

Frequently Asked Questions, Series No. 1

by Mike Tome

What is the difference between Hunt Tests and Field Trials? The most basic difference are that Field Trials are competitive, with judges having to pick dogs that place first, second, etc., and Hunt Tests are noncompetitive, with the dog's training and ability being compared to a standard. The standard defines the qualities that should be demonstrated by retrievers at a variety of levels of experience.

Because Field Trials are competitive and only one dog can win, they tend to have retrieves that are more difficult and require a higher degree of precision in retrieving a mark or running a blind. Our retrievers are so highly trainable, and so highly trained nowadays that long distances and precise handling are a prerequisite for allowing judges to separate out the placements in a Field Trial.

In hunt tests, dogs qualify according to whether they meet a standard established for various levels. Thus, in any given test, all dogs entered may qualify, no dogs may qualify, or most typically, some number in between the two. Hunt tests are supposed to mimic true hunting scenarios. Consequently, you will not see marks or blinds much over 100 yards in typical hunt tests.

What is a good book to buy to train my retriever?

While by no measure a complete list, here are several books that beginning trainers might find useful:

[Water Dog](#), by Richard A. Wolters

[Game Dog](#), by Richard A. Wolters

[Retriever Training for the Duck Hunter](#), by Robert Milner

[Tri-Tronics Retriever Training](#), by Jim and Phyllis Dobbs

[Training Retrievers to Handle](#), by D. L. and Ann Walters

You can order these books at your local bookstore, or through hunting dog magazines such as Gundog and The Retriever Journal.

Beginning trainers really should read several books and choose a method that seems most appropriate for the dog, trainer and the situation at hand. Many times experienced trainers will use a technique from one book for one situation and a different technique from a totally different author for another situation. Pick techniques that you are comfortable with. It is also a good idea to join a local retriever club and seek advice from more experienced trainers.

If retrievers love to retrieve, why should I force fetch my retriever?

The Force Fetch (Conditioned Retrieve) is not so much about training what most retrievers love to do (retrieve!) as it is teaching the dog control, discipline, and that the retrieve is something you do whenever the boss asks, whether its fun or not. It doesn't matter if you are training a dog for hunting, hunt tests, or field trials, there will likely come a time that you want your dog to retrieve a bird under difficult circumstances. The conditioned retrieve teaches a dog that it not only must retrieve when it is fun and it wants to, but the dog must also retrieve whenever the boss wants it to, even if it doesn't look like it will be too much fun. The conditioned retrieve, when done properly, gives you this control over your dog. Many trainers also believe that the conditioned retrieve process also forms a basis for other training steps that you will use in developing your dog into a full fledged hunting retriever. As with any technique, you should consult with books and experienced trainers if you should decide to conduct the conditioned retrieve training on your own. You must understand perfectly what it is you want to accomplish with each step of the training.