

## First Hunt Test By Sarah Fischer

After months of training you finally decided to plunge into the world of hunt tests with your retriever Max. Your first hunt test is today, somehow arriving much faster than you had expected. Has it really been a month since you turned in the test premium? Hopefully, you and Max slept well last night, ate some breakfast and loaded the truck with enough supplies for a week in the desert or day with a monsoon. Even with all those supplies you may forget something, so before pulling out of the driveway check for your collar, lead, whistle and map to the test site. Unfortunately, maps to test sites do not come equipped with directions to local java huts.

Once you and possibly espresso buzzed Max arrive at the hunt test grounds, look for signs indicating your test location. The PSLRA uses group designations called stakes such as Junior A or Junior B. You will know from your test confirmation letter which stake you are in. Follow the signs, if you are lost or confused, pull over and ask for directions from a hunt test worker or at home base. "Hey, where's Junior B?" The directions will likely be given with a cast and you'll be on your way.

When you find your stake location, look to park out of the way of tests. If guns are shooting in your direction or disgruntled handlers are waiving at you, pick a different parking spot. You may inadvertently be distracting another stake's test.

Once you park, notice places to air your dog, they will not be marked. Then head off to find the Marshal. You can't miss marshals. They carry clipboards, swing handheld radios like 6-Shooters and will have other handlers huddled around them. Check in with the marshal and find out your test running order. A marshal may adjust the running order to accommodate handlers with multiple dogs in different stakes or hunt test workers. Changes are common so find out who the two handlers running in front and one behind you are. Later on, when it comes time to air your dog, this tip will help you!

Pick up a Hunt Test Catalog from the marshal. You are going to want a keepsake when Max passes his test. Look through the catalogue and check Max's name and registration information. Note what number Max is listed as in the catalog, this is the number the test Judge will use to identify Max when scoring his retrieves. An added catalog bonus is finding out your buddy's dog Bruiser is really named Pink Panther's Pipsqueak Poppy.

After checking in, wait for the Judges to explain the series setup. Now is the time to ask questions if you are confused. A test dog will then be used to show the marks are standard to Max's ability level.

If Max is lower in the running order, leave him in the truck, pull up a camp chair and watch how the other dogs are doing. It is perfectly ok to cheer for a dog & handler

who did a nice job, just wait until the dog has left the line. Visit with other handlers to find out how they train, you may even find handlers close to home to train with.

At some point, you will see the person two dogs ahead of you enter the holding blind. Check in again with the marshal for the running order. When the marshal calls you, get Max and air him out, away from the test, on lead. Make sure Max is wearing his flat buckle collar. Remember, no roll, pinch, or dog tags.

The marshal will then call Max's number or your name to get into the holding blind. Sometimes there are multiple holding blinds and the marshal will want you to move forward bypassing an empty one. Remember, once you get into the blind there is no going back. You cannot leave until you are signaled to the next holding blind by the marshal or called to the line by the Judge. Max may try to take a peek at the marks while in the blind, don't let him. He'll have his own soon enough.

When the judge calls you, bring Max up to the line under control and in the heel position. Sit him at the line. (NOTE: This can be done with a collar and lead for Junior Hunt Tests) Let the Judges know what Max's number is. Remove Max's lead and hide it in your pocket or place it on the ground away from you, when you & Max are ready, call for the mark. Do not talk to your dog after you have done this. A gunner will throw or shoot the mark from behind a blind. After a mark has fallen wait for the judge to say "DOG" before sending Max. You do not have to immediately send Max, do so when you are ready. Put your whistle in your mouth and watch him go. When Max comes back with a bird, take it and deliver it to the judge.

At the conclusion of this first series you and Max will be excused. Keep him at a heel and under control until out of the test area. Take care of rewards, water, and towel dry if necessary then put him up and wait for the last dog to run, that will be the end of the first series.

After the first series is over the Judges will announce who has made it on to the next series and indicate where it is taking place. At the end of the day there will be a ribbon ceremony where you will find out if Max passed his first JH leg. Try to thank the Judges, Marshals and worker volunteers. It's been a long day for them. After all is said and done, hop in the truck and head home with new memories & the first hunt test experience under your belt.

Narrative written with the aid of:  
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Glossary:

**Air Your Dog or Airing:** A brief period before a test or training exercise to allow the dog to relieve itself, warm up, and get a feel for its surroundings.

Call for the Mark: A brief hand signal indicating to the judges that you are ready for the test.

Cast: Signal by handler using arm or hand in a specific direction to change the route to a mark while the dog is on a retrieve.

Collar: Flat Buckle Collar

Gunner: Person either shooting, throwing, launching ducks or dummies for retrieves.

Handler: Individual running the dog in the hunt test.

Heel: Dog sitting or walking closely to the right or left of the handler with head/shoulders in line with the handler's body.

Holding Blind: Device which conceals dog & handler while waiting their turn to run at a test or during training. Bind is also, device which conceals gunners.

Home Base: Where test information can be obtained, the point from which workers are directed.

Hunt Test Premium: Event application form.

Hunt Test Catalog: Booklet listing running order, dog's registration information, owner, & handler. Running order may be altered by the Marshal.

JH Leg: JH (Junior Hunter) is the designation added to the end of a dog's registered name when four Junior level hunt tests are successfully completed. Each completed test is commonly referred to as a "leg."

Judge: Volunteer appointed evaluator who selects marks for a hunt test & evaluates each dog against its level standard.

Lead also leash. Length of leather or nylon used to control a dog.

Line The starting point from which a dog is sent on a retrieve.

Mark: Term for bumper or bird thrown for retrieving where the dog is to see the object and its fall.

Marshal: Volunteer responsible for maintaining the test running order & conduct of participants.

Running Order: Order of participants in which the hunt test is to be run, established by the test catalogue & marshal. Participants may find out their running order prior

to the event by including a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope with their premium entry. Some events offer online viewing of running order prior to the event.

**Send:** When a handler commands the dog to retrieve a mark.

**Stake:** The "group" which contains a running order, Junior A & Junior B, Senior A & Senior B, Master A & Master B. The designations A & B do not indicate ability level.

**Series:** A single test in a judged retrieving event. i.e. The 5-series consists of 5 individually judged tests or series. (see judge)

**Test Dog:** Dog of similar ability as the test participants used to show where the marks will be and that the test is set up to the standard ability level .

**Hunt Test Worker:** Volunteer who helps set-up hunt tests, distribute information, take care of the needs of Judges, Marshals, Gunners and other volunteers out in the field while working from home base.