

Field Trial Basics - by David Kawami

For a Novice, it is important to know that Dachshund Field Trials are bloodless. No game is killed, and the dogs are not encouraged to engage the game. Should the dogs accidentally see the rabbit or hare while they are on the line, the Judges generally act quickly to pick up the dogs. The judges are not interested in the Dachshunds ability to sight chase. Trials are held in fenced places, dogs will not run out into roads. So, what is a Dachshund Field Trial about?

The Dachshund Field Trial is an adaption of the Brace Beagle Field Trial, in which the dogs track the game. Currently there are 3 Classes that can be entered: OPEN ALL AGE DOG, OPEN ALL AGE BITCH, and the non-regular FIELD CHAMPIONS. Points towards the AKC Field Champion Title are earned in the Open Classes. OPEN ALL AGE means precisely that. All ages are eligible to be entered, as well as Field Champions.

However, it is not in the Dachshund's best interest to be started (at Field Trials) too young. Give your dachshund a chance to mature mentally and emotionally before subjecting it to the pressures of Field Trialing. Nine months to a year are about the right age to begin. The OPEN Classes are divided by sex, but if there are less than 6 entries in one class the classes are combined. In the early days of Dachshund Field Trialing, a Field Champion may have been entered in the OPEN class to reach the 6 entries needed to avoid a combined class. This rarely happens now, and Field Champions are not welcome in the OPEN classes.

The Dachshunds are braced (paired) by random draw and assigned a BRACE number. (Brace #1, etc.) It is the responsibility of the handlers to be aware of what brace is DOWN (being judged) and to be available when their brace is ready to be judged. The Judges will have instructed the FIELD MARSHAL how many braces to bring out to the field. For example, the first 4 braces.

This group plus any spectators, is referred to as the "GALLERY". They should remain together and follow the instruction of the Field Marshal. The Field Marshal will inform the gallery what brace is to be judged. When the judges are ready, a line of "brush beaters" moves through a section of the field trying to move a rabbit from its cover. When a rabbit breaks from cover, the first person to see the rabbit shouts out "TALLY HO ! ". The judges move to the spot where the rabbit was seen (usually judges like to "SPOT" (see) their own rabbits in order to more accurately judge the Dachshunds), and if they have not seen the rabbit ask for an accurate description of where the rabbit went.

The brace is then "CALLED UP". The judges give instruction to the handlers and the dogs are shown the "LINE" (the rabbit scent trail). The handlers can talk to and encourage their dogs to find the line. When the dachshunds have indicated they know where the line is, the handlers release the Dachshunds.

Novice handlers often make the mistake of releasing the dogs too soon. It will take time and experience to learn when to release your dog. when the dogs are released, the handlers must STOP GIVING INSTRUCTIONS to their dogs and stop all conversation. They remain behind the Judges as the judges follow the dogs. When the judges have seen enough, they will ask that the dogs be "PICKED UP". It is now the responsibility of the handlers to find and leash their dogs as quickly as possible.

The judges having discussed the work of the brace will call for the next brace or may call for ANOTHER RABBIT FOR THE SAME BRACE. It is important to listen for the Judges instructions. Not appearing when the Judges call for the dogs or bring the wrong dog to be judged will cause the dog to be DISQUALIFIED.

The Judges allow 15 minutes from the time the braced is called to the time when a dog is disqualified for failing to appear. When the Judges have called for the next brace and the judged brace has been recovered and leashed, they can then rejoin the GALLERY, or be taken back to be kenneled. When the handlers have finished running dogs, they are encouraged to join the beaters. There are never enough beaters and without beaters and rabbits there is no field trial.

When all the braced Dachshunds have run, the "FIRST SERIES" is completed. The Judges will confer and decide which Dachshunds are to be brought back for the "SECOND SERIES". This information will be given to the Field Marshal, and he will announce the Second Series. At the conclusion of the Second Series the Judges will again confer and decide what dogs are required for Third series. This process will continue until all the placements (1st-4th, and NBQ-next best qualifier) have been determined. The judges will announce "FIELD TRIAL" when the class is completed.

For more information consult the AKC booklet, "Registration and Field Trial Rules" and "Standard procedure for Dachshunds".