**Judging the Pointing Breed Gun Dog**  
**by Lyle Johnson, AKC executive field representative**  
In Pointing Breed Field Trials, the gun dog stake is probably one of the most fun stakes for the judges to choose the winners. While the Open All-Age dog might be the prototypical "big running dog," the Gun Dog should be more in tune with the handler and work a more limited range. Clubs should select courses that are indeed GUN DOG courses that favor a closer working dog. On such a course, a dog that runs too big, like an Open All Age dog, would be out of contention.  
  
The Regulations for the Gundog Stake at Pointing Breed Field Trials state:  
  
A Gun Dog must give a finished performance and must be under its handler's control at all times. It must handle kindly, with a minimum of noise and hacking by the handler. A Gun Dog must show a keen desire to hunt, must have a bold and attractive style of running, and must demonstrate not only intelligence in quartering and in seeking objectives. It must also have the ability to find game. The dog must hunt for its handler at all times at a range that is dependent on whether the handler is on horseback or on foot and should show or check in front of its handler frequently. It must cover adequate ground but never range out of sight for a length of time that would detract from its usefulness as a practical hunting dog. The dog must locate game, must point staunchly, and must be steady to wing and shot. Intelligent use of the wind and terrain in locating game, accurate nose, and style and intensity on point are essential.  
  
A dog that does not point cannot be placed. A dog should not be called back to point after the running of its brace except under the most extreme and unusual circumstances.  
  
When judging the Gun Dog Stake, the Judges should look for such things as:  
  
A good pattern of coverage and a dog that is hitting objectives where birds should be found; good ground speed to cover the ground adequately; natural ability to perform the work required on his own; performance of the job without being mechanical or requiring handling to be sent to "birdy" places; demonstration of good use of wind and terrain in its search patterns; when given the opportunity, show of a snappy retrieve and delivery to hand; responsiveness to handler and demonstration of trainability with impeccable manners, such as not jumping forward at the flush or shot.; demonstration of intensity on point and when honoring.   
  
The trainer and handler should bring out the best in a dog through training and conditioning. In a class in which at least 30 minutes shall be allowed for each heat, the dogs must be in top condition in order to perform to their best.  
  
The pointing dog is not a machine but is an energetic, intelligent, free-spirited animal. He is at his best flashing across a field, nose searching for any trace of bird scent, working in his instinctual manner, but always waiting for any assistance the handler may be able to provide. Here is a dog that will help the hunter put dinner on the table by finding the birds, showing the hunter just where to hunt, then bringing the quarry gently back to hand.  
  
Judges have the hardest job and the greatest reward. They have to ride for hours and days in all kinds of weather. They must closely watch for the positive traits that keep these breeds useful. They must analyze every performance to select the best dogs at their field trials, all of which is difficult, demanding work. But the judges have the pleasure of seeing those outstanding performances that make all the effort worthwhile. For all judges, the bottom line is to have fun and to pick the dogs that would be nice to own or just to hunt over and to keep the breeds something to be proud of.