

## **HPRFTA Conference 2015 (08/02/2015)**

### **WATER PROFICIENCY TESTING FOR THE HPR**

I want to state my position on the question of the water test applicable for field trials.

I think we are all agreed that the HPR of whatever breed should be proficient to retrieve from and over water. It is written as a basic requirement in the J-Regs.

However, the conduct and even concept of the water test at field trials is persistently questioned, usually as a result of some trigger, such as a poor standard rewarded at field trials, or too high a standard demanded relative to the stake or other trials, or outstanding performance as a hunter and game finder on land, and in work after the shot let down by inappropriate conduct at the water, or the water situation is simply inadequate and any pass at that water is an affront to dogs who have met with a greater challenge elsewhere.

Dare I also say inconsistent judging?

And then there is the incidence of inclement weather conditions which present at trials from time to time.

These scenarios lead to the perennial question of the suitability of the water test at field trials.

In evaluating the all round versatility of the HPR we should aim for a certain, well defined, high standard of proficiency in water. The current variable state of water tests at trials does not meet this aim, and if dogs ARE being trained to a higher level of proficiency it is to meet the random challenge involving water while the dog is working its beat.

Water is hardly ever met in these conditions.

At a recent trial the water intended for the water test was only available before a set time, and so, on a mild winter's day, water certificates were used.

Some will or have argued for the wholesale abandonment of a water test at field trials and replacement by a water certificate. It is suggested that more grounds for trialling would then become available and more daylight available to reward deserving dogs with more work to allow it to fill its card. That seems to be too revolutionary and leads to a fear that a water certificate issued in summer/autumn would undermine the training for winter water scenarios, and even undermine the essential versatility of the HPR.

So we find ourselves debating the question year in year out, drowning in a pool of fears and apprehension. Meanwhile the perceived problems mentioned earlier continue to dog us and our sport.

We already have the concept of spring or grouse pointing tests. I wasn't around at the time of their establishment, but the aim I understand was to emulate those tests of the pointing breeds on the Continent.

Was the complaint ever heard that such tests would undermine the ability of dogs to point at trials, flush on command and be steady to shot and fall? Probably, and yet such tests are an accepted part of the calendar, although there are complaints that they were never intended to be held in woodland!

By the way, these tests, so far are not regulated by the Kennel Club.

So I am proposing the establishment of annual WATER PROFICIENCY TESTS to be run by HPR clubs, judged by a panel judge or judges only, always involving cold game. These tests would be more demanding than any water test scenario ever encountered in line at a field trial or at the water test we are familiar with.

The suggested scenarios should be extremely challenging if they are to incentivise handlers to train their dogs to reach the standard. I would therefore not label them as Novice and Open, but more as Standard and Elite, just as we have Junior and Adult for pointing tests. Standard and Elite can be graded if necessary, especially unless or until they are relied upon at field trials.

These WPT awards or certificates may or may not ever replace the field trial water tests, but we need to acknowledge the simple possibility that if they should ever reach a universal level of respect and acceptability, they just might. This will depend on the challenges set, the timing, and the judging, as well as the availability of suitable water to set up the various scenarios.

On reaching a defined level of proficiency and passing the test, a Water Proficiency Certificate can be issued by the organising club. It may be appropriate to hold these tests at GWT venues, or at special events. They will ultimately lead to training events leading up to taking the WPT. In fact cold game training days often train for more elaborate water scenarios.

I can elaborate on a couple of suggested formats for the two levels of proficiency being certified. My inspiration would be those held on the Continent. More later or off-line if you like.

We do not need to lobby the Kennel Club for the replacement of the FT Water Test right now by these prospective tests, but highlight by their success and acceptability that we may seek to do so in the future.

Possession of a current Water Proficiency Test Certificate could be a pre-requisite for example at an All Aged Field Trial, at a venue where there is no water. At this stage I would suggest that the WPTC has been awarded by two panel judges, or an A Panel judge and any other judge, panel or non-panel.

The WPTC should be issued by the organising club and just as for draw preference on a field trial entry form, the details should be disclosed and the WPTC presented on the day if necessary.

It might come to pass that a central registry would need to be established but that is years ahead.

Nigel Wroe  
08/02/2015

## **Format of WPTs (Inspired by the Danish FMR System)**

The retrieves are always on cold game, ideally recently shot. That means pigeons.

Two levels at least, STANDARD and ELITE, with gradings as thought appropriate.

### **Standard:**

Based on two marked retrieves, one from land one from open water,  
or  
One from reeds, one from open water.

One from reeds/land first then from open water or consider split marked retrieve, depends on current if water flowing.

Shots fired.

Set dog up for second retrieve, or not.

### **Elite:**

Two blind retrieves requiring the dog to hunt in the water, and to hunt once over water.

No shots fired.

### **In all cases:**

The water should be deep and the distance challenging.

Consider minimum distance applicable to either test.

Land could be an island.

Entry to water between two sticks at the waters edge at a standard distance apart.

Handler may move between the sticks to keep in contact with the dog.

Distance from the bank of handler and dog pre-set, different for standard and for elite.

Distance of retrieve on land/reeds pre-set.

Distance between two retrieves standardised.

Set number of voice commands allowed to enter water.

Dog may be spoken to in the water, or whistled, subject to over handling penalty.

May alert dog to handler's location if dog returns by land through cover.

Delivery: dog may shake, even put down bird, but not abandon, but affects grading, or not.

Switching game penalised

### **Interim Period:**

Can probably use one panel judge.

Two if and when the WPTC to be relied on at a trial.

Nigel Wroe

08/02/2015