

Golden Retriever Show Trials

Learn the different aspects of show trials your golden retriever may enter.

Excerpts from Comprehensive Owner's Guide: Golden Retrievers

OBEDIENCE TRIALS

Obedience trials in the US trace back to the early 1930s when organized obedience training was developed to demonstrate how well dog and owner could work together. The pioneer of obedience trials is Mrs. Helen Whitehouse Walker, a Standard Poodle fancier, who designed a series of exercises after the Associated, Sheep, Police Army Dog Society of Great Britain. Since the days of Mrs. Walker, obedience trials have grown by leaps and bounds, and today there are over 2,000 trials held in the US every year, with more than 100,000 dogs competing. Any AKC-registered dog can enter an obedience trial, regardless of conformational disqualifications or neutering.

Obedience trials are divided into three levels of progressive difficulty. At the first level, the Novice, dogs compete for the title Companion Dog (CD); at the intermediate level, the Open, dogs compete for the title Companion Dog Excellent (CDX); and at the advanced level, the Utility, dogs compete for the title Utility Dog (UD). Classes are sub-divided into "A" (for beginners) and "B" (for more experienced handlers). A perfect score at any level is 200, and compete. Only unaltered dogs can a dog must score 170 or better to earn a "leg," of which three are needed to earn the title. To earn points, the dog must score more than 50% of the available points in each exercise; the possible points range from 20 to 40.

Each level consists of a different set of exercises. In the Novice level, the dog must heel on and off lead, come, long sit, long down and stand for examination. These skills are the basic ones required for a wellbehaved "Companion Dog." The Open level requires that the dog perform the same exercises above, but without a leash, for extended lengths of time, as well as retrieve a dumbbell, broad jump and drop on recall. In the Utility level, dogs must perform ten difficult exercises, including scent discrimination, hand signals for basic commands, directed jump and directed retrieve.

Once a dog has earned the UD title, he can compete with other proven obedience dogs for coveted title of Utility Dog Excellent (UDX), which requires that the dog win "legs" in ten shows. Utility Dogs who earn "legs" in Open B and Utility B earn points toward their Obedience Trial Champion title. In 1977, the title Obedience Trial Champion (OTCh.) was established by the AKC. To become an OTCh., a dog needed to earn 100 points, which requires three first places in Open B and Utility under three different judges. The first dog to earn the OTCh. title was a Golden Retriever named Moreland's Golden Tonk, owned by Russ Klippie.

AGILITY TRIALS

Having had its origins in the UK back in 1977, AKC agility had its official beginning in the US in August 1994, when the first licensed agility trials were held. The AKC allows all registered breeds (including Miscellaneous Class breeds) to participate, providing the dog is 12 months of age or older. Agility is designed so that the handler demonstrates how well the dog can work at his side. The handler directs his dog over an obstacle course that includes jumps as well as tires, the dog walk, weave poles, pipe tunnels, collapsed tunnels, etc. While working his way through the course, the dog must keep one eye and ear on the handler and the rest of his body on the course. The handler gives verbal commands and hand signals to guide the dog through the course.

TRACKING

Any dog is capable of tracking, using its nose to follow a trail. Tracking tests are exciting and competitive ways to test your Golden Retriever's ability to and rescue. The AKC started tracking tests in 1937, when first AKC-licensed test took place as part of the Utility level at obedience trial. Ten years later 1947, the AKC offered the first title, Tracking Dog (TD). In 1950, the first Golden Retriever to the TD was Featherquest Trigger, owned by Marjorie Perry. A chip off the old block, Trigger was son of Goldwood Toby UD, the first Golden to earn the UD title an obedience trial. It was not 1980 that the AKC added the Tracking Dog Excellent title (which was followed by the Versatile Surface Tracking title (VST) in 1995. The title Champion Tracker (CT) is awarded to a dog who has earned all three titles.

FIELD TRIALS

Field trials are offered to the retrievers, pointers and spaniel breeds of the Sporting Group as well as to the Beagles, Dachshunds and Bassets of the Hound Group. The purpose of field trials is to demonstrate a dog's ability to perform its original purpose in the field. The events vary depending on the type of dog, but in all trials dogs compete against one another for placement and for points toward their Field Champion (FC) titles. The first Golden to become a Field Champion in the US was FC Rip, owned by Paul Bakewell III, this back in 1939.

Retriever field trials, designed to simulate “an ordinary day’s shoot,” are popular and likely the most demanding of these trials. Dogs must “mark” the location of downed feather game and then return the birds to the shooter. Successful dogs are able to “mark” the downed game by remembering where the bird fell as well as by the correct use of the wind and terrain. Dogs are tested both on land and water. Difficulty levels are based on the number of birds downed as well as the number of “blind retrieves” (where a bird is placed away from the view of the dog and the handler directs the dog by the use of hand signals and verbal commands). The term “Non-Slip” retriever, often applied to these trials, refers to a dog that is steady at the handler’s side until commanded to go. Every field trial includes four stakes of increasing levels of difficulty. Each stake is judged by a team of two judges who look for many natural abilities including steadiness, courage, style, control and training.

HUNTING TESTS

Hunting tests are not competitive like field trials, and participating dogs are judged against a standard like in a conformation show. The first hunting tests were devised by the North American Hunting Retriever Association (NAHRA) as an alternative to field trials for retriever owners to appreciate their dogs’ natural innate ability in the field without the expense and pressure of formal field trials. The intent of hunting tests is the same as that of field trials, to test the dog’s ability in a simulated hunting scenario.

The AKC instituted its hunting tests in June 1985, and popularity has grown tremendously. The AKC offers three titles at hunting tests, Junior Hunter (JH), Senior Hunter (SH) and Master Hunter (MH). Each title requires that the dog earn qualifying “legs” at the tests: the JH requiring four; the SH, five; and the MH, six. In addition to the AKC, the United Kennel Club also offers hunting tests through its affiliate club, the Hunting Retriever Club, Inc. (HRC), which began the tests in 1984.

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