



Rules: The MSDA Master Gundog Challenge

This is not an AKC test; it is an MSDA club test. While it is not a spaniel hunt test, this Challenge will, except as otherwise noted in this document, be judged in accordance with the current edition of the *Regulations for AKC Hunting Tests for Spaniels* (the AKC Rules). For ease of reference, the rules outlined below follow “Section 12. Master Test Elements” on page 27 of the AKC regulations.

This is a gundog hunt test includes elements of a spaniel hunt test, but it also includes retrieving challenges that surpass those typically found in a master-level spaniel hunt test. The test also incorporates a brace work element inspired by spaniel field trials. However, it is not a field trial – it is a pass/fail hunting test.

All dogs must demonstrate the attributes of a Master hunting dog as defined in the AKC Rules.

Notes solely for the Master Gundog Challenge test on April 11, 2025:

Dog eligibility: This test shall be open to all eligible AKC Spaniel Hunt Test Breeds that have earned their spaniel AKC MH or MHU title. Other dogs that have earned their SH or SHU and have at least two MH or MHU passes are eligible, but preference will be given to dogs that have earned their MH or MHU. If a handler feels their flushing dog has the capabilities to pass this test, but does not have the required AKC titles, the co-chairs of the test can make a special exception on eligibility.

All Master handlers must attend a mandatory gun safety and handling briefing before the start of the land series. Handlers that miss this mandatory briefing will not be allowed to run their dog in the test.

There will be no callbacks – all dogs will be allowed to run in every series. However, if a dog does not qualify (NQ) in an element, it will fail the overall test, and the handler and dog will be dismissed from that element. For example, in the Land series, the dog must find and flush three birds. If the dog is not steady on the first flush, it will NQ the test, and the handler will be asked to leave the field. However, the dog may still participate in the next test element, such as Hunt Dead.

The Double Retrieve element offers a walk-up as an option for the Master Gundog Challenge. A walk-up start will not be used on April 11, 2025.

Chukar will be used in the Land and Hunt Dead test elements. Ducks will be used in the Water Blind and Double Retrieve; in the Double Retrieve, the first duck will be a live flyer.

Section 13. “Master Gundog” Test Elements

The “Master Gundog” test will comprise four test elements, conducted in the following sequence:

- Land Hunt in Brace;
- Hunt Dead;
- Water Blind; and
- Double Retrieve.

Land Hunt in Brace

The dog must not only show all the positive attributes of a master hunter during the Land Hunt, but also be capable of hunting adjacent to another dog (bracework) and honoring its bracemate when required to do so (i.e., steadiness to shot and during its bracemate’s retrieve). The dog must show intelligent use of wind, show the ability to trail when possible, be prepared to handle all types of cover and terrain, and be under complete control at all times. Interfering with its bracemate and hunting out of control are faults worthy of disqualification.

A centerline must be indicated for bracework.

The dog must subsequently find and flush three birds with at least two retrieves. All shot birds must be retrieved. In the event that the dog successfully flushes three birds without being sent on at least one retrieve, a dead bird(s) may be thrown by a wing gunner and a shot fired in order to demonstrate the dog's ability to retrieve. In this situation, the bracemate should be called back to a position roughly 5-10 yards from the bracemate handler and remotely hupped. The working dog should be called back to a position near the center line, roughly 5-10 yards from the working handler and remotely hupped; the working handler should not be in a direct line between the hupped dog and the wing gunner.

A flushed sucker bird or hopper is considered a flushed bird. However, if a bird is a strong flyer and field conditions are favorable, a bird intentionally trapped by the dog rather than flushed will not count as a flush. The judges will determine whether the trapped bird could have been flushed, and their decision is final.

Hunt Dead

The dog must complete a Hunt Dead retrieve at a minimum distance of 75 yards and a maximum distance of 100 yards. The Find area should be approximately 25 yards wide in low to medium cover, and does not have to be an area where the handler can always see their dog. Whenever possible, a Hunt Dead scenario should involve a change in cover (e.g., from field to woods or vice versa, or a field with intermittent bushes) and/or a change in terrain (e.g., from flat to hilly, or through a creek or swale). A downwind blind is preferable, but a crosswind blind is acceptable. Upwind blinds should be avoided.

All handlers must report to the line with adequate drinking water for their dog.

The dog should require no more than 3 minutes to find the bird and return it to hand.

Water Blind

The dog must complete a retrieve by swimming a minimum distance of 35 yards and a maximum distance of 50 yards. Again, a downwind blind is preferable, but a crosswind blind is acceptable. Upwind blinds should be avoided.

The dog should require no more than 5 minutes to find the bird and return it to hand.

Double Retrieve

The dog must complete a Double Retrieve with one mark on land and one mark on water. After the handler has the shotgun, the dog must be brought out of the last holding blind at heel and be hupped approximately 10 yards from the water's edge. For each mark, a duck call is blown, a bird is launched or thrown and a shot is fired. The first bird is thrown in the water at a minimum distance of 35 yards and a maximum distance of 50 yards from the line. The second bird will be launched so that the bird falls in cover on land at a minimum distance of 50 yards and a maximum distance of 75 yards from the line.

A minimum of 5 decoys, anchored separately, should be set on land and in water in proximity of the lines to be followed. At the judge's direction, the dog is sent. The handler shall decide which retrieve is to be completed first.

Controlled breaks are not allowed and will result in automatic score of 0.

The dog shall have eight minutes to retrieve both birds.

A dog that goes to the area of a marked fall, hunts, fails to find a bird, and then leaves the area to hunt for another mark, or drops the bird it is retrieving to go for another bird, shall be considered to have switched. A dog that returns to the area of where it has previously retrieved a bird and then establishes another hunt in that same area shall be considered to have returned to an old fall. Unless

in the opinion of the Judges there exists valid mitigating circumstances, a dog that switches or returns to an old fall, shall be scored low in perseverance and/or marking.

Off-leash Requirements

Dogs must be on-leash in all holding blinds. Dogs must be brought to the line off-leash and may be taken off the line with a leash for all test elements. When a leash is removed, it must be kept out of sight of both the judges and the dog. Dogs are considered under judgment from the moment they are called to the line until the handler is told by a judge to leash their dog and leave the line.

For the Land Element, Dogs must be leashed when escorted to the Field Marshal's position prior to their run. Upon instruction from the Field Marshal, the handler will heel the dog, remove the leash, and walk the dog willingly at heel into the field. The dog must promptly sit at the location designated by the judge and remain quietly in place until further directed.

For Hunt Dead, Water Blind, and Double Retrieve, the dog must proceed off-leash, willingly at heel, from the last holding blind to the starting point designated by the judge. The dog must remain quietly in place as directed by the handler until further instructions are given by the judge.

General

In order to receive a qualifying score, a dog must acquire a minimum score of not less than 5 on each of the categories of abilities listed on the score card (Hunting, Bird Finding, Flushing, Trained, and Retrieving Abilities), with an overall average score of not less than 8.0.

All retrieves must be completed and delivered to hand.

Handlers must carry and shoulder a club-provided break-open shotgun during all test elements except Hunt Dead and the Water Blind. When a bird is flushed or thrown, the handler must shoulder the shotgun with both hands on the gun and follow the flight of the bird while the bird is in the air. The gun shall not be used as a pointing device to direct the dog's attention to a bird's location before the bird is in the air.

Gun safety will be judged throughout the test.

Dogs that bark or whine at the line, in a blind or while retrieving shall be scored low in Trainability. Loud and prolonged barking or whining is sufficient cause to justify grading a dog "0" in Trainability.

A "refusal" is a dog's disregard of a command. For example, failure to stop and look to the handler when signaled, failure to take a new direction when given, or failure to continue in that new direction for a considerable distance constitute refusal.

13.1. Gunners in the Braced Dog Land Hunt

Four gunners are required as follows:

- One center gunner;
- Two wing gunners; and,
- One back-up (fourth) gunner.

Center Gunner's Responsibilities

The center gunner walks down the center of the course, in line with the handler of the *forward* dog. The center gunner is responsible for birds which are crossing the center line and birds that fly down the course. If the forward dog and handler take a runner off the course, the center gunner accompanies the wing gunner, one on each side of the handler. If a bird flies straight down the course, both center and wing gunners may shoot. The center gunner must be careful in the case of a crossing bird because it may fall too close to the bracemate. This bird should be passed on to the wing gunner.

Wing Gunners' Responsibilities

The wing gunners maintain a position in line with the handler. The wing gunners are responsible for birds flying straight down the course or to their side. If the dog and handler take a runner off course, then the wing gunners maintain a position in line with the handler and to one side of the center gunner joining in on the other side.

Fourth Gunner's Responsibilities

Under normal circumstances, the fourth gunner maintains a position in front of the gallery and Hunt Test Field Marshal. This gunner walks with open gun and no shells in chambers and is alert to the test proceedings. If the forward dog is too far ahead, then this fourth gunner, with loaded gun, joins in as a center gunner in order that both dogs may have two gunners. Similarly, if one of the dogs being tested is off the course on a runner, in order that the remaining dog has two gunners, the fourth gunner joins in as one of the gunners. Also, the fourth gunner may be required as a replacement gunner.

Judge: _____



Master Gundog Challenge Score Sheet

NQ

(Judges must agree on Q – NQ)

Dog's Number & Name: _____

Breed: _____ Handler: _____

Test Components →	<u>LAND</u>	<u>DOUBLE RETRIEVE</u>	<u>HUNT DEAD</u>	<u>WATER BLIND</u>	<u>AVERAGE</u>
1. HUNTING ABLITY (desire, courage, perseverance, intelligence)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. BIRD FINDING ABILITY (bird sense, response to wind & scenting conditions, use of nose)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. FLUSHING ABILITY (produces birds with the breed specific hunting style)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. TRAINED ABILITIES (range, pattern, gun response, response to commands, honor on bracework)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. RETRIEVING ABILITIES (marking, enthusiasm, mouth, delivery)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
				TOTAL	_____
				Divide Total by 5 for Overall Average	_____

HOW TO USE THIS EVALUATION FORM:

The 5 abilities of a dog are graded on a scale of 0-10 in each applicable test component. In order for a dog qualify, it must not have received a score less than 5 in any “cell” of the scoring matrix. In addition, it must average no less than 5.0 for each ability and receive an overall average of no less than 8.0 across all abilities.

The following traits constitute grounds for scoring the indicated ability as “0”:

- Failure to find birds (Bird Finding Ability).
- Blinking (Bird Finding Ability).
- Refusal to flush (Flushing Ability).
- Viciousness, gun-shyness, out of control (Trained Abilities).
- Hard-mouth, refused retrieve (Retrieving Abilities).
- Recast in hunt dead or water blind. (Trained Abilities).
- Interfering with or failing to honor its bracemate (Trained Abilities).
- Breaking or controlled breaks (Trained Abilities).
- Multiple whistle refusals and/or cast refusals which the dog should have heard (Trained Abilities).
- Physically restraining or touching a dog at the line (Trained Abilities).
- Leash exposed to the dog or Judges (Trained Abilities).