

# In The Field

By Bruce Toenjes

Let's have a regular column about PBGV Hunt in *Saber Tails*. I'll take the first shot, but I invite all of you to contribute.

Why do we participate in PBGV hunt? The Hunt Rules tell us that "Judges should approach their work with the attitude that the future welfare of the breed is in their hands, and should make their findings and selections on a basis calculated toward keeping the PBGV useful for hunting purposes." So a Hunt Test is meant to be good for the breed. But why do you hunt? Or if you have not entered your PBGV in a Hunt Test, why should you?

We each had our own reasons for entering our first Hunt Test, but I think I heard it best from the owner of a Labrador Retriever. I met this owner because he was the opposing counsel in a court case, and while he was professionally courteous, our relationship was strained because of the difficult nature of the case. Yet we found common ground in our dogs. The subject came up somehow during a break in a deposition. (I am careful not to be "that person" who brings up dogs, so he must have raised the subject.) He said that his daughter loved their Lab. Although she adored their Lab, she had never seen it hunt. He told her that "because you love our dog, you have to come and watch our dog hunt." He told her there was nothing that brought more joy to their dog than hunting, and therefore she would not truly understand their dog unless she saw it for herself.

He was right. The same is so true for our hounds. As much as we think they enjoy their lives, nothing brings them as much joy as hunting. And you need to see it to truly understand it.

## Medication and Scenting

Your hound has diarrhea, and there is a Hunt Test (or a Scent Trial) coming up in a week. Did you know that the antibiotic that you give your hound can impair its ability to scent? A study published in the August 2016 issue of *American Journal of Veterinary Research* tested the "effects of oral administration of metronidazole or doxycycline on olfactory function in explosives detection (ED) dogs." According to the study abstract, the study found that "Metronidazole administration resulted in degradation of the detection threshold for 2 of 3 explosives . . . Nine of 18 dogs had a degradation of performance in response to 1 or more explosives (5 dogs had degradation on day 5 or 10 and 4 dogs had degradation on both days 5 and 10). There was no significant degradation during doxycycline administration." (The abstract is at <https://avmajournals.avma.org/doi/10.2460/ajvr.77.8.906>.) This dosage of Metronidazole is consistent with actual dosages prescribed for dogs. While testing has not been done on rabbit scent (or birch scent, for those of you competing in Scent Work), you may suspect the effect on your hound's ability could be the same as if it were searching out explosives.

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*Gathering before a PBGV Hunt Test*





*A pack of PBGVs in the field.*

## Pursuit

When is a pursuit a good pursuit? I am afraid that we get so caught up in the excitement of a pursuit that we want more, instead of better. The rabbit flushes, sometimes right under foot. The dogs give voice and chase. We shoot the gun. It is exciting. So we want more. We want to find another rabbit and do it again. But is that what we should really want?

The better goal is the longer pursuit, even if it means fewer pursuits. The pursuit that lasts for minutes rather than moments should be our goal. Next time your hound takes off on a pursuit, stop and wait. Find a good location to watch the lane where the rabbit first crossed. It may take five or ten minutes or more, but see if the hounds will run the rabbit back to the starting place. The first time you see the rabbit lopping across the lane where it all started, with dogs following the track behind, you will be deeply satisfied. This is the pursuit that we want.

## Water

Water on the field can be a help or a hinderance. It can be a great help as an alternative to treats, since we cannot bring treats on the field in a scored run. When dogs are trained to come for a drink of water, they can be recalled and picked up at the end of a run. That can be a lifesaver for dogs and handlers who struggle with “cooperation with handler” because the dog is otherwise difficult to pick up.

Water becomes a hinderance when it is over-used on the field. In cool or cold conditions, a dog should be able to hunt for an hour-long run with one or no drinks. Giving a dog more than one drink in good conditions is simply unnecessary and interferes with the run. As a judge, I

begin to suspect that a dog lacks endurance if it is frequently stopping for water, and my scoring may reflect my suspicion.

More importantly, offering water during a run can break up a dog’s ability to show the judge that it can successfully search and “check.” Too many times the hounds will bounce a rabbit and take off in pursuit, and when the dogs lose the rabbit, stop giving voice, and come back to where the pursuit started, the handlers, still in that area, say, “Good Dog! Do you want some water?” The dog stops searching and takes water. In reality the dog came back not to get water or to see you, but to check and try to pick up the line. By interrupting the check and rewarding the dog with water, the handler discourages the dog from checking. The dog may get a lower score on this run, but is also discouraged from checking on future runs, picking up the line again and having those long pursuits that we want to see. The solution? Offer your dog water at some time other than when it returns to the point where it started a pursuit.

## Willowa Hunt Recap

The Willowa Hunt Test was held on October 25 -27, 2019, at the Willowa Beagle Club outside of Platteville, Wisconsin. Handlers from seven states entered thirty PBGVs. The club has two fenced fields that are challenging because of the rolling terrain of southwest Wisconsin. The warm fall made for dense cover, but fortunately the weather was good all the weekend.

Participants enjoyed “Wisconsin Beagler” breakfasts and lunches prepared by members of the Beagle Club. The event returned a profit of \$624 to the PBGVCA, plus funds from the raffle were contributed to PBGVCA Hunt for the purchase of a laser printer and “Write in the Rain” paper that can be used at the 2020 National Hunt and future hunts. Thank you to the judges and participants who made the event a success.

Send in your thoughts for the next issue. Experienced hunters and judges, share your observations. Hunters, send in your questions. Let’s improve and grow this sport. See you on the hunt field. Tally Ho! ♦



*Getting ready for the raffle at the Willowa Hunt Test.*