

Code of best practice for retriever field trial competitors



The Kennel Club Field Trial Regulations, sometimes known as the J Regulations, are vital reading. No competitor should enter a field trial unless they are fully conversant with the current [Kennel Club Field Trial J Regulations](#) relevant to Retrievers.

Regulation J(B) - Retrievers

This section lays out what is required from your dog in a field trial for Retrievers. It is important to understand these requirements. Take note of the eliminating and major faults under regulations J(B)5. and J(B)6., respectively. Does your dog repeatedly show any of these traits? Is it ready to trial? If you are in doubt, seek a panel judge's advice.

Details of Kennel Club panel field trial judges can be obtained by using the Find a Judge facility which is available on The Kennel Club website.

J Regulations training programme

This programme has been created to manage the understanding of the J Regulations for field trial judges, societies and competitors. This is done through a seminar followed by an optional multiple-choice exam. Attending a seminar is strongly recommended. Even if a candidate refrains from taking the examination, they should find the seminar useful and beneficial. The seminar script for the Retriever sub-group is available on The Kennel Club website.

Things to consider before entering your first trial

Success in working tests does not mean your dog is suitable to be trialled. Working tests are great fun and a good benchmark to see how you and your dog are progressing. It also enables you and your dog to get used to competing in company and under the scrutiny of judges, as well as being watched by other people. Although working tests and field trials are 'poles apart', if a dog does not handle well on dummies, in most cases it is unlikely to handle proficiently on live game.

Offering to help or requesting to view before entering your first field trial is highly advised. Find out if there are any trials taking place near you. You learn so much from watching both handlers and dogs, and asking questions. [Our field trial diary](#) is constantly being updated. You should contact the field trial secretary prior to the trial.

Before you enter a driven Retriever field trial, ensure your dog has been shot over, or has at least sat near a gun, so you know it is steady when birds fall close by, especially when they drop on open ground.

Handler and dog must have had plenty of experience picking warm freshly shot game. This includes picking wounded birds.

Standards will be expected. Do not enter a field trial if you know your dog persistently commits any eliminating or major faults. A field trial is a competition, not a training day.

Things to remember when attending a field trial

Dress appropriately - wear conventional and acceptable clothes. No bright colours or denim jeans and no white baseball caps. Looking tidy and presentable in muted or neutral country attire shows respect for the event and the landowners. This is a country sport.

The welfare of your dog is your responsibility. You may need to carry drinking water, especially in hot weather when there is an increased risk of [heatstroke](#). Likewise, you may have to consider taking an appropriate dog coat for protection from wet and cold as well as from the sun. Have a drying towel in your vehicle should your dog need to be dried off before you drive home.

Harsh handling of dogs will not be tolerated. Any concerning issues you may see at a trial should be reported to the Chief Steward on the day, if possible.

Always be respectful. A lot of people will have given their time to make your day take place. Should you get eye-wiped, it is customary to shake the hand of the handler whose dog picked behind you, and the judges before you leave the line. It is good manners to stay until the prize giving has been done. Regardless of what has happened to you, always thank the judges, the keeper and the host/landowner, and the field trial secretary. It is important not to forget the guns. They may have paid for the day. To say 'thank you' costs nothing, but goes a long way. Show good sportsmanship by congratulating the winner and those in the awards.

Competitors should be aware that unacceptable behaviour will be reported in the Incident Book which will be sent on to The Kennel Club. Societies have the right to refuse entries, as stated on their schedule.

Manage your expectations

The extra pressure and nerves of working under a judge can affect your decision making and handling. Mistakes often occur through 'pilot error' so be ready for disappointments. Never publicly impugn decisions of the judge or judges. Neither should you criticise the host, ground or guns. If you are not sure why you have been put out of the trial, have a word with the judges at the end of the trial when they have completed their official duties. Questions should be restricted to the performance of **your** dog and not the dogs of other competitors. Social media should never be used to discuss grievances.

Please note, should you be put out of the trial, you must not leave the trial ground without the permission of a judge or chief steward. You will learn from watching if you are able to stay.

Targets to achieve before entering a field trial

Please note that the following targets are voluntary and self-administered, and something novice handlers can strive to achieve before entering a field trial.

The purpose of these targets is to get novice handlers to read the J Regulations to gain a basic understanding of the rules of the competition they propose to enter. This will also encourage handlers to take a dog out on a proper shooting day instead of just relying on a few training days, which may give a false impression of their dog's ability and suitability for field trials.

The handler:

- Attends a Kennel Club seminar on J Regulations
- Helps at a Kennel Club licensed field trial on three separate occasions
- Helps on an organised shoot as a picker up for a minimum of one season

The dog:

- Has worked on an organised shoot as a picking up dog for a minimum of one season before being entered in a field trial (training days do **not** qualify)
- Has no recurring eliminating faults and has had sufficient experience on live game before being entered into a field trial

The Kennel Club recommends that these targets are achieved before entering a licensed field trial.

Novice trials

When you win a novice trial, you have a Novice Trial Winner. Should your dog win after a couple of trials and, especially if it is young, it is most likely to need more 'miles on the clock' before you consider entering it in open field trials. Competing in all aged stakes with a Novice Trial Winner is an ideal way of giving an inexperienced dog (and handler) invaluable proficiency before you consider entering it in open field trials.

A higher standard of work is expected in all open stakes, which carry a qualification for the title of Field Trial Champion.