

## **A Guide to Field Trial Stakes**

**By Jim Pickering**

There are four stakes that can be offered at an AKC Licensed or member club field trial: Open, Amateur, Qualifying and Derby. The AKC requires that a club holding a licensed field trial have the two major stakes and at least one minor stake, but typically all four stakes are offered. In the field trial vernacular the terms "major stake" and "all age stakes" are used interchangeably to refer collectively to the Open and Amateur, championship, stakes. The term "minor stakes" is used to refer collectively to the Qualifying and Derby stakes.

As stated in the AKC rules for Retriever Field Trials, the purpose of a trial is to determine the relative merits of Retrievers in the field. The dogs should be judged on their natural abilities including memory for marks, intelligence, attention, nose, courage, perseverance and style, and their abilities acquired through training including steadiness, control, response to direction, and delivery. The abilities acquired through training are tested to a greater extent and more emphasis given to those abilities at each higher level; Qualifying more so than Derby and the All Age stakes more so than Qualifying.

### **Open**

An Open stake is "open" to all retrievers that are at least six months of age. Either an amateur or professional handler may handle dogs in an Open stake. The club holding the trial may reduce the number of entries by designating the Open stake to be a Limited, Special or Restricted. To be entered in a Limited stake, a dog must be Qualified All Age. To be entered in a Special stake a dog must be Qualified All Age and must have earned that status during the current or prior calendar year. To be entered in a Restricted stake a dog must have previously placed in an Amateur, Open, Limited, Special or Restricted stake.

In an Open stake the dogs should be tested on marked retrieves on land and water and blind retrieves on land and water. Typically an Open stake will consist of four separate tests starting with multiple land marks, a land blind or blinds, water blind or blinds, and finally multiple water marks. However, marks and blinds can be combined and there is no requirement as to the order of the tests. Also there is no specified limitation as to distance for either marked or blind retrieves. After each test or series, the dog work is evaluated to that point and with no preset numbers or percentages, the dogs that exhibited the relatively better work are called back to continue the trial and all other dogs are excused from the competition. This process is continued until the remaining dogs have been tested on the four required areas and until

the dogs have separated themselves as to the relative quality of their work to the point where the best four dogs can be determined and ranked for 1 st, 2 nd, 3 rd and 4 th placements. If more than four dogs should finish a stake and exhibit outstanding work, after the four dogs that earned the four places are determined, the judges at their option may award the dog with the next best work a Reserve Judges Award of Merit (RJAM) and may award any remaining dog a Judges Award of Merit (JAM).

## **Amateur**

An Amateur stake is open to all retrievers that are at least six months of age. The only difference between an Amateur and an Open stake is that Professional Trainer/Handlers are not allowed to handle a dog in an Amateur stake. The club holding the trial may designate an Amateur stake to be an Owner/Handler Amateur, which imposes the further restriction that each dog must be handled only by its owner. Otherwise the Amateur and Open stakes are the same with respect to the skills tested and level of difficulty.

## **Qualifying**

A Qualifying stake is open to all retrievers that are at least six months of age. However, a dog may not be entered in a Qualifying stake if that dog has been awarded a place or a JAM in an Open, Limited, Special or Restricted stake; or has been awarded a place in an Amateur or Owner/Handler Amateur stake; or has been awarded 1 st place in two Qualifying stakes. Both amateur and professional handlers may handle dogs in a Qualifying stake.

A Qualifying stake parallels the Open and Amateur stakes in that the dogs should be tested on land and water marked retrieves as well as land and water blind retrieves. The primary difference is that typically the difficulty of the tests is somewhat less than the All Age stakes, and judges are allowed the latitude to be more tolerant with respect to abilities acquired through training relative to the major stakes. That is, some faults that are classified as major in regard to the all age stakes and therefore call for automatic elimination are classified as moderate in regard to a Qualifying stake leaving elimination to the judges' discretion.

## **Derby**

A Derby stake is open to all retrievers that are at least six months of age and which are not yet two years of age on the first day of the trial. Both amateurs and professionals may handle dogs in Derby stakes. The dogs in a Derby are tested on marked retrieves both land and water. While the dogs must exhibit sufficient training to deliver to hand and be reasonably steady on line, the emphasis is on natural abilities related to marked retrieves. Typically a Derby stake will consist of four tests, two on land and two on water, each a set of double marked retrieves.

One may hear the owner of a Derby dog brag that his or her dog has made the Derby List. The AKC does not award points for placements in Derby stakes. The *Retriever Field Trial News* does keep a record of points accumulated by Derby dogs and at the end of each calendar year publishes a list of dogs that have earned ten or more points in Derby stakes, hence "Making the Derby List". The point schedule utilized by *The Retriever Field News* is as follows:

1st Place = 5 points  
2nd Place = 3 points  
3rd Place = 2 points  
4th Place = 1 point