

# Improving the Mechanics of Your Judging Assignment

By Dennis R. Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE

It's always a pleasure to attend a trial where the judges know what they're doing, have control of the situation and everything runs smoothly. The "know what they're doing" part may be a result of knowledge, experience and favourable winds, grounds and weather. The smooth and control part is something all judges can improve with a bit of care and thought. This article will present a few tips for smooth control.

## Communication

This is a major key to judging a smooth trial. There should be no guessing by judges, marshals or workers. The only way to achieve this is through talking. It starts on set-up day and must continue until the results are in. Make a sincere effort and talk with both your co-judge and your marshal during set-up. Your viewpoints and attitudes to various topics will help everyone understand your needs and wants. Generally speaking, you will find people will make an effort to meet your desires if sincere and reasonable. In contrast, when they have to guess, you will find that the effort to help may be considerably lower.

## Two-Way Radios

The single biggest factor to running a smooth trial is the ability to remain in continuous contact with your judge, marshal and workers. To be able to do this without yelling and shouting over wind, water and distance is critical to your trial atmosphere. Two-way radios are the secret here. These things are gold!!! During set-up the day before as well as during the trial, the ability to clearly and accurately communicate with your co-judge, marshal, and helpers can make all the difference in the world. Radios are especially useful when positioning gunners, boats, blinds, thrown birds and retired guns. During the trial when something needs adjustment, it's so much better to talk one-on-one rather than scream in front of all. It's also more polite and civilized. The last thing any handler wants to hear as he leaves the line is "Throw that bird better for the next dog!" Checking with blind planters and retired guns via radios is smooth and quiet. This communication is so important that I know some judges who carry their own set of radios with them. I urge all field event clubs to consider acquiring their own sets. The GE headphone types have been popular among trainers and used with success at many trials. Unfortunately they are no longer made although reconditioned units are quite reliable if batteries are fresh. For overall durability, robustness and range the Motorola units are becoming the standard among clubs and trainers. These units are compact and able to withstand heavy duty use. They come in 1.5 to 5 watts output. The low end is very adequate at the stake but the high end 5 watt units will allow clear communication over the range of many trial grounds. You can get 1-2 or more channel models with UHF or VHF. Lower watt models such as SP10's are available from Motorola, some phone companies, Radio Shack. High watt models such as SP50's are available from Motorola. Depending on the battery pack you can get 6-8+ hours operation. Rechargeable units may run from \$175-\$500 but reconditioned units are available at reduced costs. Other companies may provide equivalents. In conclusion, 2 way radios will go a long way to helping run a trial.

## Tips at the Line

Assuming you set up a reasonable test, the flavour and atmosphere of your trial will be strongly influenced by the events at the line. Here are a few tips to smooth out those events.

**Marking the Line:** It's important to have a clear and distinct line. Handlers should not be uncertain about the line and should not have to ask, "Where's the line?" A mat or painted box is clear but paint needs redoing during a big series. If you have a log, flagging tape, painted rocks or something special, make sure it's easy to identify like, "Sit your dog behind the log." It's much better to have something that requires no instructions. Locate your chair and the last holding blind so that there is a direct and obvious path from the blind to the line. Don't navigate dogs in front of the honour dog, over your kit bag and your lunch sandwich.

With the dog on line be very conscious of where you or the signalling judge stands. Your position must be clear to the gunners but totally non-distracting to the running or honouring dog. This means your movement and your shadow must be behind the dogs. Be aware that in a long series the sun angle changes greatly. If you see your co-judge standing where interference could occur, it behooves you to point out, in private, that we better not stand there!

Signalling to gunners can be a bit of a trick. I use my 8" x 11" judges' book binder as a signalling device. It is white on one-side and fluorescent orange on the other. I have found no circumstances where one of these was not adequate. The best way to signal is to clearly and distinctively signal to each gun. My favourite method is raise the book from chest height to above my head for each gun. I do NOT like the method employed by some judges who hold the book above their head for all birds while they simply tilt the book forward to signal the next gun. At 250 yards, that tilt is a subtle movement that requires eagle eyes or guesswork by gunners! The background is very important and with your two-way radios you can easily check that each gunner can see you clearly.

**Talking on Line:** Trivial chitter-chatter on line should be avoided but the line should also not be a chamber of silence. A pleasant good morning or similar greeting should be offered to the first and the 100th contestant. Too often judges are too gloomy and that helps increase the nervousness of the nervous! On the other hand, do not interfere with the handler who needs to concentrate on the test and his dog.

Don't ask the handler if "they know the test". Firstly, they should. Secondly, the experienced handler will usually say, "No, explain it." So that his dog can spend an extra 2 minutes looking things over. However, if the handler does ask a question, be prepared to answer it clearly but succinctly. The preferred method to release a dog to retrieve is by giving a number. A number such as '75' can be given as '5' to avoid too many syllables. The number allows your co-judge and the handler to check that we have all the right dog. If you happen to forget momentarily, say "dog" but not the handler's or dog's name. If a no-bird occurs, clearly state "no-bird" and if necessary tell the dog to go off line. Avoid running up and interfering/ blocking the dog's view. That is the handler's job and you may be unconsciously affecting the dog. The rule book states that the dog should wait a few dogs when an unfair situation develops such as a no-bird, i.e., it is not the handler's option to do what he wants. The standard is to go back three dogs. If a dog comes to line and something happens, like a delay, before the dog sees any bird, I allow the dog to run (come right back). This is another case when you should have a clear consistent rule which you apply, further presenting an appearance of smooth control.

Finally, it is important for you, your co-judge or the marshal to declare "guns ready" as the dog approaches the line after the last retrieve. Upon delivery, thank the handler and prepare to call the next dog to line. There is nothing wrong when thanking a handler or calling a handler to use their name when known. It not only adds a personal touch but it shows you know who they are!!