

Field Trials: An Introduction

by Melody Fair

Myth: The Basset is a comic hound that is better at clowning for the camera than at hunting.

Fact: The Basset is an excellent small game hunter and is all business in the field.

What is a Basset Hound field trial?

The Basset field trial is a competition that judges pairs (braces) of Bassets or four to seven in a group (small pack). The competition is solely of performance--trailing and pursuing wild rabbits or hare by scent.

As important as the competition is, the social aspect of field trialing is just as important. We enjoy the time with our friends and hounds and have lots of fun.

Where are the trials held?

Field trials are generally held at established field trial grounds. Few Basset Hound clubs own their own grounds; most rent facilities from Beagle Clubs or (in the West) rely on private or public land. Trials are generally held in the spring and fall months. The exceptions are Texas and Southern California, where winter trials are held.

Most trials occupy a two-day weekend. In some areas two or more clubs will hold trials over a period of several days. This occurs during the week before Nationals and also is a common practice in the West due to the great distances people travel to attend the trials. Many of us camp out at the trial grounds.

Local Basset Hound Clubs or the Basset Hound Club of America holds these field trials. Any person interested in field trials should contact one or more of the local BHCA member clubs as well as the BHCA Corresponding Secretary for more information. Ask to be put on the master mailing list so that you receive notice of all upcoming trials in your area.

How can I learn more about field trialing?

Attending a field trial is your best bet. Most field trials start early in the morning. Breakfast is served from about 6 to 6:30 until after the entries have closed and the drawing is held. This is the best place to start, as you will know where everyone is. It is sometimes hard to find "the gallery" after this morning session in the clubhouse or clubhouse area. Find a friendly face in the crowd--there will be many. Don't be shy. Introduce yourself and let that person know it's your first time. Ask them if they will be your "buddy" or if they could recommend someone else they're to be your mentor for the day. When out in the field, feel free to talk to anyone else. Most of us are more than glad to impart our wisdom.

Before attending this trial you may wish to do some reading. BHCA publishes a useful booklet and video, entitled "Field Trialing with a Basset Hound." It is also advisable to obtain a copy of the AKC publication "Basset Hound Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedures."

Are there any special requirements for field trialing?

If you wish to enter your Basset in a field trial it must be AKC registered and unaltered. You must be sure you have your Bassets complete registration information (AKC #, registered name, birth date, sire, dam, breeder, owner) with you in order to fill out the entry form properly.

Are novices welcome just to show up and enter a field trial?

This is a hard question to answer without some show of how differently field trialing is viewed across the US. The answer is a conditional yes. If your Basset has never "run" a rabbit, it is advisable to come and just observe

at your first field trial. In Texas and the West, many Bassets have been entered as first timers and are encouraged to do so. Some of these dogs have really surprised their owners and actually ran a rabbit the first time out. This is not the norm however. It is advisable to at least take your Basset out to an area where there might be game and see what happens before you enter him at a field trial. Just remember that most trialers spend many hours training for field trials, taking their sport very seriously.

Your Basset should be lead trained. I also train my dogs to "down" so that they will stop and drop so that I can easily catch them. Of course they have to be able to hear you issue this command. In some areas this is a challenge unless you are swift of foot and can keep up with your hound. "Come" is also a useful command especially to call dogs out of heavy bush. If he won't come, you may have to go in after the dog or have a long wait until he decides to come out on his own. Some use a whistle or horn to get their hounds attention to come.

What can I expect to see if I attend a field trial?

When clubs receive approval to hold a field trial, the dates, location and entry deadlines are also approved. A notice of the upcoming field trial is mailed to persons on that club's mailing list. Unlike conformation shows, field trial entries are turned in the day of the trial. The males and females are usually run separately. If less than 10 of either sex is entered, the Open class may be combined. The Champion class is always run with both sexes. If your female is "in season" she cannot be entered or run in a combined or champion class.

On the morning of the trial, the field trial secretary takes the entries. Entry fees are around \$10.00 per hound. Sometimes the entries being taken are for the class about to be run or can be for the entire trial. The Open Dog class is usually first. At the time stated in the Premium List (the official AKC approval of the details of the trial), the secretary will call for everyone's attention and then read the entries for the first class--this is called the roll call. The purpose of the roll call is to ascertain that the hound is entered in the correct class and that it is on the grounds. The owner or handler of the dog usually answers after the dog's name is announced. The secretary will then ask for any additions or corrections. After this is completed the secretary will announce that entries for the class are "closed". All the entries are then assigned their running order and partner(s) by a random drawing. Most trials are run in pairs or "braces".

This drawing is for what we call "first series." Each handler or owner hopes for a lucky draw. An owner who has more than one entered dog in a class cannot be "braced" with his own dogs in first series. The draw can get very interesting at times. After all hounds have been assigned their "brace" and "bracemate," either the next class is drawn in a similar manner if so scheduled or else it's out to the field for the actual competition.

It is usually announced where and when all handlers, owners, and spectators are supposed to assemble before actually entering the field. If not, ask someone. This group is called the Gallery. The Club sponsoring the trial appoints one or more persons to be the Field Marshal. The Field Marshal directs and supervises the Gallery. The marshal makes sure the Gallery forms a line across the section of field desired to be covered, controls the forward progress of the Gallery, announces which Brace should be ready and makes sure they are there. The Gallery then moves across the field at a slow walk. Handlers who have the braces often follow a bit behind the Gallery or stay behind the Gallery on the paths. When a rabbit is sighted, the person or persons who see it shouts "TALLY-HO". This person also is responsible for marking the exact spot the rabbit was first spotted. When the "Tally-Ho" is called, the Gallery stops and stands still. The only persons who should be moving about are the handlers of the brace that is to run this rabbit and the judges.

The handlers then go to the marked spot. After making sure both judges are ready, the handlers release their hounds together on the line given them. At that point the hounds are on their own and must trail the rabbit. Handlers cannot direct the dog with voice or hand signals unless the judge tells them to after they have been released on the line. The handlers follow behind the judges while the hounds are "down." Two additional

people are allowed to follow, providing they have the permission of the handlers. This is recommended for newcomers to get a closeup view of the action.

The judging of the run continues until both judges have agreed on a score for the run. Some runs are very long and some are not. The length of the run and/or the time consumed by the run does not necessarily determine the highest scoring dogs. When the judges have made their decision, they will instruct the handlers to "pick up" the dogs.

After all the braces in first series have run, those hounds with the highest scores are repaired based on their first series performance in what is called "second series". Usually four, six or sometime eight hounds are called back for second series. Second series is always run if placements are awarded. There are often "third," "fourth," and sometimes a "fifth" series to determine the eventual placements in a class. The important thing to remember is that when all the series' have been run that the first place hound defeated the second place hound, the second place hound defeated the third place and the third place hound defeated the fourth place hound in head to head competition at some point from first series thru the final series of running. First through fourth then receive championship points based on how many starters were in the class. A dog can be entered in the class yet not be counted at a starter. For each starter, first gets 1 point, second 1/2 point, 3rd gets 1/4 point and 4th 1/8 point. A Basset has to earn at least two first place wins, accumulate 60 placement points and place in a minimum of eight field trials to become a field champion.

The judges also award an "NBQ" ribbon or Next Best Qualified. This hound was not necessarily defeated by the fourth place hound. NBQ does not receive points and cannot be moved up to receive points if a placed hound is disqualified.

All classes at a field trial are patterned using the same format from drawing to the completion of the various series of competition. In addition to the Open Dog and Open Bitch classes, some clubs offer other classes. The Derby class is for hounds under 2 years of age, run as a combined sex class. No championship points can be won from this class. The Champion class is for those hounds who are field champions. BHCA offers a Grand Field Champion title for hounds completing the necessary accumulation of 20 points from placements in this class. Since this title has been offered an average of only 6 hounds receive this title yearly.