

# DERBY 101 .... What to expect on D day

by *Jeff Martin*



Jeff Martin at the 2016 Training Day

Most first time Derby Leaders are at a loss about what to expect. Therefore, they are not sure how to prepare. The purpose of this article is to outline what to expect and take the stress out of this first German testing experience.

A copy of the Derby and Solms test requirements, commonly called “the grey book” are available to be printed from the NADKC website under “new member registration”. As an entrant it’s important to understand what will be tested at both tests so that you can train

accordingly. Training and success at these tests is paramount to the German testing system and it’s the goal of the western region board to offer regular training days to help new DK owners get the best from their dogs .

The simplified overall agenda of the derby is to meet at the designated meeting point where the 3 judges and organisers will be introduced, then the entrants and spectators are welcomed. The entrants then handover the dog’s rabies certificate and official Ahnentafel (DKV pedigree/registration) as all future test results are recorded on this paper. This is like the dogs passport throughout its entire life. Don’t forget to bring these two important papers as it’s a mandatory requirement to participate on the day. The dogs tattoo and/or microchip are verified to ensure the correct dog is present. The dog’s eyes, teeth and testicles are also checked for correctness at the same time.

The group then drive to the field to begin testing which is usually done in catalogue order. The senior judge will likely give instruction on how he/she will conduct the test and about being punctual for the test to flow smoothly.

The first run in the field is to let the young dog settle down, burn off some excess exuberance and to empty out if this wasn’t done earlier in the day before driving to the meeting place. During this first field search use of nose, search pattern, pointing , desire and cooperation will be determined as well as two shots will be fired to determine if there is any sensitivity to gunfire. Once the judges have seen enough they will ask you to call the dog in to be leashed up and then call for the next entrant.

The second search is usually a more comprehensive field search but without any gun fire and if no wild game was encountered in the first field search, usually released game is used to determine pointing.

According to the DKV rules, if this derby test is say May 1<sup>st</sup>, the entrants can be as young as 6 months up to 19 months old. That is a big difference in the dogs training experience and the judges will determine what's the fair expectation for a dog of that particular age.

Don't be intimidated, judges are not "hanging judges", they are generally experienced handlers themselves and the best are very good at setting up good testing conditions and are happy to repeat something to give a fair assessment for all concerned.

The biggest mistake I routinely see is handlers turning up with dogs that have been lucky to have had a run in the park. The derby is referred to as a natural ability test but don't be misled, to quote the rule book "the test serves its purpose best when natural abilities have been developed and can be evaluated". So it's in your own best interest to turn up with a prepared dog.

The rules also state "it is the judges highest priority to advance those dogs for breeding and utility purposes who exhibit first rate aptitudes, strong nerves, maturity, desire to work and cooperation". While these expectations are the goal of the German testing system the derby does not qualify a dog for breeding (that is the realm of the Solms and higher tests) so the derby expectations in layman terms could be worded "does this young dog have first rate abilities that warrant further training"? or "what has it been given from ma and pa"?

This article by necessity is not a training article we hope to cover this at the April 1<sup>st</sup> training day but I will outline each test category, what is expected and tips on how to prepare.

**Nose and search**, any dog that has had field searches and possibly encountered any feathered game, jack rabbit or tweedy bird will use its nose while searching. It's important to try to do field searches with the handler walking in a generally upwind direction and the dog searching to the left across the wind and when it turns it comes back across in front of the handler again searching across the face of the wind to the right of the handler, this is repeated back and forth in front of the handler as you progress up the field. When you get to the end of the field put the dog on lead and walk back downwind to the beginning and either go home or search another field but in this same upwind direction. The best training scenario is if you can find a field that contains game and your dog develops a will to search and find, training can progress very quickly if you can do this and it may only take a few outings to prepare and highlight its natural abilities at the derby test, the key in your training is to give the young dog a reason to hunt and search. This reason to search is paramount for evaluating **desire**. If the dog is searching too close as it turns you can growl gruffly as it makes the turn, you walk towards the dog and wave it in the direction it just turned from. Alternatively if it is going too far, give a SINGLE whistle command as you turn and go in the opposite

direction (run if you have too). It's a common mistake to keep calling or giving the turn whistle to a dog that is ignoring you, this only serves to tell the adolescent dog where you are waiting for him. It's absolutely critical with a young dog to encourage the good habit of it searching with purpose but at the same time searching relative to where you are walking and it keeping in contact with you (rather than the other way round). It is a good practise to keep the dog in good physical condition by doing daily exercise roading on lead, good for you and dog alike. Also make sure you have water for the dog and carry it out in the field during your dog's test searches. Most judges are fine with giving an overheated dog a water break and a chance to catch its breath.

This point of giving it a reason to hunt is key to evaluating **cooperation**; a naturally cooperative dog will always check its handler's direction and adjust the direction of its search accordingly.

If you are resorting to using planted game to train the dog on **pointing**, remember wild game does NOT ever get caught. A training scenario set up where the dog learns it can run in and catch a planted bird is the complete opposite to what you are trying to achieve. As stated earlier it is best if you can use wild game or free running strong released birds. If this is not possible it is far better to use birds that are shackled (that can't run and stay exactly in the vicinity of where they were placed) as opposed to dizzied game. If the dog crowds shackled birds they will flush like wild game and are far better than easily caught dizzied birds. If your dog is not reliable at holding its points it is best to practise pointing with the dog on a long lead and therefore NO chance of catching birds.

I typically will practise searching upwind, while carrying a shackled chukar or pigeon in a velcro strap in my vest. When I think it's time to reward the dogs searching, without the dog seeing me I release a bird, I will throw it into cover and continue searching. I do a big circular loop so the dog has no chance to smell it and approach the bird that is then upwind. Remember there is not a dog alive that can smell a bird downwind!!

If the dog is not yet reliable at holding its point place it on a long lead as you bring it across the scent cone. A common mistake when orchestrating these pointing opportunities is to allow the dog to indicate scent and then walk up the scent cone to stand over the bird. This is a huge mistake, try to restrain the dog to establish a point immediately as it indicates scent and have a friend find the bird, show it carefully to the restrained dog and then release it to fly home. Most dogs start out as sight pointers, scenting then presenting the bird like this, allows the dog to connect a scent, with a bird and pointing as well as the good habit of allowing the handler to move in front of the dog on point. The dog has not been allowed to do anything wrong in this scenario and is rewarded with a flying bird. The subtlety of this will be explained at the training day.

The dog should be introduced to gun fire and this should not be underestimated as a truly gun shy dog cannot be used for breeding. The best way to introduce **gunfire** is associating the sound with something it absolutely loves. A bird dog typically loves flying birds so I use them. Have a friend hold the dog at a distance of say 80 meters, rub a live pigeon on the ground and as it flies away fire 2 shots with a lesser noise such as a .22 rifle or starter pistol. At the same time allow the dog to run in and check out the scent on the ground. After gauging the dog's reaction over successive training sessions gradually have the dog closer as shots are fired at released fleeing birds. Once this is mastered repeat the scenario using a shotgun starting at the original 80 meters. This is so that the dog is given time to associate a loud noise with what it loves i.e. flying birds. Just shooting around an unprepared dog is like someone throwing fireworks under your tail when you were 5 years old and without any warning!!

The last test subject is **obedience**. This is evaluated much more comprehensively in the fall at the Solms test over field, forest and water. The derby handler constantly trying to whistle, turn or control the dog is not what the judges are looking for when evaluating natural ability. This is not to say a big running 18 month old dog shouldn't be whistled at, if it's going 100's of yards away and possibly out of control. In such cases if the dog obeys or doesn't will be noted but typically the only obedience expected is if the derby dog can be called in and leashed up as its running past its handler.

Another common mistake is to only train to the test requirements, that is get through the derby and then start on Solms preparation. What is essential is that you train to the age and progress of your individual dog, as you have as little as 4 months to accomplish Solms preparation after completing the derby test. It makes no sense to waste valuable training time with an 18mth old dog waiting to get through the derby, progress through your training schedule with the Solms in mind. This will be discussed at the training day on the 1<sup>st</sup> April and after the derby itself. A solid Solms test score, for dogs as young as 1 yr. old, should carry far more weight than say an AZP score attained when the dog is 3 yrs. old. An AZP test is for dogs that through extenuating circumstances i.e. injury or oestrus could not attempt the Solms.

This should help in preparing your new prospect for the derby and I encourage you to make the Solms your training and testing goal for the year, you will have a great hunting companion polished and ready for the fall season.

Good luck and Waidmansheil,  
Jeff Martin