

A Day At A Dachshund Field Trial

By Sandi Myers

Welcome to the world of Dachshund field trialing. You might be wondering what a Dachshund field trial is like. The following is a description of a day at a Dachshund Field Trial. *It is no means a substitute for study and review of the American Kennel Club & Dachshund Club of America rules that govern these events. For more information, a copy of the rules may be obtained from both organizations. It is important that handlers and owners read a copy of the rules before entering a field trial. In fact, when one signs the entry form one states that one has done so. Another document you will want to read before attending a trial is the club's premium list or flyer regarding the event. There are often instructions for exhibitors attending.* Now that you are well informed, let's go to a field trial.

Dachshund field trials begin very early in the morning often before sunrise. If you have trouble driving in the dark, it is advisable to find your way to the grounds on the day prior to the event so you have a good idea where you are going the next morning. Watch for roadside landmarks that help you identify your directions to the grounds. Field trial procedures start very early to maximize use of daylight to conduct the trial classes. Many field trial events go from sunup to sundown.

On a typical field trial morning, usually the cook or cooks are the first to arrive at the field trial grounds. Someone needs to be sure there is a least a pot of coffee brewing! More often than not, breakfast and lunch will be served at the grounds. It is a good idea to read the premium list or flyer in advance to see if meal reservations are required by a prior deadline. The Field Trial Secretary and the Field Trial Committee are usually not too far behind the chefs, as they attend to conducting the procedures for getting the field trial started in a timely manner.

While breakfast is being served and participants gather in the club house to start the day off with a hearty meal. It is at this time the Field Trial Secretary and any assistants help take entry forms and fees. Some clubs begin collecting entries the afternoon before if they use a computer database, but usually no earlier. Do not mail your entries in advance. Dogs must be on the grounds the day of the event to be officially entered. Turning in an entry form the day before does not ensure your dog is entered and you can show up later in the day. Each form is checked to be sure it is completely filled out, including call name, AKC # and signatures, phone and/or email address. It is the Owner's responsibility to be sure the information is correct.

The entries are separated into the classes. At a typical field trial there are usually 3 or 4 classes, Open All-Age Dogs, Open All-Age Bitches, and Field Champions (this class can be divided by sex) or Field Champion Dogs and Field Champion Bitches. However, there can be as few as two or as many as four classes or more if any non-regular classes are described in the premium list. For a more detailed explanation of classes see the current edition of the Registration and Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedure for Dachshunds from the American Kennel Club. For our purposes we will assume that there are 3 classes and that this is a two day trial weekend.

Entry forms are numbered 1,2,3 etc. for each class and separately on another piece of paper the corresponding numbers are written with each dog's call name listed in the same order as the entry forms. An announcement is usually made to get everyone inside of the club house to begin procedures. The Trail Secretary or the Trial Chairman usually welcomes everyone to the trial. The judges should be announced and any changes that the Committee has had to make should be revealed before Roll-Call is done. Sometimes other instructions regarding use or management of the grounds are given at this time.

Before entries officially close, the Field Trial Secretary or the assistants will conduct Roll-Call. The dog's complete AKC registered name, titles and Call Name are read from the entry forms in numerical order. If there is a time shortage or large entry numbers just the call names will be read. A second person checks the corresponding call name/number sheet at the time of roll call. Roll Call is done for each class to be sure all entries have been placed in the proper classes and all dogs have been identified and are present. All entered

dachshunds must be present on the field trial grounds at the time entries close when entries close on the day the class is to be run. Each person who enters a dog will answer in the affirmative, “present” or “here” after the dog’s name and call name have been announced. It is fun to hear all of the titles either before after the registered name. Sometimes it is quite an alphabet soup! After an assurance that all dogs are entered in the correct class, entries will be closed.

Next the dogs in each class will be braced and running order determined. The bracing is done by drawing numbers in a random order. Some clubs use a round hamper with numbered balls that dispense the balls in order as the hamper is turned. Other clubs may draw numbers from a hat or some other means of random drawing. Bracing is done for each class using the corresponding call name/number list until all of the dogs in the class have been braced. The running order is written in a program book or on a piece of paper by each handler so they can keep track of their entries and the running order. Judges will also prepare their books at this time. A set of books for each class should be made for the club records. You can see someone is always busily writing! Some clubs post the bracing on a blackboard and do not take the time to repeat the bracing order. In the past Joy Dog Foods generously provided program and judges books that fit in your pocket. However, recently they are no longer providing the books so clubs will need to provide an alternative. You could simply record all of the running order for the stakes on one piece of ruled notebook paper or in a folding small notepad to fit in your pocket.

Upon the completion of bracing, the committee may have a few reminders, such as everyone needs to help beat the brush, pick up after yourselves in the clubhouse, keep the area inside the grounds free from litter (no Styrofoam containers in the field, and no cigarette debris), and be sure to scoopy your doggie poopy. Also keep an eye on running order. There is a time limit on waiting for dogs to come out in the field when their brace is called. Judges will usually give a designated time to meet at the starting point and how many braces they would like to have standing by to run.

The designated Field Marshal (FM) directs the handlers and the gallery to the starting point. The FM waits for the judges to find their “spotting” position and the beaters line up in a straight, tight line to flush the rabbits. The FM directs the beaters to maintain the line and keep their eyes open for movement. It is critical to “watch” for the running path of the rabbit. This is the “line” that the braces will be released upon. Beaters also talk, sing, call for the bunny to try to flush the rabbit. Most also carry sticks of some fashion from old broom handles, sorting sticks, to ski poles. Once a rabbit has been flushed the person who spots it running usually yells, Tally Ho!

The handlers usually maintain a fairly close distance to the beating line, as they need to get up to the area where the rabbit was bumped as quickly as possible, taking care not to step on the starting point or the “line”. The gallery will remain much further behind or in a place as instructed by the FM or the judges. The spotters and the FM and the judges need to be sure they know where the path or direction that the rabbit took before the dogs are released. It is very important to watch closely. Several people may see different parts of the line. Unless the judges ask, it is not up to the spotters to instruct the judges where the rabbit went, especially after the dogs have been released.

Once the judges are in view of the start of the line and have been instructed as to direction the rabbit traveled or they have seen it themselves, the handlers are told some directions about releasing the dogs on the line. The handlers should listen closely to these directions. Once the brace is released on a “line” the handlers must not say anything further to their dogs. The beaters need to remain in the place that they stopped as to not accidentally bump up another rabbit. The beaters and the gallery should be quiet once a “Tally Ho” has been called. Talking and other dogs barking can draw a working brace off the line in the direction of the noises. Also the beaters moving around in the brush can draw the dogs off. Be considerate when dogs are down, you want the same consideration for your dogs when they are working.

The judges will let the handlers know when to pick up the dogs. They may have the handlers restart the dogs, they may ask for another rabbit for the same brace, or they may have seen enough to make a decision. The handlers should remain with the beaters until the judges ask for the next brace. The FM then asks if the next

brace is ready. The handlers should acknowledge when they are ready. Then the beaters start looking for another rabbit.

The Field Marshal should always know if the next brace looks identical and give the judges a description of the dogs as to what color collars they are wearing or other distinguishing features like size, color, or coat-type. The Field Marshal should also keep track of ground covered and direction of travel of the beaters and gallery.

If you have been released by the judges after running your dog, be sure you travel across ground that has already been covered by the beaters. Try not to cross ground that has not been used. The same for bringing dogs into the field, always try to discern where the gallery is and which direction the beaters are headed. If needed ask someone who is on their way out of the field which direction to head into the field.

After each brace has run, the judges will discuss the scoring of the dogs. This will determine how many and which dogs are called back for Second Series and on. Desirable qualities that judges will be looking for are described more thoroughly in the AKC regulations. These are Searching ability, Pursuing ability, Accuracy in trailing, Obedience to commands, Proper use of voice by the dog, Willingness to go to earth, Endurance, Determination and Courage, Patience, Adaptability, Independence, Cooperation, Competitive Spirit, and Intelligence. Faulty actions would include Quitting, Backtracking, Ghost trailing, Pottering, Babbling, Swinging, Skirting, Leaving Checks, Running mute, Tightness of mouth, Racing, Running hit or miss, Lack of independence, or Bounding Off.

The rules give great detail on judging procedures which we will not take time to cover at this point.

After the final series in each class have been run the FM announces "Field Trial". This signifies the end of the class. The final four placements and NBQ (not a placement) are posted in the club house. Sometimes the order is announced in the field.

The above procedure is done for each class until the conclusion of the Field Champion class or Field Champion classes. Then the 1st place winner in the Open All-Age Dog and Bitch Stake are braced for the Best of Open, of which, the winner of this class will be braced with the Field Champion for Absolute. Or if there are two Field Champion stakes, there will be a similar runoff between the two field champions before running of Absolute.

No dogs may be put down in the field after 30 minutes following official sunset. When there are large numbers of entries at a trial, or depending on the conditions in the field, or the number of rabbits available, the classes may run concurrently to allow for completion of classes scheduled for that day. This shows the importance of starting on time and using the most of available daylight. It also shows the importance that the committee, judges, field marshals, beaters, gallery and handlers play in successfully completing the events of the day. It is definitely a cooperative event.

Meanwhile the cooks and kitchen helpers have cleaned up from breakfast and usually have some type of lunch prepared for another refill of energy. Participants help by picking up after themselves or offering to help with other duties if they can't be in the field beating etc. In other words, there is always something the exhibitors can do to help and not just sit around doing nothing but run their dog. Field trials are a cooperative event.

Awards are usually given out at the end of the trial on the first day, and on the second day, sometimes they allow the owners/handlers to leave early with awards if they have a long drive home. It is always best if one can stay for the whole trial especially on the second day. Certainly don't leave the grounds until after you know what the awards are for the stake your dog was entered in. You might be getting a call back or a ribbon.

As at all AKC events, good sportsmanship is a guiding factor in the smooth running of the trial. Participants must be guided by the rules of good sportsmanship or they can find themselves subject to a misconduct hearing. This has its own set of procedures in booklet form, also available from AKC. Good to review this ahead of time.

Some clubs offer a dinner after the first trial day. These events often include fundraisers like raffle or other games or icebreakers. Some offer an awards dinner. Usually these events are a chance to network, socialize and relax after a long day in the field.

It is important to note that Dachshund field trials are not intended for the dogs to catch the game. Dogs are encouraged to track the game not engage it. If a dog accidentally sees a rabbit while they are working, the judges will have the dogs picked up. Most trials are held in fenced areas, this is what keeps the rabbits in. If someone needs help catching a dog they are usually volunteers willing to help. If dogs see a rabbit while waiting in the gallery, it is best to keep them quite especially if other dogs are working.

Field trials are a team effort not only from club member's participation, but from exhibitors as well. One can learn from helping beat and being in the front line. Asking questions and watching are the best ways to learn about trialing your dog. Who knows maybe someday you will want to become a field trial judge.

If you now feel you ready to attend a field trial in your area, you probably are wondering what type of equipment to bring. Be sure to have a good sturdy pair of shoes or boots. Often waterproof boots that are well fitting are worth the investment. Brush pants or chaps make beating through briars much easier. Layered clothing as the temperatures during the day may fluctuate. Rain gear is must. Trials are run rain or shine. It is also good to invest in something that will last and survive trudging through the brush. A field jacket and a hat might come in handy. Sunscreen and lip protection are also recommended.

For the dog you should have a flat buckle or snap collar (preferably with no tags attached) and a leash. Also have a release line or slip lead, which can vary from parachute cording to rock climbing cord to a snag resistant line about 10 feet in length. Use something that will slip easily through the ring on the collar or through the collar and release the dog onto the line of the rabbit track. Always bring water and container out in the field for the dog especially in hot weather. Towels to clean or dry dogs if they get muddy or wet are a good idea too. Sometimes a flea comb comes in handy for removing ticks. And bring your dog's entry information.

Now you should be set to attend a trial. Good Luck, Have Fun, & Tally Ho!