

TRAINING/TRIALING DOGS IN HOT WEATHER

By Camie Barrow

Heat related issues, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, are 100% preventable. We all have a role in keeping our dogs safe and so that we can continue to enjoy running them.

OWNERS/HANDLERS

Prior to a field trial (1-2 months)

- Get your dog in shape prior to the trial.
 - o Dogs that are physically fit & not overweight are less prone to heat related issues.
- Acclimate your dog to hot weather slowly in training.

Come to training & trials prepared

- **Bring lots of water.** 1 dog = bring **3-5 gallons¹** of water
- Bring **multiple water bottles** for watering the dogs in the field.
- Have **fans** in the truck/car for the dogs. Bring extra batteries if needed.
- Use **crates** that allow for **good ventilation**.
- Consider having **glucose** (or something) available for before and after the dog runs.
- Have a medical kit with a rectal thermometer and alcohol wipes.
- Bring dog towels.

Trial day:

- **Hydrate** your dog both day before and day of the trial.
- Pay attention to where you **park** and **the sun** and remember that the sun changes direction throughout the day.
- Make sure your dog is **crated** in a **well ventilated** space.
- Consider the environmental risk factors and come up with a plan BEFORE going into the field. (See Hot Weather-Heat Stroke in Dogs)

In the field:

- **Have water** with you & utilize dunk tanks along the way.
- **Be aware of long or tricky retrieves.** Have a plan formulated a head of time. For example, if you have to handle on a retrieve, limit yourself to one 'back'. If the dog is successful, great, if not, pick them up.
- **Be aware of changes in your dog's pattern, behavior, and breathing.**
 - o A dog that is panting excessively and has its tongue hanging out is trying to cool himself down, not find a bird.
 - o A dog that is stumbling and staggering is in real trouble.
- Optional: Glucose can be give pre and post-run, particularly if the run is strenuous. Do not give a dog having a heat related crisis glucose unless supervised by a vet.

¹ Just trying to come up with a reasonable target for people to go by

FIELD TRIAL COMMITTEES

If the environmental/weather related factors have historically made a trial a 'high risk' trial consider the following:

Pre-trial preparations:

- Event premium:
 - o Leave room in how you word the premium to allow for some format flexibility...i.e. starting early, skipping lunch
- Gather email addresses so any changes can be communicated as early as possible.
- Have directions for the emergency vet printed and available at the trial.

Equipment:

- Dunk tanks- Placed at each end of the course and every 4-6 flags² in between.
- ATV/Shuttle - Consider having a gators/shuttle on site that can get dogs out of the field quickly.
- Have extra ice and a nearby tub of water to treat dogs with a temp LESS than 105.8°F
- Club medical kit - Have a rectal thermometer and alcohol wipes in the club medical kit.

Other:

- Having a vet on premise that can administer IV solutions and meds quickly is the most effective way to help dogs in trouble.
- Discuss the trial conditions with the judges & gunners.

JUDGES & GUNNERS

From Field Trial Rules and Standard Procedures for Spaniels.

- Judges have the latitude to intervene if they deem a dog unfit (for any reason).
- The decision of the Judges is final in all matters relating to the field trial performance of the dog.

*Observations:*³

- A judge is in a position to help the handler assess both the dog and trial the situation more objectively than the handler alone can (especially in the amateur). Therefore some communication between gunners, judges and handlers about a dog's condition is helpful.
- When a judges sees (or is made aware) that a dog's condition is deteriorating they should confirm that the handler is also aware of this.
- A handler that *knowingly* continues to run a dog with obvious signs of heat stroke, a wobbly gait, excessive panting, or that has collapsed, should not be rewarded with a placement.

² Trying to come up with a reasonable standard rule of thumb for 'high risk' trials

³ These suggested course of conduct based on my observations and personal experiences at hot field trials.