

Pet Peeves

There are some things that just drive me crazy when I am at a hunt test or club trial. Here are a few of them.

1. People making excuses for their misbehaving dogs. Either the dog knows how to heel and sit quietly or it doesn't. Telling the people around you it is "just because he is so excited" doesn't wash with me. My dog is excited too, but she still sits or stands quietly by my side. The only reasons for a poorly behaved dog are lack of training or lack of trainability—there are dogs produced where the breeders neglected to consider trainability. These dogs can have vocalizing problems or other issues that no amount of training will resolve. It's like expecting a child to behave in a restaurant or store when the child has never been told or shown how to behave...threats don't make up for training.
2. People who don't air their dogs in appropriate places...or don't understand the concept of airing the dog. These are the dogs that poop right in the traffic area on the way to the holding blind or line, or pee on the line. I even saw a dog lift its leg on a judge! Take the time to air the dog properly before you approach the holding blind. Everyone will thank you, including your dog!
3. People who are inconsiderate of others' property and/or dogs. I had a pro trainer at a hunt test holler at me that the dog he was airing OFF LEASH was a "fighter" so I needed to keep my LEASHED dog clear. Apparently he has great liability insurance!
4. Gallery members who are talking loudly and/or moving around behind the line while a working dog is at the line. Some of this may be ignorance, but you know the saying "ignorance is no excuse." If you are in the gallery and see inappropriate behavior, please politely remind people of the rules and courtesies of the game.
5. People who bring dogs to the gallery to "watch." It may be a puppy, or it may be an adult dog. If it is a participating dog, having the dog where it can see the test is a disqualifying action. If it is not a participating dog, it technically should not be on the grounds. Even though many of us have non-participating dogs with us at events, they should not be anywhere near the holding blind, gallery or line.
6. Handlers who walk away from the line bad-mouthing the test or the judges. You may have had a bad day, or the test may stink, but it is a show of poor sportsmanship to display that kind of behavior. If you really feel there was injustice in how you and your dog were judged or in how the test was set up, there is a procedure in place to handle complaints and misconduct. Tell your marshal—politely--that there is a problem and the marshal will contact event committee members to review the situation and determine if official action is needed.

7. Tolerating or ignoring misconduct. If you see someone training on the test grounds, choking his dog down in the holding blind, kicking his dog or any of the other behaviors that are misconduct, do not ignore it! You do not need to confront the person, but you need to report it to the marshal and/or a committee member so the situation can be addressed. The people who engage in these activities will not stop if they continue to get away with it. Yes, the complaint and misconduct procedures are time-consuming and you might make someone upset, but the consequences to the people involved and to the club can be dire if you don't address it. If a complaint is filed with AKC about a club event or activities at the event and the club has not reported the incident to AKC, the club can be fined, reprimanded or suspended from AKC activities. Besides, it is just the *right* thing to do.
8. Mistreating or neglecting the live birds. I have attended tests where the ducks died in the crates from heat stroke because the club did not provide adequate shade or water for the ducks. We are under scrutiny already by animal rights groups who think all hunting is despicable. Mistreating the birds is inexcusable.
9. Handlers who expect special treatment. If you are running dogs in different stakes, the marshal needs to know so he/she can work you in accordingly. Despite what you may have heard, marshals are not psychic and many clubs are not sophisticated enough to have between-stake communications like radios or cell phones. It is not appropriate for a handler to just inject himself into the lineup or assume that a stake will wait for him. You must inform the marshal. Judges have the authority to "start the clock" on a handler who is not at the stake. If you have not informed the marshal that you need to be at another stake (or you have had an emergency), you will be considered a no-show. When the judges say, "start the clock," that means the handler has 15 minutes to show or he is dropped from the event.
10. Last one. This is supposed to be FUN! It is not the end of the world if your dog doesn't pass. Yes, it is disappointing and maybe heartbreaking, but we have all been there and probably will be again. Don't take your frustration out on your dog! Ask questions, meet new people, and enjoy being outside instead of cooped up in the office. Just learn from the experience what you need to work on so the next time out will be successful.

Happy training and success in your hunt test season!

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