

Intro to Lure Coursing

Lure coursing is a performance event testing the hunting instincts and functional abilities of sighthounds. The hounds chase plastic bags on a course laid out to simulate what a chase of a rabbit would look like. AKC lure coursing is done according to the rules set forth by the AKC.

First a hound must earn a Junior Coursing (JC) title, under two different judges, in order to compete in a lure coursing trial. JC tests are either conducted first thing in the morning, before the trial itself begins, or in the afternoon after the trial is completed. A hound must be at least 12 months of age in order to earn a JC. When a Junior Courser title is earned, the letters "JC" are placed after the dog's registered AKC name. While AKC does not require it, most participants strongly urge you to run your hound with another before competing beyond the JC level to ensure he is ready.

The AKC awards qualify coursing hounds with the titles of Junior Courser (JC), Senior Courser (SC), Master Courser (MC), Field Champion (FC) and Lure Courser Excellent (LCX). At AKC trials, hounds compete in the Open stake until they earn their AKC Field Championship. Then they go on to compete in either the Open or Specials Stake (typically special stakes). In order to earn a field championship, a dog must earn 15 points. (Points are determined by the number of dogs present -- the more dogs, the more points.) Of the wins your dog earns, two must be first places won under different judges and be worth a minimum of 3 points each. (The maximum number of points that can be awarded for a first placement is 5.) When an AKC Field Championship is earned, the letters "FC" are placed in front of the dog's registered AKC name. If the dog has also earned its Conformation championship, then the letters "DC," for Dual Champion, are placed in front of his registered AKC name. When a Senior Courser title is earned, the letters "SC" replaced the "JC" after the dog's registered AKC name. In addition to a field championship, another accomplishment your dog can work toward is her Senior Courser title. In order to earn her SC, your dog must earn 4 qualifying scores (that is, compete four trials with competition). It does not matter if your dog does not place or earn points; all she has to do is successfully complete the course.

Only sighthound breeds are allowed to run in AKC field trials. These include the: Afghan Hound, Basenji, Borzoi, Greyhound, Ibizan Hound, Italian Greyhound, Irish Wolfhound, Pharaoh Hound, Rhodesian Ridgeback, Saluki, Scottish Deerhound and Whippet. Additionally, each hound must pass "roll call" the morning of the trial where there is a check for lameness, bitches in heat and breed disqualifications. In Ridgebacks, that would be ridgelessness.

The hounds will run the course twice, a preliminary run and a final run. Scores from both runs are added for a combined total score. Hounds are awarded placements and points based on where they finished and the number of hounds they competed against. The hounds are running not only for fun and to keep their natural abilities alive, but also for titles.

An owner might enjoy a ribbon or trophy, but the hounds run just for the fun of it. To find out about field trials check out your breed clubs web site and the AKC web site. www.akc.org To fully comprehend the rules of AKC, people should acquire a copy of AKC's Running Rules.

The Course

The lure is several white plastic bags tied to a line attached to a machine made from a starter motor. The lure is dragged at between 35 and 40 mph through a series of pulleys, across a pre-arranged course or a continuous loop course. The course is setup to simulate the way in which

a rabbit would run when being chased. There are 90 degree turns, long straight-aways and even crossovers in the course. The course must be a minimum of 600 yards. Lure coursing should be done in a field 8 to 10 acres in size.

Judging/Judges

Each stake is judged by one or two judges- one is the norm. The Judge, before beginning his/her assignment, shall walk the course and verify with the FTC that an approved course is properly setup and free of hazards.

Hounds are normally run in trios. Judges assess performance based on each hound's abilities, identifying hounds by their blanket color. The hounds are judged on such things as: speed, agility, follow, endurance and overall ability. Each is worth 10 points. In order for the judges to tell them apart when they are running, the hounds wear either a bright yellow, pink or blue coursing blankets. At the starting line, the hounds are position in these colors, left to right. Of the three dogs running in each course, the judges give a numerical score reflecting how each hound placed. Ideally, the dogs are cross-course judged. That means if there are two courses of three dogs run, the judges must rank the scores as though all six ran in the same course.

The hounds run a preliminary course and a final course, and then may run for Best of Breed. Finally, the Best of Breed run for Best in Field, as an optional stake.

The judge performs the following:

- a. Scores the course:
- b. Determines if any of the hounds are interfered with or any outside interference occur
- c. Levy a pre-slip penalty (if required)
- d. Determines whether a hound shall be excused or disqualified
- e. Determines whether a re-run is in order

The judge can stand in the middle of the field, on the sidelines or in a chair, depending on where they think they will have the best vantage point to see the entire course and score from.

Field Committee

The Field Committee is comprised of the following: Field Chairman, Field Secretary, Field Clerk, Huntmaster, Lure Operator, Inspection and Measuring Committee and the Paddock Master. Although all of these functions are important in the overall success of a trial, the roles and responsibilities of the Judge(s), Lure Operator and Huntmaster will be discussed

For a complete listing of the roles and responsibilities of each, please go to:
<http://www.akc.org/registration/rules> The Judge(s) is not officially apart of the Field Committee.

Lure Operator

A good lure operator is very important. The lure operator not only controls the lure, but he/she is also responsible for your dog's safety out on the course. The following is a brief list of the Lure Operator's responsibilities:

- a. Makes a pilot run of the lure before the first course of the day and again, prior to the second runs, which is the same course in reverse.
- b. Starts the lure at the signal from the Huntmaster
- c. Attempts to keep the lure 10-30 yards. in front of the hounds at all times
- d. Stops the lure anytime the safety of the hounds are in jeopardy

Huntmaster

Just like the lure operator the Huntmaster has a very BIG responsibility when it comes to the scoring and safety of your hound. The huntmaster probably has more responsibilities than any of the other Field Committee positions. The following is just a brief list of their responsibilities:

- a. Shall call up a new course when the previous is completed
- b. Responsible for checking that blankets and slip leads are secure and attached properly
- c. Ensures the hounds are in the correct starting order/position
- d. Explains the release and retrieval process to the handler's
- e. Responsible for starting the course with the signal, "Tallyho"
- f. Will stop the lure if a pre-slip occurs prior to the "Tallyho" signal
- g. Will stop the lure if the dog's safety is jeopardized
- h. Will notify the Judge of a pre-slip penalty if one occurs
- i. Will inspect the lure prior to each course and replace if needed
- j. Shall inform the judge of any interference or aggressive behavior of any hound on the course
- k. Shall assist in stopping the lure and protecting the dogs from injury during the retrieval

The huntmaster shall stand in close proximity to, but not in front of, the handlers and hounds.
<http://www.clark.net/pub/bdalzell/lureinfo.html>.

Items Needed

You will need three coursing blankets, one in each color (yellow, pink blue). Some clubs have blankets to loan and many people will let people borrow them. You should purchase your own blankets to fit your hound. You will also need a slip lead to release your hound at the line. Be sure you bring WATER for your hounds since there may be none available at the site of the trial. You will need water for drinking and for cooling down your hound on warm days. When attending a trial, READ the premium. It has all the information you will need to know for that particular trial. Example: directions, whether you need to bring a lunch or not, etc. A chair to sit in is also a good idea. Reflective tarps to cover the car and or the crate and bungee or claps, cooler for drinks and food, if no food is available to purchase at the trial. Again, the premium will give you that information.

What to expect

First of all, if you are going to enter the trial that morning – instead of pre-registering by mail -- most clubs require you to do so at least a half-hour before roll call. The time of roll call and late registration will be noted on the premium list. Such late entries are typically more expensive than early entries that are mailed to the Field Trial Secretary.

When the club announces roll call, entrants line up with their hounds. If you have a bitch, her vaginal area will be swiped with a clean piece of toilet paper or paper towel to make sure she is not in season. Bitches in heat cannot compete in trials because they pose a huge distraction to the other dogs that are running.

Finally, you will be asked to gait your hound away and back to the roll-call officials. Try to run in a straight line and keep your hound at a steady trot - not so slow that he walks, not so fast that he gallops. This is so trial officials can be sure he is not lame or injured.

After roll call, the field committee posts the running order for the field trial - which breeds will run in what order, i.e. salukis first, then basenjis, then Ridgebacks. Then the committee will post the running order within the various breeds. Open dogs run first, followed by field champions, veterans can run first or last. Look for your dog's name,

When you get to the line, you will line up parallel to the other hounds in your course, and await the huntmaster's instructions. If you are not sure what to do, tell the huntmaster that you are new and he/she will be glad to help. The huntmaster will check to see if everyone is in the right order (yellow on the left, pink in the middle, blue on the right), that the slip lead is set correctly, and that your hound's blanket is set securely. She will then explain the rules and ask if you are ready. The most important thing to remember is not to pre-slip your hound. Wait for the "T" in "Tally-ho!" before releasing your hound.

After your hound runs, leash her immediately, taking care to notice if and when the lure operator resets the lure, as your bag-crazed dog might well lunge at it as it moves again, sending you sprawling. It's crucial to walk your dog out, just as jockeys do their horses after a race: Take her for a long walk. Be sure to offer water, and plenty of it.

After the first series of courses, the scores are posted, along with the new running orders within each breed. (This means that your hound may not be competing against the same dogs the second time around.) Again, note the course your hound is running in, as well as the color blanket. After the second set of runs, the judge's final scores are tabulated. If there are ties for first, second, third or fourth, they will be run-offs to determine the final standings. After the run-offs, the hounds of your breed will run for Best of Breed: Competing will be the first-place Open dog, the first-place Field Champion, and the first-place Veteran. The winner of that course will go on to compete against the winning dogs of every other breed for Best In Field--the lure-coursing equivalent of Best In Show.

If at anytime you have questions or are not sure of something, ask! Everyone is happy to help.

Does my dog need any practice to successfully lure-course? Some hounds are just "naturals" at coursing: They just "get" it, and remain undistracted by anything else once they are on the bag. Others, however, need more time to understand the "game." They might be distracted by other dogs, or might try to play with the other dog instead of chasing the bag. It is better never to let a habit develop than to try and break that habit once it has become set. For that reason, shy or "shaky" dogs might benefit from a period of solo practice runs after they earn their JC title, so that they can find the activity self-rewarding and build their self-confidence.

Also, if you run a green dog in competition without first testing him, you are not just gambling with your dog's coursing career - you are also potentially affecting every other dog that is running. If your dog initiates an incident, even if he is "only playing," you have now broken the other dog's concentration, and possibly introduced a hesitancy or fear of running that might affect that dog's future performances. Interference happens occasionally on the field, but we strive at all costs to avoid it when it happens. This should remind you of the responsibility you have to your fellow coursers and their hounds.

Sue Ann A. Leslie

Thank you to the following sources for information contained in this introduction:

- American Kennel Club website www.akc.org/
- Big Apple Sighthound Association website, www.bigapplesighthounds.org ,
Written by Denise Flaim,
- The Greater Valley Forge Rhodesian Ridgeback Club's website, www.gvrfrfc.org
- "Dog World Magazine".