

## Handler's Clinic

This is not a “training” clinic, rather it is a “handlers” clinic so I will not be covering training instructions and tips. However, before I begin I would like to say that two things will increase the odds of your dog passing an HZP test: (1) your dog must be obedient and (2) take the time and force fetch your dog to retrieve. There are numerous obedience and retriever training books available and while only three specializes in the training of versatile dogs, a lot of valuable information can be gleaned from “specialty” books and incorporated into your training program.

There are currently three books available on training the versatile hunting dog. One is a book written by Roger Smith and Nancy Bohs (GNA members and drahthaar breeders) is called “Drahthaar Puppy Manual.” This manual is well written and covers all aspects of training a drahthaar for the VJP and HZP tests. It can be purchased from their web site at [www.altmoor.com](http://www.altmoor.com).

A new book published in 2006 is called Training the Versatile Hunting Dog by Chuck Johnson. This book is available for Amazon.com and is a very good book that is easy to read and has lots of great pictures. The book covers everything an owner needs to know about training a versatile hunting dog. Each instructive chapter has a detailed explanation of the training techniques, along with numerous illustrative photos.

The last book that deals specifically with training drahthaars is the Armbruster Training Manual written by Len F. Armbruster. He donated his time and expertise to develop the Armbruster Training Manual that goes into detail on the development and training of the versatile Deutsch drahthaar. This manual in conjunction to the books mentioned above will provide first time handlers with the information needed to prepare their dogs for the HZP test.

What I would like to do now is take this opportunity to discuss what I believe **handlers** can do to help their dogs pass a HZP test. For ease of discussion, I have grouped the test phases into three categories – general, field, and water. I have also included a short section concerning protests.

### **GENERAL:**

First, if you have not purchased, read, and studied the *Regulations for Association Breed Tests (VZPO)*, you need to do so. This booklet is available from Lona Kluck, Watertown, South Dakota. The booklet outlines in detail what a dog is required to do at the HZP test and how the judges will evaluate its performance. It is not a training manual. Do not expect the judges to spend time explaining the testing procedures to you. Handlers need to take responsibility of becoming familiar with the test regulations prior to going to the test. You will notice that some of the items say “shall” and others say “must.” In order for your dog to successfully pass the HZP test the dog must complete the “must” items. Make sure you bring this booklet with you when you test your drahthaar in case any question(s) comes up during the evaluation.

All GNA tests are “open judging,” i.e. handlers are permitted and encouraged to ask questions during the test. Judges will often times inform handlers how their dogs are doing throughout the day. If you do not understand a judge’s instructions, ask the judge for clarification. Do not wait until after the dog has completed the task to ask questions, it will be too late. The judges are not there to flunk any dog, so when they tell you to do something follow their instructions. They are trying to help you and your dog obtain the best possible score.

The senior judge is the appointed official who will answer your question(s). If you find yourself in a position of disagreeing with the manner in which your dog was evaluated, take the senior judge aside and discuss it with him/her in a polite and courteous manner. Try to stay calm and listen to what the judge is saying. If you do not agree that the test regulations were followed as worded in the test regulations, you may file a protest at the appropriate time (this discussion is found on the last page of this handout).

I recommend that handlers wear a white shirt, do not wear a dark colored shirt. The reason is your dog will always be able to pick you out no matter what color the background behind you is. This is really important if there are a lot of people in the gallery watching the test.

It is not unusual for first-time handlers to be under stress during the test, this often results in “nervous chatter.” Try and keep the conversation with the judge to a minimum so you can concentrate on your dog. But always remember you can ask questions about the test at any time. I recommend that your attention always be directed to what your dog is doing while it is being evaluated. You do not want the dog to pick up on your nervousness during the test.

When your dog is not being evaluated, put your dog up in its kennel. This will keep your dog from getting hot and tired. If it is an extremely hot day, pour some water in the bottom of your dog’s crate. While the dog is kenneled he will be laying in the water which provides a cooling-evaporative effect. Make sure the dog has access to fresh drinking water throughout the day.

In all likelihood, it will be hot during the test so bring plenty of fresh water to keep you and your dog hydrated. You might pour some water over your dog’s back, head, and neck prior to a drag or going into the planted bird field to help cool it down.

Some portions of the HZP that are similar to the VJP test. Handlers will gather in the morning and separate into the various judging groups. There will be three judges per group and it is possible that there might be a judge apprentice or two in the group. The senior judge will collect your Ahnentafel and rabies certificate at the beginning of the test. At that time the judges may look at your dog’s bite, teeth, eyes, ear tattoo number, etc. or they may choose to wait until lunch or at the end of the test.

The judges will evaluate each dog one at a time. If your dog is not being evaluated make sure you keep the dog on leash. Each dog will be evaluated for gun sensitivity in the field. This is accomplished by shooting two times over each dog as they are in the search field.

### **FIELD (Search, Point, Drags):**

During the field search if the judges are walking too fast, too slow or get out ahead of you, politely ask that they slow down, speed up, and/or walk beside you. Sometimes the judges are concentrating on watching the dog's search and they do not realize they may be affecting the dog with their position in the field.

The judges may have you search your dog into the wind, with the wind, and cross wind depending on how the search fields are situated. During this portion of the test the judges are evaluating the field search, use of nose, desire, cooperation, and pointing if your dog is lucky to find wild birds in the field.

In order to evaluate a young drahtaar's pointing ability, it is sometimes necessary to use a planted bird field. Birds may be liberated to free fly into the field or each individual bird may be planted. Either way the judge will tell you exactly where the birds have been planted. The objective is for you to get your dog into the field to locate and point the bird. This is not a timed event, but you want your dog in and out of the field in as little time as possible. Use verbal or whistle commands to keep your dog in the bird field. Remember, it will probably be hot and allowing your dog to run around wasting time will only make the dog hot and expend energy. Do not wait until your dog is hot, tired, or has run through all the birds to get control of your dog.

You will be instructed by the judges that once your dog scents the bird do not say anything to it, i.e. whoa, steady, easy, etc. They want to see the dog naturally establish point without any undo influence from the handler. Once the dog has established a point and the judges have seen enough to give the dog a pointing score they will tell you to pick up your dog. Without running, get to your dog as quickly as possible and either leash or pick the dog up. You do not want your dog to jump in and catch the bird.

The fur and feathered game drags are a retrieving reliability test. Your dog **MUST** successfully complete the two drags in order to pass the test. Handlers have the option of bringing their own game for the drags or use the game that will be provided by the test director. Depending on which test you attend, handlers may be required to bring a rabbit for the fur game drag. The test program mailed to each handler will state whether or not this is a requirement for those attending the test. Normally feathered game will be supplied by the test coordinator. Ducks are often times used to lay the feathered game drag for two reasons: (1) dead ducks are already available from the water work and (2) using ducks helps keep the costs of the test down. If you prefer to use a pheasant for the drag, you can bring your own bird. Please remember, all game must be as fresh as possible, there should be no blood or open wounds on the body, and, if previously frozen, the game must be totally thawed prior to use.

Prior to releasing your dog on the drag make sure to check the wind direction. If there is a cross wind, you will want to get your dog down wind of the drag track as the scent will be drifting with the wind. The test regulations state that, "The handler may work the dog on a leash for the first 20 meters, and then must stop and let the dog continue." Do not release the dog until you are positive he is working the track. Once you release the dog, stop and stay at that spot.

You are allowed to give your dog one “fetch” command, one “sit” command, and one “out” command. Any additional commands will lower your dog’s drag and/or manner of retrieve score and might possibly result in a failure. The judges may or may not tell you this prior to the start of the drag, remember you are expected to know the test regulations. If your dog is returning with the game and you see it start to slow up (possibly thinking about stopping), do not give it a command as this will result in your dog failing the test. This is why it is so important to train your dog to retrieve to hand immediately upon finding the game.

As previously mentioned, you are allowed to give the dog one “sit” command upon return. Do not waste your sit command, wait for the dog to come to you, collect himself, and see if he will sit without a command. If the dog does not sit on its own, give a sit command. I have seen handlers give a “sit” command to their dog at a full run. If the dog does not sit after one command, reach down, command “out” (or give), and take the game. You may lose a point or two because the dog did not sit, but the dog will probably ignore any additional commands you give it. Repeated commands will only lower the score further.

If your dog happens to drop or spit the game out do not give repeated commands to “fetch” as you will only lose additional points. Just reach down and pick the bird up, hold it behind your back and let the judge take it from you. DO NOT hold the bird up in front of the dog, this only encourages the dog to jump up and try and grab the game from you. This could affect the dog’s manner of retrieve and obedience scores, especially if the game is ripped in two. Once the judge has taken the game from you can leash the dog and heel it out of the field.

If you are worried that the position of the judges and gallery might affect your dog’s manner of retrieve, you can ask that the gallery move and that the judges get behind you and maybe to one side or the other. If the senior judge is present, direct the request to him/her. If the senior judge is at the end of the drag, ask one of the other judges to request the gallery move. There are times when the returning dog sees a bunch of trucks and people standing behind you and can not readily pick you out of the crowd. The judges will permit you to wave your hand and get the dog's attention one time by saying "good dog" or "good boy" without docking any points. Anything more than once or twice and the judges may consider this to be excessive handling and start deducting points. You can not tell the dog to "come" at any point during his return without affecting your score.

**WATER (Gun Sensitivity, Blind Retrieve, Search Behind the Duck):**

The usual sequence of events at the water evaluation is as follows: (1) gun sensitivity, (2) blind retrieve, and (3) search for the duck. You will want your dog to immediately enter the water upon command. To help this occur you should position yourself as close to the water as possible. I always recommend that handlers actually have their feet just in the water. This will help prevent a dog from running up and down the bank before entering the water.

**NEVER NEVER NEVER** turn your back on your dog when it is in the water. If your dog sees you turning your back, it will think you are leaving and just might come out of the water to

follow. If it is necessary to talk to a judge who is standing behind you, ask him to come up beside you.

For the blind retrieve, the regulations state that, “The handler may help and direct the dog; however, constant influencing or shot/stone throw lessens the score.” If you have taught your dog to take a line in the water, it is permissible to handle your dog to the vicinity of the dead duck by using either a whistle and/or hand signals. If you have to “constantly influence” the dog in order to complete the blind retrieve, the score for this particular test phase will be lowered. Some typical ways of influencing the dog could include whistling, shouting, hand signals, throwing rocks, shooting in the direction of the bird, etc. Please be aware that what one judge considers as “constant influencing” may be different than another judge’s interpretation, i.e. one judge considers 4 rocks to be constant and excessive while a different judge would consider 2 or more rocks to be constantly influencing the dog. Please note: If you choose to throw a rock or shoot in the direction of the duck the highest score you can receive at that point is a “7” and the score can be lower depending on how much you handle your dog to the duck. .

On the search behind the duck the regulations state that, “The dog should search for and find the duck independently. The handler may help and direct his dog; however, constant influencing lessens the score.” As stated above, typical ways of influencing the dog might include whistling, shouting, hand signals, throwing rocks, etc. If you have taught your dog to enter the water and independently search for the track this should not be a problem. However, if after a few minutes the dog has been unable to locate the track it would be permissible to throw a rock in the direction of the track to help orient the dog to the track; however this will automatically reduce your dog’s score into the “good” range to start with. If you find yourself in a position of having to throw a rock, make sure you throw the rock on the far side of the track so that the dog will “cut” the duck track swimming to the splash of the rock. As stated above, be aware that there are differences in what judges consider to be “constant influencing.”

If your dog finds the live duck the judge will shoot it when the shot can be made in a safe manner. The dog is expected to retrieve the duck to hand without any additional commands. If after a ten minute search the dog does not locate the live duck, the senior judge will throw out a dead duck for the dog to find while swimming back to you. Again, the dog is expected to retrieve the duck to hand without any additional commands.

Do not demand or expect your dog to “sit” on a steep slick slope, in heavy weeds, or in the water with a heavy duck in its mouth. Without turning your back to the dog while it is in the water, look around for a close spot that is fairly level and dry with short vegetation where the dog can come to you and sit without any problem. Try and select a spot that is somewhat close to the water’s edge. The dog will have no choice, but to come out of the water and sit by you. This might eliminate the dog from dropping the game to shake or coming to shore and running the bank.

You are allowed to give the dog one “sit” command upon return. Do not get in a hurry to give the command, allow the dog to come to you and see if it will sit without any verbal or hand signal. If the dog does not sit after one command, reach down and take the game. You may

lose a point or two because the dog did not sit, but the dog will probably ignore any additional commands you give it. Repeated commands will only lower the score further.

There will be three “manners of retrieve” scores given for the water work (retrieve of duck from gun sensitive evaluation; retrieve of duck from blind retrieve; and retrieve of duck from live duck search) which are eventually averaged into one score. If the dog happens to drop or spits the duck out during any of these retrieves, do not give repeated commands to “fetch” as you will only lose additional points. Just reach down and pick the bird up, hold it behind your back and let the judge take it from you.

### **PROTESTS:**

I have been a VR judge for approximately 25 years and have only been involved in one protest. I sincerely believe that GNA judges are very qualified and capable of evaluating your dog's performance. However, if you run enough dogs in VDD tests, odds are at some point you will not totally agree with the score your dog receives. You need to remember one critical thing; you CAN NOT protest the overall score or the individual scoring of a test element that your dog receives.

The protest protocol is in place so handlers can challenge the manner in which the regulations were followed and implemented during the test. Protest regulations are outlined in detail in the *Regulations for Association Breed Test (VZPO)* booklet. An individual can protest errors and mistakes of the organizers, test director, judges, and assistants in the preparation and execution of the test, provided that the handler or dog were disadvantaged or were interfered with during their work.

At the beginning of a test, the senior judge will briefly discuss protest regulations. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the protest procedure. Do not expect the judges to ask if there are any protests at the end of the test.

If you do not agree with how your dog was evaluated at the test (remember you can not protest the score), take the senior judge aside and discuss the situation with him/her. If you still do not understand his explanation, ask that he/she show you in the test regulations why the dog received the evaluation it did. If after all that you still do not agree with the reason, you may have grounds for a protest.

## Recommendations for Consistency in HZP Retrieving Evaluations

The purpose of these recommendations is to standardize HZP retrieving evaluations. They summarize decisions made by the Stammbuchkommission, as published in the most current "Questions on VZPO Test Practices" (January, 2009), and the test regulations, as published in the English translation of the VZPO, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2007. **They are not intended to be used as a rigid scheme, nor should they be interpreted so as to limit or supersede discretion of judges.** They should be used as a framework within which judges are to apply their own observations of the performance in light of their own dog experience and knowledge, keeping in mind the goals and purpose of the test regulations. However, significant deviations from these guidelines without attendant special circumstances should be avoided. Handlers should be advised of these evaluation standards at the start of the test, or before each applicable test subject.

**An independent retrieve is demonstrated when the dog finds a piece of game, picks it up, and starts back to his handler without having to be commanded to do so (other than the initial fetch, find, seek, search, or similar commands given at the start of the drag or water work subject). The dog must demonstrate this independent behavior, without intervention, or will fail the test.<sup>1</sup>**

1. When the dog is sent to retrieve, but returns without finding game, it can be restarted (sent again) at most 2 more times; the score is reduced one predicate for each restart.<sup>2</sup>
2. If the dog sees the duck (or other game), it is deemed to have found it.<sup>3</sup>
3. Upon finding the game, further commands to retrieve or handler interventions are prohibited, until after the dog has begun to carry game back to the handler.<sup>4</sup>
4. If the dog shows eagerness to retrieve, by returning part way to the handler with game, but appears confused in strange circumstances, then the handler can intervene without failing the dog.<sup>5</sup>
5. Praise for correct behavior, and distinguishing oneself from judges and gallery by moving, speaking, waving, or even hand claps, are normal and permissible dog-handling when done within reason and for the intended purposes, and do not count as intervention.<sup>6</sup>

**The quality of work on the drag should be judged on the way out and the way back.<sup>7</sup> Very good work on the drag includes adapting to the task, eagerness to find and retrieve the game, and obvious willingness to carry the game to the handler at all.<sup>8</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> VZPO §36(1) (b), §36(2) ©, §37(1) (g), §38 (16), and §39 (2); QTP Water 6, General Drags 20.

<sup>2</sup> VZPO §38© (12); QTP General Drags 3, Feathered Game Drag 2.

<sup>3</sup> VZPO §36 (2) (f), §37(1) (g).

<sup>4</sup> QTP Water 6 and General Drags 20.

<sup>5</sup> QTP General Drags 9 and 19.

<sup>6</sup> QTP General Drags 17; VZPO §37(2) ( f).

<sup>7</sup> QTP General Drags 6; VZPO §38(13).

<sup>8</sup> VZPO §38 (14).

1. After the dog has demonstrated willingness to retrieve by beginning to carry game back to the handler, handler intervention is then permitted whether or not the dog is performing correctly.<sup>9</sup>
2. Each handler intervention after the dog has picked up the game and started to return, lowers the subject predicate.<sup>10</sup>
3. Handler intervention when the dog is within about 20 - 25 meters should be considered as influence on both quality of work on the drag and on manner of retrieve.<sup>11</sup>

**Manner of Retrieve includes how the dog grasps, carries and delivers the game to the handler.<sup>12</sup> Very good work includes retrieving to the handler with a correct, happy and willing delivery with no more than one command to sit.<sup>13</sup>**

1. A retrieve to within about 10 meters, but no closer than 6 - 8 meters, should be considered completed, but deficient in manner of retrieve (1 point).<sup>14</sup>
2. A retrieve to within 6-8 meters, but no closer than 3 or 4 meters, should be considered completed, and scored from deficient to sufficient in manner of retrieve (1-3 points depending on extent of repeated handler intervention, or other circumstances).<sup>15</sup>
3. A retrieve completed to within about 3-4 meters, but not delivered to hand, should be considered sufficient manner of retrieve (3-5 points depending on totality of circumstances)<sup>16</sup>
4. A completed retrieve to the handler that requires one or more additional sharp commands, or includes a combination of an unhappy/unwilling delivery and failure of the dog to sit, should result in a lowering of the score to the good category (6 - 8 points) or even lower, depending on totality of circumstances.<sup>17</sup>
5. A completed retrieve necessitates that the handler be able to take possession of the game. A dog that will not allow the handler to pick up the game upon it being retrieved, or leaves game out of reach beyond water's edge, fails regardless of the distance to the handler.
6. Burying, heavy plucking or eating of game, or attempts to do so, show such a severe impairment of the dog-handler bond that the dog must be failed regardless of the distance at which the infraction occurs or whether handler intervention stops the behavior.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> QTP General Drags 19, 20.

<sup>10</sup> QTP General Drags 3, 17, 18, 19; Feathered Game Drag 2; Rabbit Drag 5.

<sup>11</sup> QTP Water 5, General Drags 1, 8 and 17.

<sup>12</sup> VZPO §38(15).

<sup>13</sup> VZPO §40(3).

<sup>14</sup> QTP General Drags 1.

<sup>15</sup> QTP General Drags 8; Retrieving 2.

<sup>16</sup> QTP Retrieving 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> VZPO §40(4); QTP General Drags 13.

Special Note: Delete from §40(5), the sentence reading "Each individual retrieve subject must be scored with at least a "deficient" (1 point)". Also, each individual duck retrieve must be scored 3 or higher for the dog to pass the test.<sup>19</sup> Although a score of 1 or 2 in any retrieve will fail a dog, a score of 1 or 2 on a duck retrieve will still allow that dog to finish being tested in all water phases, and meet VDD breeding prerequisites, assuming a minimum score of sufficient in the duck search. If a dog receives an insufficient (0 points) in the gun sensitivity retrieve or the blind retrieve, that dog cannot continue at the water, and will therefore be ineligible for breeding certification absent subsequent tests.

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<sup>19</sup> Per Herr Ulrich Augstein, JGHV Director of Testing, March 2007