Jerry and Dennis meet at the grounds for set-up at 1 pm on Thursday afternoon. They are accompanied by an apprentice, Mike.

**Dennis:**

Hi Jerry – Great to see you again – Hope you had a good flight east! I’d like you to meet Mike who will be an apprentice this weekend. Mike has judged hunt tests at the Master level but has never judged a field trial. He’s very interested in learning differences and especially how trial judges use distance and factors in setting up marking tests. This series of articles is intended to accomplish just that.

We have enlisted four experienced field trial competitors: Pat Burns, Don Driggers, Jerry Patopea, and Dennis Voigt to assist us in exploring the design and construction of marking tests. In each of the articles in this series, two of our contributors, will explore overall test philosophy, practical considerations, and actual test design. Each article will begin with a description of the general weather conditions, size of the entries, and a diagram and photograph of the field.

We hope you find this series interesting and educational.

~Terry Rotschafer & Ted Shih

**General Parameters for Open All-Age Stake**

65 dogs with a temperature: low 52, high 70 with a low humidity; all gun stations are ducks. The wind is from south 10-12 mph. Note: photo shows facing north so marks downwind. The sunrise is 6:00 am with a sunset at 8:20 pm. Trial begins Friday morning at 8:00 am and judges have until Sunday to complete. The trial help is good with a 4-wheeler available and the Apprentice will be Mike.
Dennis:
If by configuration, you mean tests such as Indents or Inlines or Hip-pockets or California doubles, I think you’ll find that both Jerry and I do not think in terms of a configuration when designing marks. Instead, we look at the factors in the field and key locations for birds that are either hard to get to or hard to find or often both. Jerry, do you agree?

Jerry:
I normally see a key bird and design my test around that. I try to adjust the other birds around that first key bird so the test is not too hard. With a good key bird I have to be careful not to make the test too hard and wipe out the field, so I adjust the other birds to get a test that will separate but not destroy the field of dogs.

Dennis:
Yes, I also look for a key bird and sometimes two especially with variable winds, but, I also try to avoid a one-bird test. I really seek a middle of the road test, ideally with all birds showing different performances by the dogs. If the test produces lots of variation in performances it’s usually the right level. It’s easy to set up a test that is much too hard or much too easy. The challenge is the right level of test.

I should clarify, Mike, that often we could end up with a particular configuration but that is a result of finding three to four marks based on factors or concepts. However, I am always aware of certain concepts when designing marks.

By that, I mean things like finding check down birds that dogs might be prone to overrun. This is enhanced if the dog has already made a longer retrieve. Or, conversely, a longer bird that dogs would have a tendency to break down and start hunting early, perhaps after passing the flyer station. The influence of other marks is often very important including whether the other gunners are retired or not, so that’s always an important consideration.

But on so many occasions having a wide open test with lots of room among guns is often more effective than a pair of tight guns that the dog and handler can line off of. I find that no matter how much I set up tests in training or judging, that it is always surprising how tight the marks are when you go out into the field. But, I do find that if you give the dogs lots of room to run around in front of or behind the gun, they often do!

Jerry:
I agree. Sometimes when you walk out in the field, it’s way tighter than it looks from the line. Lots of times, in training, the gunners will come in and say how much tighter it looks in the field than it does at the line.

But there are two kinds of tight: Tight falls and tight lines. When you have equidistant tight birds there is difficulty defining the area of hunt of one bird or another. Oftentimes the areas overlap, and serious judgement calls can result in disputes.

Mike:
Time out, here guys. Tight falls? Tight lines? I don’t know what you mean. It might help me if you drew a picture to illustrate what you are saying.

Dennis:
I totally agree with you on that Jerry. Some of the most difficult tests involve momma-poppas (two birds thrown from the same station in opposite directions) but I think they are extremely hard to judge properly.
Jerry:
The same is true on converging birds or tight hip pockets. Oftentimes, the hunt areas overlap each other and make it hard to judge. Defining a switch is not necessarily a good idea. I like to think of the hunt area for each bird as if the other birds weren’t there, and give the dog room to hunt. But, the pencil marks are still on the page, and don’t look good if the hunt extends in length itself.

Mike:
Guys, you are losing me. What is an overlapping hunt area? Why is it hard to judge?

Dennis:
Yes, judging two birds close together requires very careful observation of the dog. Switching in the Rule Book is an issue of perseverance. Did the dog go to the area of the fall, hunt, fail to find and then leave? A quick run through always causes discussion, but so does “what is the area of the fall?” It’s also an issue if a dog returns to an old fall. (Editor’s note. The Rule Book, Standard Procedure, Paragraph 33, page 34 states: “A dog that returns to and systematically hunts the area of a marked fall previously retrieved should be eliminated from the stake, provided, that where the area of the previously retrieved fall overlaps the area of a subsequently retrieved fall, no elimination penalty should be incurred for hunting the area of the overlap.”)

Jerry:
Tight lines with a lot of length difference often leads to bowed lines with a lot of dogs who avoid the line to one bird because of the other bird and then arc their way to the fall, or get lost because of avoiding the line on the way out. Also, if the hunt pattern on the short bird overlaps or crowds the line for the long bird, then the dog may get confused as to which bird it is actually looking for, or push off that hunt area on the next bird. Sometimes they appear to be looking for both birds at the same time, even though there is a lot of depth between the birds, and may outright switch and maybe even change their hunt area focus. When they get lost on one bird like this they sometimes don’t know which bird they pick up, or are befuddled by the process. Obviously this makes the next bird a lot harder, and this will provoke an avoidance line to the next bird.

Mike:
What about distance? It seems that the major difference between hunt tests and field trials is distance. Why are so many marks so long?

Dennis:
Well frankly, I think a lot of field trial marks are too long. I just don’t think you need to go 500-600 yards as I have seen. Invariably, such long guns can be very difficult to find and the birds very hard to see. Quite often, the dogs will identify the guns and see the motion of a bird, but, at some time during the day, the slightest change in lighting conditions and the dogs miss seeing these birds. I have no problem with marks as long as 350 yards with good visibility. (Editors’ note: The Rule Book, Standard Procedure, Paragraph 8, Pages 28-29 states: “On marked retrieves, a dog should be able to see each bird in the air and as it falls, and the Guns shall be so stationed as to be conspicuous to and easily identified by the dog.”)

But to answer your question why longer than hunting tests? For me, it is a matter of factors. Factors include, wind, water, terrain, cover and even distractions. Factors will influence a dog and the path it takes towards a bird. Some factors do not become significant at the shorter distances of hunt tests. For example, a cross-wind often doesn’t cause a dog to fade with it until the dog has run a couple of hundred yards. Then, they start to give in. Similarly, with terrain: dogs tend to fall down or climb hills but not angle for long. Difficult cover or changes at a long distance cause dogs to break down and hunt early. Jerry – what’s your experience with very long marks where you run?
Jerry:
Well let me answer this in two parts. First, a lot of birds are put out long because long birds get answers. There may be a lot of better birds along the way that judges don’t see, but they know long birds get answers. One of the best quotes I ever heard was when I was working for Ed Minoggie long ago. We were standing near the line at the Open watching the test dog run. It was a triple with a really long retired bird. He said, in his very dry way, “what these judges lack in depth they make up for in length.” That is often very true. With lighting changes during the day it is often a much different test in the afternoon than it was in the morning. We will try to set a test here which will be equally fair visibility wise all day long. We will do this primarily by keeping the guns out of the shadows and out of the falling sun in the afternoon and not back-lit.

The second part of my answer is that hunt tests are set up to judge different aspects of retrievers, and they have limits in the Rulebook as to how far the judges can put birds. Their hands are tied. They have to be short, compared to field trials.

Dennis:
Jerry, I love your Ed Minoggie quote! I bet I will be thinking it to myself often when in the gallery. I hope every judge hearing this will reflect on their long birds! So Mike, what do you see now?

Mike:
In this field I see some interesting cover out past that mound but also the closer area on the left with the water bay and point looks interesting, but this is a land test!

Dennis:
I agree with you on both counts. I am particularly attracted to the water area where there are multiple entries. We certainly have time to use some water with this set-up with our goal being to get through the 65 dogs on Friday without a split test. However, I see at least four to five different locations for the birds near that water area. I see multiple ways places that you can locate the gunners throwing either left or right. I’m thinking that some dogs will avoid or at least “speed” cheat around the corners, others will be watery and swim past the point and some will mis-mark the distance and because of the entries, re-entries and exits, they will either hunt short or over-run. I have in my mind that this mark is retired and would not be the go-bird. More likely it would be after the flyer which would be longer.

Note: Above diagram FIG. 5 shows an overhead view of 4 quite different mark locations (#1-4). Gunner could be located in various locations to throw these marks either to the right or to the left. Some locations are #1 – A bird on the far shore so that the route is water all the way. #2 – A bird on the far shore so that the line crosses over the point to just left of the spruce tree. #3 – A bird near the end of the point on land and #4 – A bird on the point in line with the spruce tree.

Jerry:
Well that water is certainly inviting, and it will probably be a deciding factor in who wins this field trial. If we put the bird in the right place, it will be a great bird for us to watch. This is a “Driving Check down” bird and should be very difficult. I want to throw the bird where the dog won’t be rewarded for speed cheating, but rather will get himself in trouble for that, so, I would throw the bird to the left and block the cheater with the holding blind. It will also make the bird a lot more difficult if we throw across the bay, with the gunner on one side and the bird on the other.

Mike:
What do you mean by a “Driving Check down” bird?

Jerry:
A Driving Check down bird is a bird where the dog has to drive through a barrier or an obstacle or past another bird and then check down. That is a very difficult thing for a dog to do. In this case, he will drive through some water and then check down. He will need good presence of mind to do that.

Dennis:
Your point about not rewarding a speed cheat is similar to the idea that I have in both training and testing – I don’t like to reward a dog with the bird for giving into a factor. However, I would not want this bird to be a key factor in determining the winner if we are just looking at the “cheaty” line to the bird.

Mike:
Fault #10) We are looking for a dog that marks well and also has the courage, conviction, and perseverance to drive through uncomfortable environment to retrieve the bird. We are looking for a dog that wants the bird more than it wants to stay dry and comfortable.

So if we look at the left bird placement, and the water, I really don’t want to score whether a dog runs down the bank and around the corner of the pond and gets the bird, but if we put the bird where it’s actually through that obvious part of the water then I am obligated by the book to score the line. It is a water retrieve, even though this is the first series. If we threw one of those birds, I would want to have a very serious discussion with Dennis about scoring that particular bird, so we were in sync before we started the trial about the penalty for running around the corner. I would not want to run all the dogs and then have a disagreement about the line to that mark and how to score it. That would make for a poor day.

That’s what I like about the bird by the spruce tree. It has a little bit of water, just enough for a dog to negotiate and keep his mind on where he’s going, and if he doesn’t, there is a natural barrier of the tree to significantly make his job of finding the bird a lot harder. I don’t have to score the line too much, because the natural hazard will do the work for me. The dog will fight the elements and maintain focus or get lost and have a hunt.

On the middle bird, I will commend the dog who can and does run a straight line to the bird, or if he makes a wide bow off line. I will note it and it might make a difference, but I think it will be hard enough for the dog who starts on a bad line to straighten out and get the bird before a significant hunt occurs, that...
I won’t have to worry much about that. The natural penalty of avoiding the line will cause a poor score with a poor mark.

**Dennis:**

It seems to me that a lot of judges decide the winners based on straight lines. Unfortunately, this is often true in the Derby where the emphasis is supposed to be on natural ability and marking not trained ability. You can find things like “going out of his way by land to an excessive degree to avoid water” or reluctance to enter rough cover, water, mud, or “disturbing too much cover by not going to the area” (Moderate Fault #2) but to me the key is “does the dog know where the bird is?” This seems to be a contentious issue among many judges when deciding placements. But, even though I am not a fanatic about judging lines on marks, I have never found this to be an issue with a co-judge. Invariably, I find it boils down to the hunts not the lines.

I will admit I do draw the dog’s lines to the birds unlike some respected judges I know. Why? Because it really helps me to recall the dog’s performance at the end of the day. In some cases, it also uncovers a dog’s weaknesses or strengthens my view of how he navigates and shows both natural talent and trained skills in the all-age stakes. But to me a key is where the dog starts his hunt – not how he gets there unless it’s flagrant avoidance. Where the dog starts to hunt – that is where he thinks the bird is. Where is that in relation to the area of the fall? The Rule Book actually talks a lot about the area of the fall and for good reason—it is difficult to define. *(Editors’ note: There is an extensive discussion of what constitutes the “Area of Fall” in the Rule Book, Supplement, Part II, pages 50-51.)*

I distinguish greatly between training and testing. When I train, I know that the dog that diverts his line may get lost, so I really work on straight lines. In contrast, while judging I try to set up tests so that the dog that gives into factors loses his mark and gets lost, he needs to know where the bird is. BUT if he can deviate a bit and still go directly to the bird – kudos to him. On this water bird, I wouldn’t care a lot if the dog just missed the water but went to the bird. The bird is designed so that if the dog cheats the water many won’t get the bird!

For me and I think the Rule Book, the dog that runs a straight line but then disturbs a lot of cover and eventually stumbles on the bird is worse than the crooked line but the dog knows where the bird is. The Rule Book helps by telling us to favor the dog that consistently zeroes in closer to the bird. It doesn’t say the straightest lines win. I am always looking for the consistent all-around dog rather than the one mark wonder!

**Jerry:**

I wish I could agree with you Dennis, about judges giving reward for straight lines, but unfortunately, I can’t. I see a lot of judges not rewarding the extra effort a dog gives for going through tough terrain. As you mentioned, some judges don’t even write the lines in their book. I just don’t understand this. I reward the dog who will take that extra effort to go through the tough terrain. That’s the kind of dog I am looking for. That’s the kind of dog I want to own. That’s the kind of dog I want to promote. I don’t want to promote the retriever breeds with dogs who won’t put out the effort to go through the cover or the water. I don’t give kudos for the dog who runs around terrain. Most people train to have a
dog go straight to the bird, not avoiding the terrain en route. If it didn’t matter how a dog went to the bird, I think they would train differently. They would teach their dogs to avoid all the obstacles and still find the bird. They would teach them how to get the bird without getting their feet wet and how to get around heavy cover and then triangulate to the bird. I don’t know anyone who trains that way, because that’s not the kind of dog they really want.

The dog who takes the cover en route, or the water en route is giving that extra effort I like to see in a retriever. I like to reward it, and I do. I note the courage of that dog, and I note the fault of the dog who runs around.

Dennis:

I am not sure we disagree that much. First, I like the same kind of dog you describe and I always reward courage and style. I also agree if you are talking about avoiding cover or obstacles or tough going, in that the Rule Book faults those behaviors and that’s another reason I draw lines. However, if you are just talking bowed lines in the absence of obstacles or small corner cheats (not “an excessive degree” as the book says for a moderate fault), then I am little concerned in comparison to whether the dog can mark. The Rule Book emphasizes faulting a “reluctance to enter rough cover, water, ice, mud or other situations involving unpleasant going for the dog” but I cannot find a reference to straightest lines win!
Mike: I think if we throw middle, left, right, the dog will have to work a lot harder to get to the middle bird than if we move the left gun to the left. Moving the left gun to the left makes the middle bird easier because the dog can center the middle gun between the water, which dogs don’t like to do. On the other hand, if we move the left gun to the right, the dog will have to work hard to stay in front of the gun. The flyer gun may also pull the dogs to the right, and depending on where we put the left gun, that may push him to the right, avoiding where they’ve just been.

The flyer on the right should be a fair bird all day long. The birds should fly into an equal area with uniform cover for every dog. There’s plenty of space so we shouldn’t have any rabbits in front of the spruce tree with no water, and it won’t conflict any of our other birds. The flyer guns are far enough off line to the middle bird for most dogs to distinguish, but I’m sure some dogs will want to revisit that station on the way to the long bird. Perfect.

I think if we shoot middle, left, right, the dogs will see all the birds best, but the middle gun should be visible enough all day so we could shoot left, middle, right. That will require a more experienced dog and handler, and be a little more interesting to watch.

Mike: What difference does it make which order the birds are shot?

Jerry: It makes a lot of difference. First, a dog will naturally swing his head from the outside gun to the outside gun if the middle bird is distinctly longer, as it is here. It takes training and experience and a good handler to get the dog to look long down the middle to see a second bird thrown. Also, the handlers will probably want to pick up the left bird second, which is not the way the dog saw them shot, and will require more teamwork and a more experienced dog to be successful.

Dennis: I agree that left, middle, right is definitely more difficult for the dogs to watch the middle bird well and would require more training and teamwork at the line, especially given the flyer on the right—an obvious head-swing. Personally, I try to avoid that kind of a test unless I feel the need for a much tougher test. I want the dogs to see the birds and if they don’t I am not evaluating their marking. I definitely hear judges say, “well if we shoot the long bird second, maybe they won’t see it!” Given this great field, I would opt for the middle, left, right order.

Jerry: Okay, we can shoot it that way. But let’s leave the option open and run a test dog in the morning and maybe then we will want to change the shooting order.

Dennis: Jerry, over the years I have learned to not be swayed by the test dog performance. I use them for mechanics and for visibility and for the handlers to see the hazards. I rarely use them to evaluate our test. Often the dogs are either unqualified or lucky! I have seen a test dog ace the test and the next 10 entrants fail it! Go figure!

Jerry: I agree sometimes it’s hard to tell anything other than mechanics by the test dog, but let’s leave the shooting order open until we see if the visibility is what we expect it to be in the morning. Now, back to the left water bird, I just can’t see why we would throw the bird to the right. That would just help any dog who is avoiding all or some of the water. To me, any bird we throw over there should be to the left. I see four birds over there which would work well with these other birds and the wind. The first option would be to stand on the close shore and throw the bird across the first bay and land the bird on the point. The second option would be to stand the gun on the point and throw across to the far bank, so the line to the bird would be water all the way. The third option would be to have the gun pretty much in line with the spruce tree, but in front of the second piece of water, and throw to the left across that second bay. Building a spruce blind there would blend in real well with the tree behind. This would be the most interesting bird to me. The fourth option would be to have the gun about in line with the short point but on the far bank, throwing left.

These four birds are all thrown into the wind to various degrees, so if the dog cuts behind the gun he will have to work back into the wind to get the bird. On the other hand, if he takes too much water he will be upwind and will have to check down without smelling anything to get the bird. If he gets deep and starts circling downwind, or behind the gun and starts circling downwind, it will be a challenge for him to get over to the left side of the gun to get the bird. He won’t be getting any help from his nose when he’s behind the gun or deep. He would also have to hunt toward the water, which dogs don’t like to do.

The fourth option would widen the test out the most, and the dog would have the most room to wind the bird if his line is between the gun and the bird, and would probably be the easiest of my four options, and make the test the easiest also, because it widens the test out and kind of squares up the field for the center bird.

Mike: What do you mean by square up the field?

Jerry: Well, by moving the left gun to the left we would be centering the middle gun between the two outside gun stations, and being as the middle bird is almost straight downwind, it makes the middle bird easier because the dog can go center between the two outside guns and arrive in bird country. It’s a lot easier to get to the middle bird than if we move the left bird over to the right. Now the dog will have to angle more toward the left gun than the right gun. That’s harder.

My favorite bird on the left is having the gun stand in line with the spruce tree in front of the second water and throwing left across the channel. There, the dog will go through two pieces of water if he goes straight to the bird. If he skips the first piece he is likely to end up behind the gun and on a downwind arc, and on the wrong side of the spruce tree and be in trouble having to hunt back into the wind, if only slightly, and may even switch to the mid-
dle bird. The dog will really have to mark this bird more than any of the other options, and also hold his line because he won't get much help from the wind. All of the other birds offer a higher degree of luck for a dog not really knowing where the bird is or speed cheating the water and still ending up with the bird.

But I could live with any of these four throws. Dennis, it's up to you. Can you go with any of these birds? If so, I think we have a really good test.

**Dennis:**

My favorite location was also with the gunner on the middle point. I wasn't entirely sure the thrower could always get it across to the far shore and that is critical. If he couldn't, I would opt for throwing out to the end of the point but not in the water. As always we need to find out about our throwers from the stake marshal.

Jerry raises an important but difficult topic when he talks about centering the middle gun. While we don't totally understand how dogs see marks and choose destinations, there is little question that our training uses "targets and "pictures and slots." If there is a single object in the field and the bird nearby, the marks will be more accurate than in a featureless field. Similarly, if there is a slot, dogs will learn to use it as a sort of target. For example, that slot between the mound and the tall pines on the right would be easy for well-trained dogs to line through on a blind. The hazard would be getting out of sight on either side when they go through the "key-hole." As a mark, they might be prone to break down after going through the gap since that is a break down point where the "picture" will suddenly change. So, when the correct route through a gap is not in the middle, dogs may have more trouble. That's one reason why the long bird a bit to the left and the short gunner, a bit to the right makes the route to the two retired marks more difficult.

Jerry, as a Westerner, I'd like to hear your views on wind since my more limited experience out West is that the wind can be much more variable. I feel quite strongly that wind is the most significant factor in a lot of all-age marking tests. Dogs on the way, especially to longer birds, are very strongly influenced by wind. They are also very dependant on their noses to smell birds. While everybody talks about dogs using their eyes to mark, I believe that they primarily use their eyes to navigate to the area of fall and keep spatial oriented while hunting, BUT they find birds with their noses. I have kept track often in tests and it's not uncommon that the actual discovery of the bird is with the nose 90% of the time!

So often, everybody talks about setting up tests so that the marks are downwind. They say this to avoid dogs getting so-called "wind saves." Dogs smelling birds when running past at a distance can turn a difficult mark into an easy one. Next thing we see is that the test is not getting any variation and the dogs all score the same.

But, as you well know when judging in some areas such as the mountains out west, you can expect the wind to change direction all day! I've seen times when the wind was a different direction for each bird for the same dog!! I think in such circumstance you really need a more open marking tests with birds thrown in different directions. Sometimes one bird will be effective and sometimes another. You simply can't rely on a one bird test. Now when I have a reliable forecast of a steady and strong wind all day, I have far less problem with a cross-wind than most judges. The reason is because the dogs will fade with the wind over distance and terrain and cover and not even make it to the area of the fall.

**Jerry:**

A variable wind can change a test a lot but the birds don't necessarily have to be wide or long. One thing I like about our test here is if the wind shifts right or left the test still remains hard. An east wind (from the right) would still make it difficult to find both the long bird and the left bird. Dogs coming out of the water on the left would be prone to continue down wind and deep, while dogs avoiding the water would still have a tough time getting to the left of the tree. On the middle bird, if they took a wide line to the right they would have to correct more to get downwind of the bird. They might also be influenced by blow back scent from the flyer and tend to stop behind the flyer guns and set up a hunt. The flyer would be more difficult to get a consistent fall, but the cover is consistent throughout the whole area so I think that would be okay.

If the wind changed to the west, the flyer would be easy to get a good long flight. The left bird would still be blocked from wind saves and the dogs would be more likely to line behind the gun and then hunt downwind. If they crossed the water early they would have to check down and find the bird without wind help. Going for the long bird I think they would likely bow more to the right and then turn downwind and hunt behind the long gun, and would be more attracted to hunting the mound on the right and even the trees to the right of the mound.

If the wind turns in our face, the flyer may be harder because the birds would maybe turn right, and there will be a lot of blow back feathers scenting the area. But I don't think that will be a big problem. The left bird should still be protected from wind saves because the spruce tree will block the scent cone on the left, and it will still be hard for a dog going behind the gun to get around to the left of the tree to get the bird. Rather, they might be picking up some drag back from the middle bird and be influenced by that, maybe even switching to the long bird.

So, with the left bird by the spruce tree, we have a solid test no matter which way the wind blows.

I also love to see a big crosswind bird that requires the dog to really persevere and drive all the way to the bird to get it, without being saved by his nose from a great distance downwind. A bird like that requires special design to prevent the handlers from shipping the dogs far into the wind and hoping for the fade into the fall. If the wind starts blowing from the west or the east tomorrow, we will end up with that crosswind bird in the middle. The left gun will prevent the handlers from sending too far left, and the flyer gun and blow back scent will prevent them from sending too far right. I want my winner to be the best performer this weekend rather than the luckiest, and I think we have a test which will hold up under any wind so a dog doesn't luck into a win. This weekend we are forecast with a consistent wind, so our job is a little easier because of that. But we don't have to worry much with these birds, because the test will be hard and hold up no matter which way the wind blows.

**Dennis:**

Mike, I am sure from your hunting test judging that you know how effective a crosswind land or water blind can be even at short distances. In marking tests, the shorter birds have to placed where the route to the bird would take most dogs up wind of the bird. For example, if a bird was thrown to the edge of a shore with an off-shore wind, the dog taking a land route would not smell the bird but would have to mark it. Here we are using a tendency of dogs to skirt water to miss smelling the bird. Even though the factors are not in concert, it's the same idea as on water marks.
**Design and Construction**

where you have a strong on-shore wind and the dogs are attracted to land plus are pushed by the wind. So, understanding whether factors are in concert or not and which factors are primary is very important.

**Mike:**

Explain what you mean by factors in concert.

**Dennis:**

Factors will push or pull a dog a certain way. If you can design a mark so that route to the bird has two to three factors all influencing the dog the same direction you have greatly increased the difficulty of getting to the mark. A bonus is that if conditions change during the day, you may still have one to two factors working together even though another factor would become inconsequential.

**Mike:**

So what did you two finally decide about the water bird?

**Dennis:**

I do like the bird Jerry likes with the gunner standing on the point and throwing left across to the far shore. A good “spruce” camouflaged holding blind would be in line with the big shoreline spruce and be ideal. This bird is as you say a Driving Check down bird. I will tell you I have some uncertainty about whether it will hold up as well as a bird thrown to the end of the point. I think a lot of dogs will run right past perhaps cheating to shore instead of jumping straight across or they will swim past on the outside to the far shore. Once on the far shore, I think far fewer will check back into the wind AND the water. It will be a natural barrier to the check back. If the bird is on the far shore, I think more dogs will check back after a hunt even if they go deeper. Importantly, as the scent builds up during the day, it will be easy to check back at the far shore but not all the way across if the bird was on the point. So, I think both birds would work but it’s not easy to predict which would work the best all day.

**Jerry:**

In this case I think the bird placement on the far shore will work and with our experienced thrower and visual conditions the angle back throw will be fine. Shortcuts here will be square across the water and upwind of the bird or cutting the corner and not fighting the water factor. If we use the bird landing just left of the tree (#2), that will put them behind the gun and on the wrong side of the tree if they squirt the water.

**Dennis:**

Speaking of angles, Mike, I should add that I often prefer to throw birds square to give the dog the best look at the bird. However, on this short bird there will be no problem with the dogs seeing an angle back throw. I’d prefer the longest bird to be square for visibility. In this case, we do not have to worry about the back-lighting changes that often occur in the midday or in the afternoon because we are facing north. It’s often hard to predict the variation in fliers but generally you want to shoot with the wind, not into the sun and relatively square so variable flights aren’t unfair. I avoid shooting fliers into the test unless the guns are totally isolated. Variable long and short fliers pinched to another mark simply make the test unequal for different dogs.

As far as angles go, in general, they are important considerations for the route to the bird. That angle back water bird has far more angles than a square throw. Dogs like shortcuts and often opt for the right-angle route. Always think about angles on the route to birds – both marks and blinds!

**Mike:**

What factors do you see that will push or pull a dog and what do you have to do about them?

**Dennis:**

A final discussion for me, Jerry, is how do you think our test could change during the day? You said lighting should be good and we have a consistent wind but this test will take all day. Do you have any concerns about drag-back, scent in the area of fall, trail development or anything else?

**Jerry:**

Lighting will be good as our test runs north and the gun stations and birds will be lit up all day. There are no trees to create shadows, no ground fog or smoke to obscure visibility. The wind should hold steady all day. Enroute trails will be scattering as dogs head to the marks due to the ditch they cross early. Many dogs do use each other’s trails when negotiating their way to birds. This ditch will make it less likely for one obvious trail to develop. So Mike, this test configuration turns out to be a classic long retired down the middle, short retired on the outside, flyer of the other side, but designed by the factors in the field rather than by looking for a particular pattern.

**Mike:**

This has been very helpful for me but I can’t help but wondering how often you guys “lay an egg?” or get totally surprised by your test?

**Jerry:**

Well sometimes the dog work is better than I think it will be and sometimes it’s worse. That’s the way it is. But if I’m careful to be sure the grounds are safe and the dogs will be able to see the gunners and the birds all day, it will be fair for everyone. Laying an egg would be like running in the dark, or starting too early with poor visibility or not walking the grounds the day before to see where the dogs will be going, and then having to change the setup on Friday morning.

Time is always a factor in having a good test and getting the best winner. Being fully prepared before 8 am Friday helps immensely. Having someone on setup from the club is really helpful on setup day so they really know what to expect equipment and manpower wise for Friday morning. Unnecessary delays in setup can really lead to laying an egg.

**Dennis:**

Hey! It can happen – we surely can’t always predict how every bird will produce variation. I know many Pros with a ton of experience that often change their training tests after two to three dogs. A judge doesn’t have that luxury. As an Amateur trainer with two to three dogs, I have learned how difficult it is to get set-ups right the first time when training. But that is also how to learn. It takes a lot of work to observe, respond and remember. I would say an excellent way to avoid a disaster is to carefully use the Field Trial Judges Fundamentals and Check List as published by Retriever News and Retrievers ONLINE. If you adhere to those Fundamentals and review the Checklist for your test, your chances of a setting up and judging a bad trial are greatly diminished.