

“Skill and Task Evaluation Form”

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce my good friend and colleague Jim Keller. Jim owns and operates one of the most competitive Field Trial Spaniel kennels in the country. Wildwind Kennels is located in Knox, Maine.

In 2013 Jim showed me his “Skill and Task Evaluation Form”. Since then, several of my training and seminar groups have found the evaluation concept interesting and we’ve discussed a retriever version. Many people keep written records of their dog’s performance and training issues. Many pros and amateurs have shared a list of skill objectives and training methods. Jim’s Evaluation approach provides a process to regularly assess strengths and weaknesses in your training program and with individual dogs.

Pat Burns:

Jim, you shared with me a way of tracking your dog’s progress, performance and overall skills. It is quite detailed. We started a conversation on how you use this form, how you developed the form and what you would like to change about it. I wanted to continue the discussion in print for our readers benefit. I will share with everyone Jim’s form and a rough draft of one we started for retrievers. Jim would you like to kick this off?

Jim Keller:

Sure, Pat. We developed the form for two reasons:

One is to clearly identify the objective abilities and measurements necessary for a spaniel to excel in our field trial sport. We specifically look for natural ability, train ability and learn ability. This form further broke down each category into objective and subjective measurements.

Second was to note the progression of skill sets and clearly tie in the relationship between natural abilities and training objectives.

Some things I want to change on our form is to make sure we statistically balance out our objectives. In other words, our original form grades each task in the teaching sequence. I am not sure this really needs to be

graded through the learning process as much as a basic grade or rating on the final objective. This statistically could put too much emphasis on tasks versus process and could skew your data. For example, you don’t want a skill such as nose being on the same level of rating as a handling drill such as the double T.

I think the best way to figure out if the rating works is to measure a bunch of dogs fresh in your mind and see if the form ratings reflect your objective.

Pat Burns:

Jim, one thing that really stuck with me was your comment that using this form really takes emotion out of the equation. It promotes objective thinking. I believe that emotional thinking really skews the perspective of most amateurs. They are either too critical or not honest with themselves. And that usually revolves around last weekend’s field trial results.

I also believe having a system of evaluation assists you on keeping on track with the training process for each dog.

The second thing that this system provides is a good tool for keeping your training in balance. It is so easy to get out of balance. It is usually driven by your personal priorities from a recent trial or your dog’s shortcomings.

Jim Keller:

Everyone wants to setup corrections. I believe a tool such as this form identifies program or student deficiencies which may help identify training objectives.

Pat Burns:

How do you incorporate this tool into your daily or weekly training routine?

Jim Keller:

In all honesty it is more of a quarterly or bi-annual form for me. However I think it is most useful if you are not meeting objectives. That can be monthly or weekly if necessary.

Pat Burns:

I believe the real benefit in using this form is in setting up a six-month training plan. The

form can identify weaknesses in both your dog and in your training routine; as well as embracing and preserving your current strengths. One might, also, use this form to determine whether a current prospect is worth continuing with as a field trial or hunt test competitor.

I’ve spent time with Jim, watching him train and witnessing his success. His approach is worth paying attention to. He pays close attention to detail. We can all learn something from that.

I would like to thank Jim for taking time to share one of his tricks of the trade. Jim, I’m really looking forward to spending time, in 2015, at Wild Wind Kennels in Knox, Maine. I wish you continued success this upcoming season.

If anyone is interested in looking at the full Retriever Skills and Task Evaluation Form that Pat Burns is working on, please email pat@eliteretrievers.com ■

Elite Retrievers – Pat Burns

Visit Pat Burns at www.eliteretrievers.com



L to R, Jim Keller, NFC-FC Hearthrocks All In (Scratch) and NAFC-CNAFC-FC-AFC-CFC-CAFC Flushing Wings Annie, both owned by Fred Musone.

Here is a brief bio of Jim in his own words:

Wild Wind Kennels – Jim Keller

Over the past 27 years we have been blessed to have worked with and developed some of the best spaniels in the modern era. Overall accomplishments are: 65 All-Age Field Champion Titles; Highest Pointed Springer Spaniel in History; 2014 Hogan Award for Top Professional Handler; 5 National Championship Titles: 2015 US National Open Springer, 2013 National Canadian Amateur Springer, 2010 US National Amateur Springer, 2009 US National Open Cocker and 2006 US National Open Springer. Contact Jim and Denise Keller by phone 207-322-6236 or email jim@wildwindkennels.com

Evaluation Form provided by Jim Keller ...

SKILLS and TASK EVALUATION FORM

Dogs Name: _____
Date: _____
Evaluator: _____

Please rate each item using the following scale:

4 = Advanced (Excellent) **3** = Proficient (Above Average) **2** = Basic (Average) **1** = Minimum (Needs improvement) **NA** = not applicable

Natural Ability
4 3 2 1 NA Nose - Body Scent
4 3 2 1 NA Nose - Track
4 3 2 1 NA Use of Wind/Pattern
4 3 2 1 NA Flush/Drive on Birds
4 3 2 1 NA Retrieving – Marking Ability
4 3 2 1 NA Retrieving – Ability to Find Game
4 3 2 1 NA Courage in Cover
4 3 2 1 NA Style
4 3 2 1 NA Biddability
4 3 2 1 NA Mouth
4 3 2 1 NA Kennel Manners

Learnability
4 3 2 1 NA Ability to Focus
4 3 2 1 NA Ability to Process Task Learning
4 3 2 1 NA Overall Confidence
4 3 2 1 NA Working Attitude

Basic Trained Abilities
4 3 2 1 NA Placeboards – L/R, L/R Back
4 3 2 1 NA Heeling – On/Off Lead, L/R Side Heel
4 3 2 1 NA Bench Trained/Ladder Drills
4 3 2 1 NA Force to Piles, L/R Backs
4 3 2 1 NA Overall Basic Training

Static and Dynamic Steady Drills
4 3 2 1 NA Hup/Downs
4 3 2 1 NA Static Steady
4 3 2 1 NA Dynamic Steady
4 3 2 1 NA Flushing Drills off Placeboards
4 3 2 1 NA Dynamic Steady to Gunshot only
4 3 2 1 NA Overall Steadiness

Pattern/Control Drills
4 3 2 1 NA Basic 6 Buckets
4 3 2 1 NA Basic 12 Buckets

This is a condensed form. For the full-length version, contact Jim Keller at jim@wildwindkennels.com

RETRIEVER Skills and Task Evaluation Form

Dog's Name _____

Date _____

Evaluator _____

Please rate each applicable item using the following scale.

5 = Excellent 4 = Above Average 3 = Acceptable 2 = BMR 1 = Deal Breaker NA = not applicable
Awesome! *Very Good* *Good* *Bare Minimum* *Not Acceptable*

Natural Ability

5	4	3	2	1	Retrieving – Marking	1
5	4	3	2	1	Retrieving – Ability to find game	2
5	4	3	2	1	Courage & Perseverance	3
5	4	3	2	1	Desire	4
5	4	3	2	1	Water Attitude	8
5	4	3	2	1	Work Ethic	9
5	4	3	2	1	Working Attitude	14
5	4	3	2	1	Heat Tolerance	15
5	4	3	2	1	Kennel / House manners	16

Land Blinds

5	4	3	2	1	Poison birds and dry shots	57
5	4	3	2	1	Red Zone Handing	58
5	4	3	2	1	Casting	59
5	4	3	2	1	Crosswinds	60
5	4	3	2	1	Key-holes	61
5	4	3	2	1	Going tight to guns	62

Blinds on Water

5	4	3	2	1	Getting in the water	64
5	4	3	2	1	Over Points	64
5	4	3	2	1	Shorelines	65
5	4	3	2	1	Angle exits and entries	66
5	4	3	2	1	Water ID at a distance	67

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Advanced Marking

5	4	3	2	1	Check down on a short retired	40
5	4	3	2	1	Balance on a medium retired	41
5	4	3	2	1	Long retired – Going the distance and fighting factors	42
5	4	3	2	1	Hip Pocket (Short or Long)	43
5	4	3	2	1	Momma-Poppas	44
5	4	3	2	1	Out-of-Order Flyer	46
5	4	3	2	1	Secondary Selection	47
5	4	3	2	1	Tight Marks	48
5	4	3	2	1	Stay in the water	50
5	4	3	2	1	Birds in the water	53
5	4	3	2	1	Big Water	54
5	4	3	2	1	Bridge Birds	55

Line Manners

5	4	3	2	1	Out of truck	71
5	4	3	2	1	To and in the Holding Blind	72
5	4	3	2	1	To Line	73
5	4	3	2	1	On Line before birds are down	74
5	4	3	2	1	On Line	75
5	4	3	2	1	Works with you for next bird alignment	77
5	4	3	2	1	Honor	78



Total Points _____ Average _____

This is a condensed form. For the full-length version, contact Pat Burns at pat@eliteretrievers.com