

CURLY COATED AND FLAT COATED RETRIEVERS NOW ELIGIBLE TO RUN SPANIEL TESTS

Following is an excerpt from the FCRSA Newsletter which provides an introduction to spaniel program tests, an overview of the tests, a brief description of each level of testing, and provides resource information for those interested in finding out more or participating in the program.

General Overview of Spaniel Hunting Tests

The purpose – to provide an opportunity for a dog to demonstrate its field abilities in a manner as consistent as possible with the demands of actual hunting conditions.

The objective – to help the hunter develop a useful hunting companion by providing a means to gauge a dog's ability at the junior, senior and master levels.

Each breed participating in the spaniel tests is required to submit a written description of the breed's unique "hunting style". Each description provides some background history on the breed, as well as general guidance regarding the breed's speed and application while upland hunting, the aggressiveness of the flush, and the water entry that is typical of the breed. Hunting style descriptions can be found at www.akc.org/events/hunting_tests/spaniels/hunting_style.cfm.

The following rules apply to all three levels of testing:

- Hunting tests are open to all AKC registered Spaniels or versatile upland hunting breeds over six months of age. There is no maximum age for any of the levels. Regulations pertaining to eligibility can be found at www.akc.org/events/hunting_tests/spaniels/eligibility_breeds.cfm.
- The hunting test program is designed to simulate a day in the field. The basic attributes of the test allow the dog to demonstrate its hunting abilities – how to find game, how to flush game, and how to retrieve game
- There are three test levels – Junior, Senior, and Master
- The dog's natural hunting ability and training are scored against a standard of performance. The standard varies by test level.
- Dogs are run singly with handler, judges, and gunners
- Gunning is involved at all test levels. All gunning is done by designated gunners.
- Female dogs in season are not allowed.
- Hunting tests are pass/fail events/ Dogs are scored on their own merit. There are no placements and no ranking of the dogs entered in a test.
- Non-spaniel breeds earning a title will have the standard hunt test title followed by a "U" (to signify "upland"). For example, JHU will designate a Junior Hunter

Junior Hunt Test

A Junior-level dog must show a desire to hunt in an enthusiastic manner and the ability to retrieve. It is not necessary that a dog be steady to wing and shot. The dog should show no fear of cover, demonstrate a reasonable response to commands, and maintain a reasonable working distance from its handler.

Junior-level dogs must find, flush, and have an opportunity to retrieve two birds on land, and perform a water retrieve at a reasonable distance. Junior dogs should complete their retrieves in close proximity to the handler, but need not retrieve completely to hand. A dog must achieve four qualifying scores to receive a Junior Handler (JHU) title. (The scoring system is explained below)

Senior Hunting Test

A Senior-level dog must show all of the attributes of a Junior-level dog, and in addition must also show true boldness to cover, a pattern addressing the course objectives, and an intense desire to hunt. A proper working distance and independent hunting sense must be maintained. The dog need not be steady to wing and shot on

land but should not show uncontrollable chasing in a missed bird situation. The dog must be steady at the line on eater, must retrieve eagerly to hand, and exhibit the ability to “hunt dead” on a blind retrieve.

A dog must achieve five qualifying scores to receive a Senior Hunter (SHU) title, except if the dog has earned a JHU title, then it will receive a SHU title once it achieves four qualifying scores.

Master Hunter Test

The Master-level dog is expected to be a finished and experienced hunting companion. While allowances for less-than-poished performances can be made at the Junior and Senior levels, real perfection is expected in Master. The Master-level dog must always be under control and must handle kindly, with only the quiet commands and signals that would be used when hunting.

The dog must locate game, flush well, and must be absolutely steady to wing and shot on land and at water. Intelligent use of wind and terrain in locating games, an accurate nose, and intensity are essential. A handler must not command a dog to retrieve until steadiness has been demonstrated. The dog must retrieve promptly, tenderly, and absolutely to hand. A water blind must be completed in addition to a “hunt dead” on land.

A Master-level dog must achieve six qualifying scores to receive a Master Hunter (MHU) title, except that if the dog has earned a SHU title, then it will receive a MHU title once it achieves five qualifying scores.

The Scoring System

Keeping in mind that the purpose of a flushing dog is to hunt, find, flush, and retrieve birds in a pleasing and obedient manner, the judges assign a numerical score that reflects an estimation of how well a dog performs against an established standard. Stated in the test regulations, for the test level under consideration.

Dogs are judged according to these performance categories: 1)hunting ability, 2)bird finding ability, 3)flushing performance, 4)trained abilities, and 5)retrieving abilities. Judges assign a score from 0 to 10 for each category of performance. As dogs advance in the level of tests, their performance is expected to be more finished; therefore, they are judged with less tolerance. To receive a passing score, a dog must average a score of 7 across all performance categories, and cannot receive a score of less than 5 in any category.

Resources and Information

If you're interested in learning more or participating in spaniel tests, it is highly recommended that you:

- Find a spaniel club in your area that holds club training sessions
- Attend and observe a spaniel test prior to entering an event
- Offer to work at a test
- Read and understand the AKC Regulations for Spaniel Hunting Tests
- Attedn a spaniel judging seminar to learn more about the test standards that dogs will be judged on, the requirements to earn a title, and other related information about the spaniel program.