

# VERSATILE DOG 101-SEARCH, POINT, TRACK, SWIM

Most of these principles are taken from the NAVHDA AIMS, Rules & Test Program Book

## Versatile Dog Origins

In feudal times in Europe, hunting was the exclusive privilege of wealthy landowners. The Industrial Revolution of the 1800s changed all this. New socio-economic classes of people evolved. A greatly elevated standard of living created interest in many pursuits which before were restricted to the wealthy. Hunting was one such pursuit.

These new hunters (handlers) wanted breeds that would handle a variety of game, both feather and fur, before and after the shot. Dogs that possessed a keen nose and strong pointing instinct, a lively temperament, eagerness to retrieve from both land and water, stamina, and a durable coat and hide that would not hamper the dog's work in cold water and heavy brush. The dogs also had to be intelligent, relatively easy to train and have a character compatible with protecting and living in or at their masters' dwellings.

Breeds were developed to provide the on-foot hunter with a dog that will serve as a dependable hunting companion in the production (before the shot) & recovery (after the shot) of a variety of game in a variety of environments on land & water.

## Important Characteristics of a Versatile Dog

**Cooperation** can be defined as an inherent willingness on the part of the dog to apply its own initiative and special talents while working with the handler in pursuit of a common goal, producing game. The intelligent cooperative dog seems to sense his handler's wishes and movements. Even while on a solid point, the cooperative versatile dog may slowly turn his head to make sure the handler is moving up. A cooperative young dog will maintain contact with his handler. For example, when a young dog chases a bird and then returns of his own volition, he demonstrates cooperation.

The **Desire** to work is the hallmark of a good versatile hunting dog, and this desire is expressed in every phase of work on land and water, from beginning to end. The dog must demonstrate that it wants to find game and is willing to work hard to that end. Desire, or lack thereof, provides a clear index of the dog's character and usefulness.

**Use of Nose:** The quality of a dog's nose, more than any other single factor, determines its usefulness as a versatile hunting dog. Across ALL NAVHDA Tests, Use of Nose is weighted the heaviest of all (index of 6). A dog that finds game rapidly and repeatedly, under various conditions, has a good nose. Conversely, a dog that must search for a long time to find game where game is present probably has a poor nose.

A dog will sometimes scent game at a great distance and while checking the scent, will move up on the game as if being pulled to the spot by an invisible string attached to the nose. The relative distance from the point the scent is first detected, to the point where the game is found, can determine the quality of the nose. Another indication of a good nose is when a dog crosses a fresh track and immediately acknowledges the scent and direction of the track. The distance between the dog on point and the game, however, can be an indicator of the quality of the nose, as well as shows cooperation by the dog in not pressuring the game.

### **Searching:**

A pup should show enthusiasm, sufficient independence to move away from the handler, and a willingness to investigate likely cover. From start to finish, the search should indicate but one purpose—to produce game for the gun. The good dog will leave the impression that in the terrain covered by the search, no game has been missed, showing purpose and productivity.

An eager, cooperative dog will readily adapt to the terrain and cover over which it is being hunted, regardless of its “home ground” experience, and it will not hesitate to search rough cover if the situation demands it.

The dog should rely on its nose rather than its eyes to find game, however, use of the eyes to maintain cooperative contact with the handler is a natural result of the dog’s desire to please.

The dog should conduct its search at a practical distance from the gun. Terrain, cover, and other variables make it impossible to measure practical range in yards. Rather, it must be measured in terms of covering the maximum amount of likely game cover without loss of control or sacrificing the all important cooperation that must exist between the hunter and the dog. Suffice it to say, that the uncontrolled dog running the far horizons is of little use to the on-foot hunter, as is the one that remains so close to the gun that it constitutes an underfoot nuisance.

The use of guns is an obvious necessity in the pursuit of game by a versatile dog and handler team. Dogs that are *gun sensitive* or *gun shy* will severely impede the goal of producing game for the hunter.

### **Pointing:**

The instinct to point must be clearly evident in the dog. Pointing and searching are the two major aspects of the dog’s work “before the shot.” When game is located the dog must establish point naturally.

The pointing stance must be Intense, Convincing, and Unmistakable as a point and, in the end, the point must be Productive. Remember the Acronym **ICUP**

A young dog undergoing the Natural Ability Test may break and chase after clearly establishing point without being penalized. OBEDIENCE IS NOT EVALUATED IN A NATURAL ABILITY DOG.

### **Tracking:**

The ability to concentrate on a track is an important trait of the versatile hunting dog. It is this ability that permits the prompt recovery of cripples that are still capable of running long distances. The young dog must display eagerness and perseverance on a track. The dog’s future use as a retriever of crippled game is dependent on this characteristic.

### **Swimming**

A truly versatile hunting dog must possess the desire, confidence, and cooperation to swim for the handler. Note\*- On the NAVHDA Natural Ability Test, the Water portion is weighted more heavily (5) on the scorecard than Pointing (4).