

The English Cocker Spaniel Club of America, Inc. Working Dog/Working Dog Excellent Certificate

Well before the AKC Spaniel Hunt Test program was developed, the English Springer Spaniel Field Trial Association, which is the parent club for the breed, developed a Working Dog Certificate program in 1960. The following are excerpts from an article written by Karen Lee for the ESSFTA. *“Working Certificates would be awarded to Springers which successfully completed tests demonstrating their basic usefulness as a hunting companion. The purpose was to encourage and cooperate with the numerous exhibitors and breeders endeavoring to keep the Springer a hunting dog as well as a show animal of good conformation. The intent is for Working Certificate Tests to: continue as a basic test of instincts and usefulness in the field; encourage owners to train their English Springer Spaniels to a hunting companion level; and serve as a first step towards involving new participants in AKC Hunting Tests for Spaniels.”*

In 1976 the American Spaniel Club (ASC) approved a proposal for a Working Dog Test. From that, the English Cocker Spaniel Club of America's (ECSCA) Working Dog Certificate program was created to encourage the further development of the natural hunting and retrieving abilities of the English Cocker Spaniel, and as a useful aid in the selection of breeding stock. The Working Dog program provides a way for English Cocker Spaniel owners to experience and develop an appreciation for the natural working abilities of their dogs without the lengthy and expensive commitment that other performance events (spaniel hunt tests or field trials) require. The Working Dog program recognizes that most English Cocker entries will not be as thoroughly trained as those that compete in AKC field performance events and the ECSCA therefore has devised simple, straightforward land and water tests using game birds. The program was not designed to indicate the extent of training the dog has received, but rather to evaluate the basic abilities of English Cockers to find, flush and retrieve game on land. A short water retrieve is also required to earn the WD or WDX title. As a parent club award, the ECSCA Working Dog test is only open to English Cockers and is not sanctioned as an AKC event. Dogs that qualify for a Working Dog Certificate, or a Working Dog Excellent Certificate, are given an ECSCA parent club award, either WD or WDX. These awards are not AKC titles and cannot appear in the catalog of any sanctioned AKC event.

The following is an excerpt from Volume I of the Jubilee Book of the English Cocker Spaniel Club of America, Inc. *“The first actual test where English Cockers were run was the Maryland Sporting Dog Association tests at River Hill Farms in Clarksville, Maryland on May 29, 1977. Four English Cockers were entered and three came away successful. The first WDX certificates went to Deborah Mason's Am. Can. Ch. Merryborne Minstrel and Sue Rose's Am. Can. Ch. Rose's Sherry Lenore, Am. UDT, Can. UDTX. Robert and Lorraine MacLennan's Ch. Mittenwald Gentian Andrew was awarded a WD.”*

The AKC Spaniel Hunt Test program was developed almost a decade after the ECSCA had developed its Working Dog test. For some background, work started on developing an AKC sanctioned event called the “Spaniel Gundog Qualification” in 1985. After three years of work, the AKC Spaniel Hunt Test program was developed. The original purpose of the program was to gauge *“a dog’s natural abilities during demands of actual hunting conditions.”* Currently the Regulations for AKC Hunting Tests for Spaniels states: *“The objective of the hunting test program is to help the hunter develop a useful hunting companion by providing a means to gauge a dog’s abilities against three standards of accomplishment—Junior Hunter, Senior Hunter and Master Hunter.”* The AKC Spaniel Hunt Test program is a non-competitive, performance event. This means that placements are not awarded, i.e. there is no first-place dog, and that qualification is solely dependent on whether, in the view of two judges, the dog meets the performance standards. However, compared to the Working Dog test, extensive training is expected, and to a certain extent, required to obtain the highest level titles.

It is important to note that the ECSCA Working Dog program was developed before the AKC Spaniel Hunt Test program. The original purpose of both the ECSCA program and the AKC Spaniel Hunt Test program was to demonstrate the usefulness of all eligible breeds as hunting companions. The keyword in the preceding sentence is “companion”. It does not matter how much a dog loves to chase birds if it will not work cooperatively with its owner. The bond between the hunter, i.e. the handler, and the hunting dog is essential.

The following two pages show the entry form, the judge’s score sheet, and the Standard of Performance and judging guidelines for the ECSCA Working Dog Certificate. Although the Working Dog test is a non-competitive event, handlers should remember that the scoring is a subjective evaluation of the performance of the dog on the day of the test.

ENTRY FORM-JUDGING SHEET WORKING CERTIFICATE TEST



The English Cocker Spaniel Club of America, Inc.

Please print and fill in completely use black ink.



TEST OFFERED BY: _____ DATE: _____ TEST CHAIRMAN: _____
(Club or Group)

TEST LOCATION: _____ TEST CHAIRMAN ADDRESS: _____

NAME OF DOG: _____ CALL NAME: _____

AKC #: _____ HANDLER: _____ COLOR/SEX: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ SIRE: _____ DAM: _____

BREEDER: _____ OWNER: _____

OWNER ADDRESS: _____

JUDGE'S REPORT

	EXCELLENT	SATISFACTORY	FAILED
HUNTING & BIRD FINDING (Desire, courage, pattern, perseverance, intelligence)			
FLUSHING (enthusiasm and determination to put the bird to flight)			
RETRIEVING ON LAND (marking, enthusiasm, mouth)			
RETRIEVING FROM WATER (enters water, swims to bird, retrieves bird to handler)			

COMMENTS: _____

_____ **NOT QUALIFIED:** One or more of the above sections marked FAILED.

_____ **WORKING DOG (WD):** Dog displayed behavior which would make him a satisfactory companion hunter in the field. He worked within gun range of the handler, was under reasonable control and is capable of finding and flushing birds and retrieving them on land and from water.

_____ **WORKING DOG EXCELLENT (WDX):** Dog displayed all of the qualities necessary for the W.D. but in a superlative manner

JUDGES SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

PRINT JUDGES NAME: _____

Chairman or Secretary of the officiating Club or Group shall, WITHIN ONE (1) WEEK OF TEST, send all completed Entry/Judging forms, signed by the Judge (on front & back) to:

CORTNEY OLIVER Box 791 South Wellfleet, MA 02663

OVERVIEW AND STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE

The WD test is a test, which allows participants' dogs the opportunity to demonstrate the abilities expected of a companion hunting dog. While no portion of the test may be failed in order to qualify for the WD or WDX title, the judge should consider the overall performance of the dog to be of greater importance than minor flaws in any one aspect of the test. Although parent clubs differ, the ECSCA intends the WD test to be a precursor to the AKC Spaniel Hunt Test and it is not to be judged to the standards of AKC Spaniel Junior Hunter. WD dogs may have limited field training and exposure to birds and gunfire. The emphasis for judging should be on instinctive, natural abilities rather than trained abilities.

The dog is expected to demonstrate the ability to hunt and locate game, flush it from cover, and to retrieve it to the handler. The dog need not be steady to wing and shot but should be in reasonable control by the handler. The dog should not demonstrate fear of cover or game and should maintain a reasonable working distance. Retrieves do not need to be made to hand.

Handling is ideally done quietly. Dogs that require excessive coaxing to perform any aspect of the test are demonstrating a lack of those abilities required on a hunt.

Dogs will be given the opportunity to find, flush, and retrieve two birds from land and to make one retrieve from the water. A key word here is "opportunity". If the dog traps the first bird and fails the retrieve it must be given an opportunity to flush and retrieve a second bird.

Again, demonstration of natural abilities is to be regarded with greater importance than trained abilities for the WD. A dog worthy of a WDX should demonstrate a level of enthusiasm, skill and control as would be expected of a dog with a greater degree of experience and training.

WD/WDX TEST ELEMENTS

HUNTING AND BIRD FINDING

The dog is expected to stand quietly on the line and may be gently restrained. Excessive leaping, lunging, or vocalizing by the dog is undesirable but not grounds for failure. Upon instruction from the judge, the handler may cast his dog, which will then begin hunting. The handler walks behind the dog and may direct the dog along the course.

The manner in which the dog covers ground is less important than his ability to find the birds. Hunting may be done in sections or in a zigzag quartering pattern. Boldness to cover and use of wind is more important than pattern, though the dog should cover the ground as thoroughly as possible. Occasional back casting is not to be faulted so long as the dog can be directed back to the front of the handler.

A dog that runs wildly out of control, that remains behind the handler, that refuses to range out to hunt, that does not show any attempt to hunt or does not show any interest in birds when they are encountered or shows any evidence of gun-shyness should be marked as **FAILED**.

A dog that demonstrates confidence in the cover, enthusiasm, intelligent use of scent/wind, thoroughly covers ground and shows good response to command/direction should be marked **EXCELLENT**.

FLUSHING

Upon locating game, the dog should demonstrate determination to put the bird to flight. The dog may drive directly in for the flush or hesitate momentarily before attempting to flush. The dog should not require excessive encouragement from the handler to flush. In the event that both birds found by the dog fail to fly the flushing requirement should be judged by how the dog addressed the bird in its attempt to flush it.

Complete failure to flush (or pickup a non-flyer), dogs that are observed to locate a bird and then turn away and ignore it, or that do not produce birds despite favorable conditions should be marked as **FAILED**.

A dog that demonstrates the ability to efficiently locate and, enthusiastically, flush game (or pick it up and retrieve it to the handler) with confidence and within reasonable gun range should be marked **EXCELLENT**.

RETRIEVING ON LAND

Upon the shot, the dog should mark where the bird has fallen, go to that location and recover the bird. The pick-up and return of the dog should be reasonably prompt with consideration for conditions. In the event of a particularly long retrieve or difficult conditions, the judge should allow the handler to advance toward the dog. In the event that the guns fail to down a bird for the dog to retrieve, the judge or gunner should throw a dead bird into

the air for the dog to mark and retrieve. This should be done with a simultaneous gunshot. It is important that the dog be allowed to smell the bird before it is thrown for the retrieve.

There are many reasons why a dog may miss the mark of a flushed or shot bird. Failure to mark should never be a disqualification unless the dog exhibits blinking by running from the flush or gun-shyness by running from the gunfire. In the event of a missed mark of a shot bird, the judge should allow the handler to push or direct the dog to the location of the fall.

In the event that the dog completely fails to recover the a bird, fails to return to close proximity of the handler, or the bird is crushed or damaged by the dog as to be unfit for consumption, the dog should be marked FAILED.

A dog that marks, recovers, and returns with their bird undamaged in a brisk and direct manner should be marked EXCELLENT.

RETRIEVING FROM WATER

Retrieving a dead bird from the water is **not** a test of marking or bird finding; rather it is a test of desire and courage.

A bird is thrown approximately 20 feet into the water and a shot is fired. The dog should enter the water without excessive coaxing, swim to the bird and return with it. Dropping the bird within the handler's reach from the water's edge is sufficient. The handler may kneel or back up the bank a few feet to encourage the dog to exit the water, but may not enter the water themselves.

A dog that is working for a WD, only, should be shown and teased with the dead bird while off lead before it is thrown in front of the dog into the water. At the handler's discretion, a dog that has the ability, experience, and training to try for a WDX may be gently restrained and exhibit the manners to wait to be released for the retrieve after the bird hits the water. Again, the bird must be thrown in front of the dog.

A dog that must be physically forced into the water, that fails to return to the handler with the bird, that refuses to come out of the water, or that leaves the bird in the water well out of reach of the handler should be marked FAILED.

A dog that enters the water with minimal hesitation, swims directly to the bird, and returns directly with it to the handler and releases the bird at least to the water's edge should be marked EXCELLENT.

AWARDING OF CERTIFICATES

A dog that completes all parts of the test in a creditable manner may be awarded the **WORKING DOG(W.D.)** certificate.

A dog that completes all parts of the test with excellent scores should be awarded the **WORKING DOG EXCELLENT** (W.D.X.) certificate.