

Field Trial Specifics  
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Field trials contain 4 stakes:

- **Derby:** is for dogs up until their 2nd birthday. Tests consist of 4 series of marks. Generally 2 land doubles and 2 water doubles. No distance limit on marks, but generally they are less than 300-350 yards/274-320 meters. Gunners generally stand out in white coats, or may sit in a chair and be partially retired in tall grass/cover (example: is a test where the 2nd series memory bird was over 400 yards/365 meters and the gunner was very difficult to pick out on the distant hillside, one where the 4th series memory bird was 425 yards/388 meters through two ponds on water). On occasion, judges may decide to only do a single for a series or the Derby judges decided to run an in-line triple in the last series. No handling on marks in the derby. If you handle, you are out. The intended objective of the Derby is to test the "natural" abilities of the dogs as opposed to the "trained" abilities, but make no mistake; most Derby dogs are very well trained. They are very talented dogs at a young age.
- **Qualifying:** Is the intermediate level in field trials. There is no age limit. Many times people will double stake a Derby dog or an Amateur dog in the Qualifying as well. Again, there is no distance limit on marks or blinds. Be prepared for 300-400 yard/274-365 meter memory birds and blinds. 4 series consisting of land marks, a land blind a water blind and water marks (generally in that order). Most of the time you will see triple marks in the qualifying. They may be wide-spread but can be tight as well. About 50% of Qualifying tests usually have at least one gunner retired in either the first or last series. Blinds are generally big, but straight forward with no added tricks (poison birds, dry-pops, hidden marks, etc.), although the judges may leave the flyer crates out from the 1st series or a gunner sitting in a chair that does nothing and you have to run the blind right past them. Qualifying is tougher than an AKC Master Hunter test, but not nearly as tricky. The white coats make things much more straight forward. Participant dogs may still be in the Derby, or they may be 7 years old and still running Qualifying. You can continue to run a dog in the Qualifying until you either get two wins, place in Amateur stake or JAM/Place in an Open stake.
- **Amateur and Open All-Age stakes:** These are the Big Dog stakes. Only a handful of FCR's have ever even attempted to run at

this level, let alone place or finish. Both are equal in the difficulty of the set-ups, with the only difference being that professional handlers cannot enter or run dogs in the Amateur stake. The All-Age stakes generally consist of 4 series (land marks, land blind, water blind and water marks). Many tests have 4 marks with 1 or 2 guns that retire when the dog is picking up the go-bird. These may be tight and some birds are close to or over 500 yards/457 meters on both land and water! Blinds may be single or double blinds with a gunner in a chair, dry pop, poison birds, flyer crates out in the field, having a dog run over the scent of an old fall, etc. You may have to parallel a shoreline for a 200 yards/183 meters without getting out near the gun or re-enter off a distant point after swimming 150 yards/137 meter and commit to another 200 yards/183 meters of swimming water with a strong wind pushing the dog to shore. This is truly for the finished retriever and the handlers who are willing to fail much more than they succeed.

Field Trials will push you to train to a completely different level than hunt tests do. There is no standard or expected performance in order to pass. You have to beat the best dogs there that day. Ribbons are few and far between in this game. Just finishing a Derby or Qualifying and getting a green JAM (judges award of merit) ribbon is a BIG deal, especially with a minority breed. It's a tough game, but well worth the effort when you finally do break through.