

## Hunter – Handler – Apprentice Judge – Association Judge

Hunting and hunting dogs are inseparable. We can all agree on that, but not much more.

The central focus of the versatile hunting dog movement, as we know it today, has always been the search for usable and versatile hunting dogs. From this search evolved our renowned testing system with natural ability and performance tests. It allowed us to support and promote the abilities of the various hunting breeds with respect to our hunting requirements. Multiple breed and testing clubs with specific testing regulations have, over many years, formed the character and structure of our versatile hunting dog movement.

Our testing rules and regulations define us, and just as important a component to our system are our judges. The Association recognized early on that our judges are important and started working on regulations for our judgeship.

Important factors to be considered in the judgeship regulations were the selection of suitable persons, their education and training, and the stipulation that only JGHV Judges would be allowed to judge at tests held by JGHV member clubs. The evaluations by our judges not only impact the breeding activities of our hunting dog breeds, but also determine a dog's usability as a hunting dog and hence, decide whether a dog meets the minimum standard that our legislation requires of a hunting dog.

One would have to believe that the path to the OfdVRW (Association Judgeship Regulations) as it stands today was a bumpy one. It had to be a challenging task to develop uniform regulations that encompass the specific requirements and conditions of all member breed and testing clubs, from continental pointing breeds to special breed clubs. The outcome of this effort can surely be called a success.

Who are our judges and where do they come from?

The Association functions as an umbrella organization for all member clubs. It was clear from the very beginning that the selection, education and training of judges would take place in the member clubs. JGHV registers our apprentice judges and nominates them judges after they have completed their training successfully.

It thus becomes clear that the member clubs are responsible for selecting apprentice judges and applying for their registration as apprentice judges with JGHV. There are a few conditions in place, such as possession of a valid hunting license and the membership in a member club, but in general, the member clubs decide who appears to them as suitable future judges. When you consider the importance and responsibility inherent to the position of a judge, it quickly becomes clear that our judges must have a great deal of hunting and hunting dog experience. This experience cannot be limited to the training and successful handling of hunting dogs through tests; it must extend to a rich experience in actual hunting with one's dogs. Reading a dog and its correct and purposeful behavior, or reading its incorrect behavior are as much part of a judge's experience and hunting practice. Years of well-rounded hunting practice becomes even more important as we continue to lose small game presence. The reduced small game presence deprives our hunting dogs of being able to show their natural abilities on multiple opportunities. Given our changed small game presence, our judges are now challenged to quickly and confidently recognize the dogs' natural abilities on small game.

Additionally, a judge's character is an important aspect in our judgeship. Our judges must reach objective and unbiased evaluations, work and cooperate as a team member in their judging group, and must be able to accurately interpret the contents of the test regulations and apply evaluation standards. In judging our dogs, there is no room for personal interpretation beyond or in conflict with the test regulations. Receiving the qualification of a judge does not represent a merit award; it is instead, the duty and responsibility of the person to serve in the versatile hunting dog movement. This, in reality, translates to dedicating much of one's free time to judging in the months of April, September and October, plus attending and/or holding training and preparation seminars. Experience and the confident application of our testing regulations are gained, above all, through regular judging and judging outside one's own club. What good are judges who have no time for judging?

I know how difficult club life can become when a member is denied registration as an apprentice judge despite meeting the formal requirements. It is every member club's high responsibility to screen the candidates. Members who react to the denial with personal attacks certainly lack the suitability to become judges.

Finally, let's address the paperwork which must be complete and submitted under the judgeship regulations. VGPs, or equivalent utility tests by special breed clubs are usually followed by requests from many successful handlers who wish to be registered as apprentice judges. Successful VGP handlers must wait until their VGP result has been verified by registration in the Studbook Register. VGP registration is done in the months January/February following the VGP and sent to the organizing club. Processing incomplete documentation takes a great deal of time.

With testing season behind us, I wish you a successful hunting season with your well-trained hunting dog.