

SAVHDA

Versatile Hunting Dog Testing is Here!



by Trudi Winter



photo: Andre van der Westhuizen

The South African Versatile Hunting Dog Association (SAVHDA) was launched on 18 August 2016 at Boavida Sporting Estate, Hartbeespoort. The launch of SAVHDA incorporated an Inaugural Field Meet, complete with tests and demonstrations, as well as our Inaugural General Meeting. It was a hectic three days, but well worth the time and effort!

What is SAVHDA, you might ask? It's a good question, since SAVHDA is the first association of its kind to be established in South Africa. SAVHDA is an association devoted solely to promoting, testing and training the versatile hunting dog breeds, otherwise known as the HPR breeds. Apart from competitive field trials and a very simple once off

natural ability test, there are no other tests available for the versatile breeds. SAVHDA aims to fill that gap with a variety of versatile tests already in use internationally.

SAVHDA's aims are simple. Firstly, to foster and promote excellence in versatility and hunting performance of the HPR/Versatile breeds in South Africa. Secondly, to determine, prove and grade the hunting and versatile abilities of the HPR/Versatile breeds in performance tests. Lastly, to awaken, encourage and foster an appreciation for ethical hunting and for the truly versatile capabilities of these dogs in the hunting community. Results of our tests will be made readily available to the public, and hence, may be used by hunters, prospective breeders and potential puppy buyers as guides to

continued overleaf...



proven performance and genetics.

Our tests are modeled on well established, existing hunt tests from Germany (the Solms or HZP) and the USA (the NAVHDA tests). We currently have a series of four tests: the Natural Ability Test, the Novice Hunting Test, the Advanced Versatile Hunting Test, and at the highest level, the Utility Test. Each test successively tests for a higher degree of competence and training. A blood tracking test is also on the cards for next year!

Each test comprises a field category (nose, search, pointing and drag) and a water category (from a simple retrieve to difficult blinds and searches) and Gun Sensitivity. The SAVHDA tests are somewhat

unique in that the field performance testing is run on natural game and is therefore based on real hunting of wild birds. Also judged throughout the test are Nose, Desire to Work, Cooperation and Obedience. Each of the attributes and exercises are graded individually, thus, at the end of the test the handler receives vital feedback on the complete package of important aspects of versatile dog performance! Temperamental and physical aspects are also evaluated.

Each test element is graded on a linear scale from Outstanding (5 Points) or Very Good (4 Points) to Insufficient (0 Points). Any dog passing all of the categories at a very high level is eligible for a Prize 1 classification, which is similar to graduating

magna cum laude! There are also Prize 2 and Prize 3 classifications available for dogs passing all of the categories at various threshold levels.

These tests are time intensive and entry is therefore limited to between 6 and 10 dogs a day. Dogs are given the full attention of the judges throughout the test, and the emphasis is on genuinely assessing the dogs at their full potential.

There are almost no disqualifications – although a dog might not pass an element of the test, it may nonetheless continue to participate in the remainder of the categories in order that the handler may have a full assessment of the dog at the end of the day!

This is important in helping handlers understand the strengths and potential inherent weaknesses of their dogs, or their training, in order that they can improve and make training adjustments where necessary. The

*"The Novice
Hunting Test. This
is a practical test of
functional
hunting
performance, and
incorporates field
work, a drag (100 m)
and water work."*

inaugural tests in Gauteng were followed by the launch of the Cape SAVHDA tests in September! So far a total of 22 dogs have been tested in the Natural Ability, Novice Hunting and Advanced Versatile Tests, with 14 dogs passing at various levels.

The very first Advanced Versatile Hunting Test Prize 1 was awarded in Gauteng! This test is identical to the German Solms, and requires an extremely capable and well-trained dog to pass. With field work, drags of up to 300 metres, and water work with 40 metre blinds and duck searches, it is no small feat!

In the Cape, we tried out a new test developed specifically for the South African handler and hunter – the Novice Hunting Test. This is a practical test of functional hunting performance, and incorporates field work, a drag (100 m) and water work. Dogs passing this test not only have the natural ability required to do the job, but also have enough training and experience to be a very capable rough shooter's dog.

Although SAVHDA itself may run tests, our structure allows for and encourages the establishment of local Chapters. We see this as a great strength in reaching far flung areas, and in catering for the higher density areas where one Chapter may be insufficient to cater for all.

Interested in finding out more about SAVHDA? Contact your local Representative! Our website should be up and running soon, but in the meantime our FB page will carry announcements about Workshops and Test Dates for 2017.

SAVHDA Representatives:

Northwest (Gauteng, Limpopo, North West): Matthew Berry (boavida@saol.com) 082 869 9366

Southeast (KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Mpumalanga): Dicky Meij (technical@daeco.co.za) 082 336 4554

Cape (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape): Rooies Dorland (rooies@dorland.co.za) 084 618 1569, or Mariann Wilson (mariann@dogsinmotion.co.za)



photo: Andre van der Westhuizen