

Rating Test or Hunt Test?

“Why don’t you bring your puppy out to the Rating Test and see how he does on birds?” Weimaraner breeders often say these words to new owners and for many newbies it leads to their first competitive dog event.

Weimaraner Club of America (WCA) Shooting Rating Tests give an opportunity to demonstrate field performance at three, increasingly more difficult, levels of expertise. The first level, Novice Shooting Dog (NSD), is the least demanding, relies heavily on hunting instinct and measure skills that overlap with those required in the AKC Junior Hunt Test for Pointing Breeds.

At a recent Rating Test I got talking to a fellow who was recruited to be a gunner. He didn’t own a Weimaraner but had other Sporting breeds that he ran at AKC Hunt Tests. He was curious about how a Rating differed from Hunt Tests.

To explain the differences I contrasted the test requirements of the WCA NSD Rating with the AKC Junior Hunter (JH).

There were more similarities than differences. Both the Rating and Test required a demonstrated desire to hunt, boldness and initiative searching for birds, reasonable obedience to commands and gun shyness was not to be tolerated. There was divergence when it came to pointing. In the WCA NSD Rating the dog must point but even a flash point is acceptable, while for the AKC Hunt Test the dogs must hold point until the handler gets within normal gunshot range. Another minor difference is that the time given to demonstrate these skills was 20 minutes for the Rating and 15 minutes for the Hunt Test. The biggest difference was that to get the title of NSD the dog only has to compete and pass one test while for the AKC Junior Hunt Test the dog has to run in and pass four tests to get the JH title.

The curious gunner listened politely, and then observed that with the exception of having to run in 4 tests for the JH and do a little steadier pointing they were remarkably similar. He shook his head and asked, “Why do you even bother holding Ratings when Hunt Tests are available?”

Why? My personal opinion is that the beginning level Rating Test gives a golden opportunity to encourage field activities, especially for new owners who have no previous experience. Ratings give Weimaraner breeders a chance to encourage new owners to try field work in a relaxed, “you only have to do it once” setting. This is especially true for the folks who mainly show their dogs and while interested in the field are not about to try entering a more stringent form of field competition.

Ratings are sometimes criticized in Weimaraner circles as being too easy. “It’s a ‘give away’ title.” I totally disagree and rather consider the NSD Rating title as a stepping stone to other field endeavors.

The proof of this is that many owners go on to the more advanced Ratings and to AKC Hunt Tests. Leafing through a recent copy of the *Weimaraner Magazine* I looked for dogs with show and field titles and many times Rating and Hunt Test titles appear hand in hand at the end of a dog’s name.

Let’s provide new owners with a way to succeed, even if it is only in a small way, and they’ll get hooked on the sport of dogs.

Carole Lee Richards
PO Box 516, Collingswood, NJ 08108
ymar_column@yahoo.com

This column first appeared in the January 2010 issue of the AKC GAZETTE and is reprinted with permission.