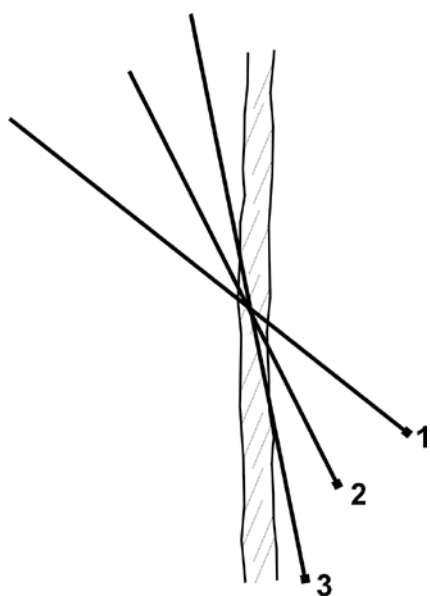


Figure 1. Basic 3-Peat Pattern

Tune-ups are very effective if they focus on repeating a concept without repeating a retrieve. Most of you are now familiar with the idea of 2-peats and 3-peats and “n”-peats which are marks and blinds that repeat a concept without

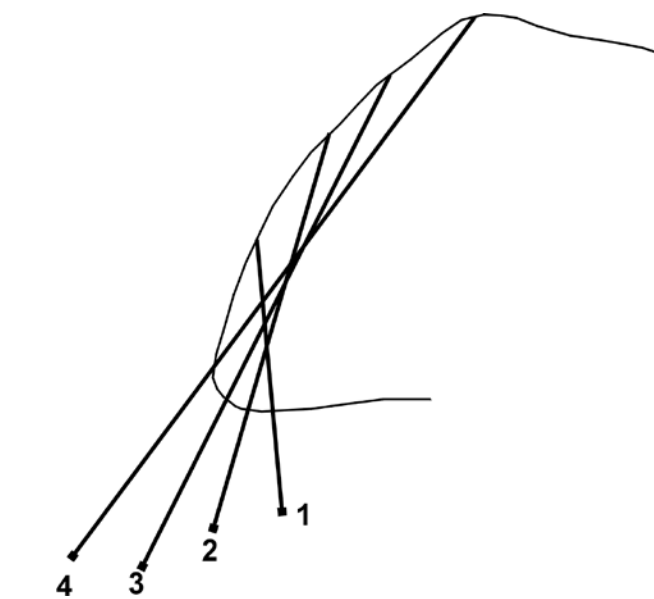


Figure 2. Simple Tune-up design with multiple lessons

points on day 2 and 3, he needs fewer and fewer whistles and can make correct decisions himself. Day 1 can have 5-10 whistles per blind and day 4 as little as 0-3!

### Designing Effective Tune-ups

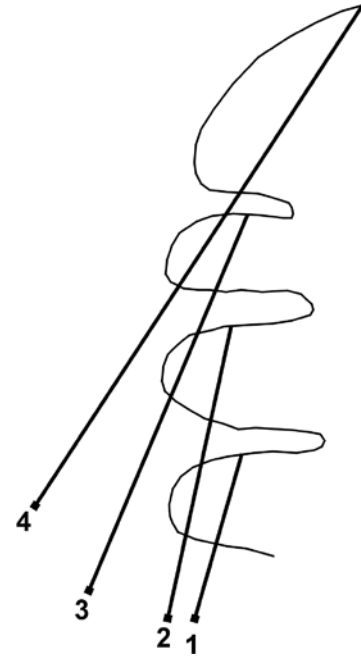
Figure 2 illustrates the design of a simple Tune-up that has good lessons about dealing with corners, entries, exits and going straight. It starts with a quite square entry to a rather shallow exit angle shoreline bumper. As the line and destination are moved, the angles into the water become more challenging and the exits more acute. Because of the sequencing and the prior retrieve, the prospect of getting the entry and the exit goes up. If you tried retrieve #4 "cold" with all but fully trained dogs you would likely have a pretty tough go of it. On the other hand, I have had a 12 month old puppy line #4 after doing 1, 2 and 3.



**Figure 3.** Another Tune-up with more aggressive angles and water re-entries

Figure 3 illustrates another tune-up idea, although I have only shown 3 blinds. This could be simply called a 3-peat water blind but it shows the strong relationship between the tune-up drills and 2 and 3-peat blinds. In this case, we "teach" more and more severe angles progressively as well as re-entries off a point at increasingly challenging angles. Again, #3 would be much tougher to do cold with a dog compared to when built from 1 and 2. Notice that we progressively move the starting line and the end destination in order to achieve 3 distinct lines


that all "theme" the same concept.



**Figure 4.** A Tune-up for angling across a corner, past early water and re-entry into later water!

Figure 4 illustrates a very neat setup if you can find the appropriate water. It teaches a dog to angle across a corner in a straight line and then to run past early water and re-enter into later water. This concept is seen in trials and requires a very balanced, willing dog. Normally, the average dog would want to get in early or not at all on a typical water blind with a sharp angle entry and or early water. This tune-up can really help to balance them and practice great communication on the line. When perfected, it can show great comprehension by dogs, as well as great teamwork between handler and dog.

### Synopsis

Tune-ups are not just a series of random blinds that involve different lines and different destinations. Ideally, through careful design, they progressively develop skills on a concept or two. By showing the dog initially, with handling and repeating over a period of days, dogs can develop valuable skills to navigate challenging factors. Develop 2-4 such tune-ups over a period of a year and balance them with other work including lots of cold 2 and 3-peat marks and blinds. Your dog's understanding of how to navigate land-water situations, as well as deal with other factors, should increase dramatically. 



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### RETRIEVERS ONLINE SURVEY RE JUDGING

*Discussion with Theodore Shih, Denver, Colorado and Dennis R. Voigt*

Last December, we started speaking with pros and amateurs that we each knew and asked them to comment about judging in our sport.

Among the pros with whom we spoke were: Scott Dewey, Bill Eckett, Danny Farmer, Karl Gunzer, Bart Peterson, Dave Rorem, Bill Sargenti, Bill Schrader, Kenny Trott, Kevin Cheff, Chuck Dygos, Rick Roberts, Mike Lardy, Pat Burns and Ray Voigt. Among the amateurs we spoke to were: Glenda Brown, Charlie Hays, Larry Morgan, Mitch Patterson, Jeff Warren, Judy Rasmuson, Richard Dresser and Duncan Christie.

We asked each of the people listed above the following two questions:

**Question 1:** What are three areas where you think field trial judging could be most be improved?

**Question 2:** What do you believe would be the best way to improve judging?

Frankly, we found the responses to the first question to be surprisingly basic. Almost to a person, the respondents told us that:

1. The dogs need to see the gunners in the field.
2. The dogs need to see the birds in the air.
3. The handlers need to be able to see their dogs at critical spots in land and water blinds.
4. Judges need to exercise better time management.

There seems to be a general feeling that many tests – particularly in the large Opens – have situations where the dogs cannot readily see the gunners and the birds, and handlers cannot see their dogs at critical moments. In many cases, this appeared to be either purposeful design or, at least, failure by the judges to pay adequate attention to ensuring visibility. It is believed that better time management would improve the quality of field trials.

### MARKS

In marking tests, the consensus is that in many tests:

- The gunners are obscure because of poor lighting, extreme distances, bad background or only a small portion of gunners was visible. Backlighting, where the sun is behind the gunner, was commonly observed. In other cases, gunners were in the shadows for part of the day and at other times in bright sunshine. Gunners at extreme distances and tight to shorter more prominent gunners were very hard for the dogs to detect.
- The birds are obscure because of poor lighting, bad background, extreme distances or optical illusions which prevent the dogs from seeing/judging the area of the fall.

There also is a widespread belief that more and more tests – again, most predominantly in the large Opens – are designed so that even if the guns and dogs are visible, that the mechanics of the test are such that the dogs are distracted from marking the birds. This may be the result of:

- Gunners retiring a long way from where they throw.
- Gunners moving in a prominent way while other birds were going down or prominently moving when the dog is released for a retrieve.
- Short close in birds (usually fliers) shot early to prevent the dogs from focusing on a long retired bird shot later and tight to the flyer station.

Dave Rorem expressed the sentiment of many of our respondents when he said:

“To me the single biggest problem with judging lately has been the willingness of judges to eliminate dogs based on the ‘controllable’ mechanics at trials. These mechanics are dictating the difficulty of the tests more than the bird placement or terrain. Meaning: Gunners or birds not visible on marks; the deliberate desire of keeping the gunners hidden in the shade for the entire day; the confusing order of shooting the birds so as to have the dog go back and forth across other gunners.

What seems to becoming more popular is that the difficulty of the tests are based more on whether you can see the mark, instead of making sure the dogs can see it and let’s try to find the best dog at remembering and finding it!”

Richard Dresser basically said the same thing when he stated, “judges seem to be too focused on distance” and “they use order of fall and tightness to make tests difficult rather than good bird placement.” Bill Sargenti also believed that many “judges use distance as a crutch.”

Danny Farmer succinctly summarized things this way: “We are seeing too many tests with weak mechanics and poor marks.”

### BLINDS

On Blinds, a common sentiment was that too often dogs were out of sight at critical moments or places and the handler was unable to do anything but sit and wait for 10 seconds or more. Our respondents believed – almost to a person – that judges are deliberately constructing blinds where the dogs are out of sight for extended periods of time during key portions of the blind so that most of the dogs are essentially out of the test when they come back in sight and will be eliminated from the trial.

In the same vein, many respondents expressed concern over the number of blinds that they are running in competition where the dogs cannot see the handler and/or cannot hear the whistle. Mike Lardy talked about how it also seemed that just

as soon as new “mega” whistles appeared the judges respond with longer and longer blinds. The endings of many blinds are at the extreme of visibility of the dog and its ability to hear. It’s not unlike the “Weapons’ Race!” Both Kenny Trott and Mitch Patterson echoed Mike’s thoughts.

There is also an undercurrent of sentiment that when judges have difficulty creating separation with their marks that they overreact with the blind design or scoring of their blinds. Judges set up ‘In or Out’ – ‘Get Cast or Not’ blinds where they can easily eliminate the dogs. Examples included tight keyholes where one poor cast and you are out, or blinds where the dogs are out of sight for extended periods making recovery highly unlikely. One example was a white decoy around the corner when the dog was barely visible. Related, some respondents felt that judges were far too quick to make the endings of blinds hard to see, poorly marked, or located too close to an out-of-sight hazard (such as a the back edge of a dyke). In many situations, the perceived intention of the judges appeared to be “remove or hamper the handler’s ability to correct his/her dog’s line and handle at critical moments.”

Mike Lardy observed that judges appear to use arbitrary criteria to eliminate dogs especially on blinds. He thought that if there are hazards or unclear parameters and the judges are looking for a particular performance, the handlers all ought to be informed. He also noted that evaluation of performance at trials can be over influenced by our training methods and standards (true for both marks and blinds). He suggested a need for a more “holistic” evaluation. Perhaps that is similar to our discussion in an earlier article of trying to find the all-around, overall best performer without getting preoccupied with one particular deviation or mistake.

## TIME MANAGEMENT

Again, our respondents universally expressed the belief that judges could be better at time management. By this, they mean:

- Judges take too long to set up their tests
- Judges set up tests that are too time consuming for the conditions or size of the field
- Judges take too long on their callbacks
- Judges waste time during the running of a series

The general belief is that when time management is poor, the tests become increasingly arbitrary, and the callbacks unreasonably severe as judges struggle to complete their stake on time.

## CALLBACKS

Callbacks and Time management seemed strongly linked in the eyes of many.

Chuck Dygos emphasized the point that callbacks start to suffer before the trial even begins when judges spend too much to get the test started. While this is not always the judges’ fault, a good judge can identify this problem quickly (even on setup day) and react accordingly.

Richard Dresser felt strongly that judges seem really hesi-

tant to have generous callbacks. He cited numerous occasions when his co-judge wanted to bring back far fewer dogs than he did. This seemed to happen when more dogs did the test than expected and entries were large. It appears a lot of judges are just “nervous” about dealing with large numbers. Again, he thought wise use of time and not wasting it would allow much more generous callbacks. Judges that spend time arguing over 3-4 dogs could have easily brought those dogs back and still have more time left.

We found it interesting that our respondents did not mention concerns over “political” callbacks or placements. Yet, this is often an issue discussed among small private groups. When we queried some of our respondents on this, they suggested that a lot of the questionable callbacks or placements are not due to politics but rather due either to honest differences in opinion or weak evaluation. They felt that most judges are doing the best that they can every weekend but that sometimes a trial simply doesn’t work out. Reasons were more obvious in hindsight where everybody gets 20:20 vision!

However, a number of our respondents expressed exasperation over inconsistent callbacks. For example, in a given Field Trial, Dog A and Dog B had similar work. Dog A gets dropped and Dog B gets carried. Or in Field Trial X, all dogs that do “Z” on a test are dropped. But, in Field Trial Y, all dogs that exhibit the same conduct are carried. Our respondents would like to see more consistency within a particular trial and also, from one trial to another.

In line with what Judy Rasmuson mentions later in a sidebar, Bill Sargenti says that he would like to be able to ask a judge why a given dog was dropped – not to argue with the judge, but simply for his own information. Bill says that more and more, judges are unwilling to tell contestants why their dogs were dropped.

## IMPROVEMENT

What can be done to make things better?

There is a general belief that we need to make a more concentrated effort at educating judges. Most respondents believed that judging clinics and videos would be helpful. A number of our respondents said that they wished that more judges read the Rule Book and the Blue Book before their judging assignments.

However, there is a widespread belief that evaluating dog performance – the focus of most judging clinics – is not as much of a challenge as understanding bird placement. That is, it is easy to judge the dogs when you have a good test that creates separation among the dogs. The hard part is creating the test that creates separation and is fair throughout the day. Chuck Dygos felt judges could do more to even the test for early and late running dogs if they paid more attention to the effect of changing conditions during the day that can be predicted. Examples are heat build-up in the day, scenting and drag back build-up and changing lighting conditions. We know it’s a big challenge with large entries and all-day tests but are judges giving such issues adequate consideration?

We found it interesting that Judy Rasmuson responded to our survey not by listing the “what’s wrong” items described above. Instead, she emphasized how judges can improve their assignments by self-assessment. Judges need to learn from their mistakes and how to do better when things go wrong. Her submission is basically a set of guidelines on “How you can improve yourself and your judging assignment.” Or, in other words, “learn to make omelets instead of laying rotten eggs.” We have included it here in its entirety here as a Sidebar.

In a similar vein to Judy’s quest for education, many of the professionals expressed their need to invest more time in educating their clients in bird placement and test construction. Bill Schrader suggested that clubs – in addition to having judging clinics – put on bird placement clinics.

Dennis Bath believes that the educational process could be facilitated if clubs insisted on having an eight point judge paired with a novice judge in the minors.

Both Dennis Bath and Mitch Patterson believe that the standard for judging the All-Age Stakes needs to be more stringent. However, they differ in their approaches.

Dennis believes that judges should spend more time judging in the minor stakes (alongside 8 point judges) before they move up to the All-Age Stakes. In Dennis’ opinion, aspiring judges need to learn more about the fundamentals of judging in the minor stake before moving up to the major stakes. Richard Dresser echoed the same belief that you have to pay your dues. In contrast, Mitch would increase the total number of points needed from both judges to preside over a major stake from 8 to 16. Like Dennis, Mitch thinks that the judges need to be more battle tested.

Duncan Christie identified that selection and pairing of judges was often critical in determining whether a trial was weak or strong. Interestingly, when asked what was the result of having two “weak” judges, he cited all the above major issues as occurring. Some clubs have people selecting judges

that do not know whether the pair of judges would be compatible, whether they are both current and truly qualified, and whether they have the same bias or are conversely incompatible. Bill Sargenti also felt more thought needed to be given to the selection and pairing of judges.

A number of professionals suggested the clubs ought to consider utilizing a pro as a trial consultant. That is, a pro would be on site on set up day and throughout the trial to answer any questions that the judges might have in constructing the tests. The judges would not be required to use the consultant’s services, but would be able to ask them for input if they choose. One of us (DRV) has judged a trial where the resident Professional was there as Chairman throughout setup. The input on suitable places to run from, lighting conditions, visibility of dogs and gunners, hazards and likely performance of dogs, areas not previously used and more was incredibly valuable. The problem, of course, is finding a pro who is familiar with the grounds and is either not running the trials or at least would not provide information that favoured their dogs training experience at that site. Some of our respondents felt that the use of a professional as a consultant was inappropriate and unnecessary – that field trial committees should be able to assist the judges without the need for additional help.

### **Safety of Dogs**

The issues of visibility and time management were universal as described earlier. It surprised us a little that the Top Three rarely included the safety of the dogs and attention to hazards. When we asked respondents about this they invariably responded with the attitude that “Safety goes without Saying” and should always be an automatic priority. Kevin Cheff did identify safety as a number one issue. He felt that there were simply too many tests designed where the judges did not thoroughly inspect the field for hazards. In addition, many judges did not consider some hazards as significant. Perhaps that was because they themselves did not have those





## When You Lay an Egg, Learn to Make an Omelet

By Judy Rasmuson, Madison FL

No matter how careful you are, there are judging assignments that simply don't go right. Sometimes the reasons are beyond your control – disastrous weather, co-judge from hell. Sometimes the reasons just pile up – huge entry, flat field, no water, unintended blind results, poor shooters, fast birds, easy marks, etc. But no matter how the fiasco unfolds, there are ways in which you can lessen the chances of a "laid egg." Most of this revolves around self education.

The first judging assignment I had was with John Russell. It was a Qualifying at the Women's spring trial. John turned to me after we had run 5 dogs and asked me what I would change. He said it is a rare test that is perfect and hindsight critique makes for better judging. So, here is my betterment list that has evolved since that cold, rainy day on the Eastern Shore.

**Setup day** Besides all the good things that Ted Shih and Dennis have talked about, anticipate the bad gunning, the wimpy throws, the dogs eating your lunch in the first series. Don't rely on winging it as the stake goes on. Plan the whole trial. Spend as much time on setting up the water marks as you do the land marks. Talk with your co-judge about all aspects of the trial. This is your chance for you and your co-judge to plan.

**Time Management** If your schedule is blown to smithereens by your marshal's insouciance, don't get angry. Be polite as you push for more efficiency but double down on your own time management. Have the next dog coming to line as running dog leaves or gets to the honour. Ensure that you have the guns up and waiting when the last bird is delivered. Be ready to go as the re-bird is finished. Give your marshal clear instructions for the next series before your current series is over. Have quick and accurate callbacks.

**During the Trial** Ask yourself after you have run 5-10 dogs what would you change? Is it mechanics or bird placement? Are the birds and guns as visible as you thought they would be? Should you have cut down more cover for better visibility of the dog? This review list is endless from minor to major concerns. Setting up tests is about weighing options and making choices. There are always trade-offs. The field with the better cover has less terrain and distance; another field has better options with a wind shift but fewer places to hide the bird. How are your choices working out once you start running dogs? What would you change? Is it mechanics or bird placement? Are the guns and birds as visible as you thought? Can you see the dogs working?

**After the Trial** This is the time to critique your test and ask yourself some questions. Which was the most useful test? Why? Think about time used versus dog separation gained. Think about the time used versus the dog separation. Was the separation for legitimate reasons? Would you have understood why you were dropped if you had been running? When asked by the marshal, I feel strongly that a judge needs to respond with the reasons why a dog is dropped. A judge needs to be able to explain his reasons and not hide behind a shield of omnipotence.

Which was the least useful test and why? Did it use too much time? Did you get the wrong kind of answers? Too tight? Too long? Good dogs looked bad and marginal dogs looked good? Did you admire the dog that won? Is this a dog that you would like to have taken home with you? If the answer is yes – what was in the tests that allowed the cream to rise? If the answer is no – what was in the tests that rewarded behaviour that you don't like? I judged an Open in which we set up a triple land blind. At the end, I was unhappy with the weight that the blinds had on the placements. Good lesson to learn. Don't put in birds that you don't want to judge.


What surprised you in the tests? Did a hard bird not work as well as you thought? And did a throw away bird get more action than anticipated? Why? Did the blinds work the way you planned? Did a blind reward a handler with multiple dogs or, put another way, was a single dog handler at a distinct disadvantage? Did you like the way your time management worked? Start on time, finished before dark? Ease of change over to next series? Efficient use of setup day? Could you have been more decisive? Were dogs sufficiently tested? Were all series a factor? Was it a one bird trial?

**Later Hindsight** About a week later, look over your judging sheets to see if you think that the placements were correct. No one is looking over your shoulder. Be honest. Separations might not be as evident anymore. I've found myself going back to the rule book and rereading passages on natural and trained abilities, weighing the importance of each thing as accuracy, style, manners, perseverance, hunts and handles. The placing of 3rd, 4th and RJ is often times about splitting hairs. But regardless, you need to develop standards to weigh the apples and oranges that confront you at the end of a trial. Each judging assignment gives you the chance to work on your standards, using the rule book as your basis. These standards will follow you through your judging career and will help you with equitable callbacks as well as the final judgments.

In hindsight.

Listen to what people say to you about the trial that you judged. This feedback will be sparse and heavily weighted towards the people that are unhappy with your judgment. You don't need to argue but think about where the kernel of truth lies.

Lastly, think about the arc of the stake. Did you call back as many dogs as you thought you had time to judge? Would you have liked to have run this trial? As a contestant, I like the last series to be another turn of the wheel, a chance to rise to the top. Maybe this is because I rarely come into the last series in perfect shape and I crave another shot at the blue. As a judge, I tend to keep this in mind. Oftentimes, I'll suggest to my co-judge that we do a quicker blind, call back more dogs but have time for a bigger set of water marks. This seems to end in a more satisfying trial than letting two sets of big blinds be the gate keeper for who is going to get the last series.

With all the pitfalls that happen along the judging path, there are many rewards, with knowledge being one. This knowledge is gained from many sources not the least of which is failure. Every test isn't going to work as planned. Don't be afraid to try something new or innovative. So be willing to embrace the lessons that are presented. 

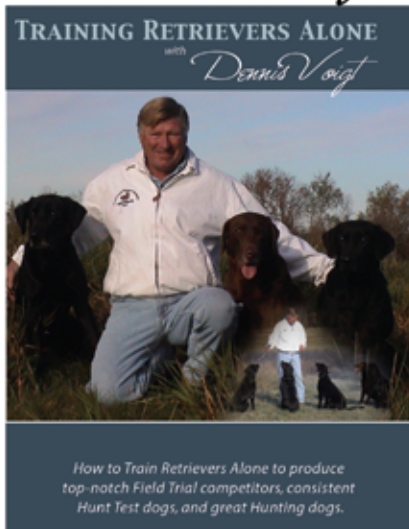


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super hard chargers. Or, perhaps it is because really serious injuries such as broken necks have not occurred enough to scare people. Those who have experienced serious accidents at a trial know how devastating it is. Kevin wisely identified that it is common for dogs to sustain smaller injuries such as soft tissue damage, partial tears of ligaments and tendons while navigating treacherous terrain. These injuries surface later as major career threatening injuries. While not all injuries can be avoided in any performance sport, judges need to pay much more attention to hidden hazards, holes, ditches and cover patches that cause tumbles. At a recent Conditioning and Injury Rehab Seminar, a major take home lesson was that “no lameness is insignificant.” How many times we have seen dogs limping after a test! Let’s not underestimate the importance of safety in improving our judging.

## Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?

**Ted:** Dennis, I have to say that I really enjoyed doing this article because it gave me an opportunity to speak with many of my friends about something that all of us hold dear – the betterment of our sport.

I was surprised with the uniformity of responses that we received. I was surprised with – for lack of a better word – the “fundamental” quality of people’s concerns. Just think about it – our respondents uniformly told us that what they would most like to changed at field trials is:

- They want the dogs to see the guns.
- They want the dogs to see the birds.
- They want to be able to see their dogs at critical points in both marks and blinds.
- They want good time management.

How much more basic can you get? That these were the primary issues tells me that the sport has some work to do at a foundational level if we are to improve our judging.

I was impressed with the passion that our respondents expressed in our conversations and encouraged by the energy people displayed when we discussed this article with them.

As we were going back and forth on this article, I was reading the November-December 2010 issue of *Retrievers ONLINE*, specifically the article on “Laying an Egg While Judging,” and I was taken by the correlation between the things we mentioned in that article and the comments that we received from our respondents. I think that correlation speaks to the fact that many of us are seeing the same things across the country.

Some of the things that I would like to touch on in the future are:

1. What does the Rule Book say about the concerns our respondents expressed?
2. What can judges do to manage time efficiently during a field trial?
3. What can we do to improve judging?

Perhaps more importantly – and, of course, most difficult – I think we need to address the nuts and bolts of setting up marks and blinds.

I am interested in what you think and, of course, what our readers think? Where should we go next?

**Dennis:** I agree that this survey has had rather remarkable unanimity. There has been a strong echo of things we have said in previous issues even though not all respondents are *Retrievers ONLINE* readers. I wondered how biased our survey was because it certainly was not a random sample or even a large sample of trialers. Instead, it was a group of people prominent in the game and whom we respected, knew and were able to contact and be able to discuss such topics in the past month or so. Nonetheless, the responses are remarkable in their fundamental nature.

Certainly, in past articles, I thought we had carefully identified judging

approaches and philosophies based on the Rule Book and experienced input only to find that many others had different viewpoints, or continued to espouse other ideas. We sure don't profess to have all the answers but it's frustrating when fundamentals can't be adhered to or agreed upon. The Rule Book does give much latitude for different viewpoints but we shouldn't be totally at odds in judging things like lines to the Derby marks, the seriousness of a "pop" and "what is a good hunt."

I think everybody's biggest challenge is how to improve judging in general and judging by themselves in particular. Improvement means quality tests that don't illustrate the problems identified here, consistency of callbacks and more uniformity on evaluation. So, I agree a starting point would be to identify what the Rule Book says about the major problems identified by our respondents (incidentally, as we go to print we are still getting more responses). It would also be good to prepare a summary of how to improve time management because that is clearly another key.

I think we could end up with a list of Fundamentals of Judging.

As I said above, everybody needs to tackle the subject of how to improve judging. Judy's sidebar is a great start because it starts with each of us as individuals. In future articles, we

can start to discuss the nuts and bolts of setting up blinds and marks. That is a huge topic and one that I think is best done in the field and I think it should be the focus of most judging seminars. But I also know that there are a bunch of ideas we could collect to illustrate how judges can design good bird placement.

In summary, I think everybody has to also be thinking about ways to improve the game overall and what they can do to help. Some lateral thinking is needed on dealing with huge entries, dwindling grounds, using experienced and developing inexperienced judges and even how we conduct our typical trials. Mike Lardy responded that "due to the parity in dog ability and training these days, it seems that results are often because of random events rather than ability." I think that is true and one of the reasons why judging has become so difficult. He suggested one solution was to abandon the 4 series model in large events in order to have more opportunities to evaluate each dog. That needs discussion along with other "outside the box" thoughts.

As always, we invite your feedback and we hope to continue with these topics in the Spring issue.

Our sincere thanks to those that participated to date. We will be talking to more of you as we develop these topics.



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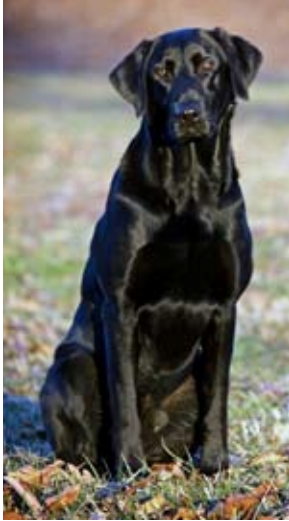
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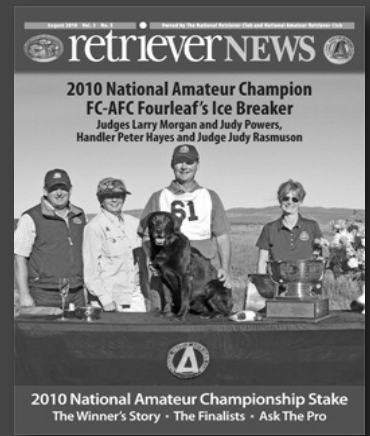


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