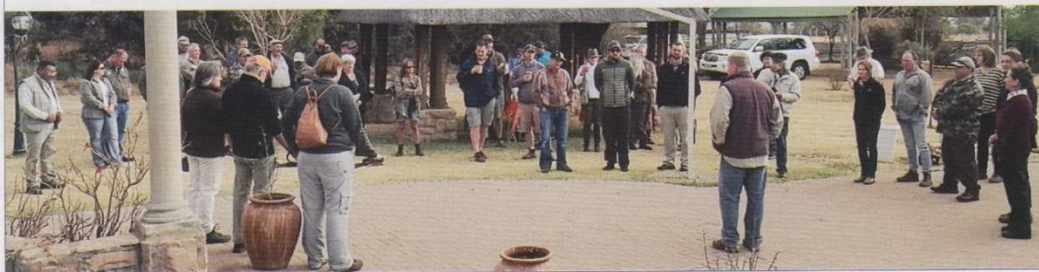


Update on SAVHDA

The start-up of any new venture is often challenging and not for the faint-hearted, and so it has been for us at the South African Versatile Hunting Dog Association (SAVHDA).



by Trudi Winter

Despite the challenges, we are well into our second year of testing and activities. As the saying goes, what didn't kill us made us stronger! Here's what has transpired during the past year...

Tests and Workshops

For those of you not familiar with SAVHDA, we are a non-profit organization that utilises performance-based testing systems to evaluate the hunting qualities of the Versatile/HPR breeds.

Our aims are to foster and promote versatility, training, hunting performance and ethics as they relate to the Versatile breeds. To these ends, in addition to our tests we offer a variety of training, handling and judging workshops.

Six workshops were held during 2017. Some of these were gen-

eral workshops in which interested parties were given the opportunity to learn more about SAVHDA and our testing system, other workshops focused on training and handling for our tests. One of the most beneficial workshops was the Test Director/Judges Workshop, in which SAVHDA members participated in a 2-day learning experience in order to become future Judges, Learner Judges and Test Directors.

Another great learning experience was the 2-day Foundation Training Workshop with renowned international trainer Jeppe Stridh, held in the Western Cape.

Nine test days in total were held, six in Gauteng and three in the Western Cape. The majority of dogs tested entered the Novice Hunting Test (NHT), with fewer dogs entering the Junior Versatile Hunting Test (JVHT - SAVHDA's Natural Ability Test). A few dogs entered

Not all photographs in this article are related to SAVHDA

Flatcoated retriever Kara owned by Mike Holman. Photo by Mike Holman



the Advanced Versatile Hunting Test (AdvHT), our equivalent to the German Solms or HZP.

Most dogs passing the tests do so at the basic or intermediate threshold pass level, earning a Prize 3 or a Prize 2, respectively. These categories indicate at what level a dog passes a test, and in each test all attributes and exercises must be passed. Only a few dogs pass at SAVHDA's highest Prize 1 level, meaning that in all categories, especially those of heritable abilities, the dog passed with high scores. This indicates to us that the tests and our judging are pitched at the right level to identify and separate out the high-end performers.

Having a tiered structure of pass levels is beneficial from both a training perspective and a breeding perspective, indicating the level the dog

is performing at and serving to motivate handlers to strive to achieve higher standards – which is exactly what we are hoping for!

SAVHDA Week – August 9-13

The SAVHDA Field Meet week coincides with our Annual General Meeting, and is designed to bring SAVHDA members from across the country together to meet one another, participate in training and workshops, and enter tests. This constitutes nearly a week of activities, and culminates in the AGM.

This year the Field Meet was held at Boavida Training Center, with some of the Tests being held in Derby. Attendance wasn't quite as hoped due to the approaching Inaugural HPR National Championships, with many handlers steeped in field training

for that event! Nonetheless, it was a successful and thoroughly enjoyable week, and served to cement our goals and activities.

The highlight of the week for me was judging the tests held on Friday and Saturday. As an accredited Judge of HPR, British Breed, Retriever and Spaniel Field Trials, I enjoy judging all the gundog breeds, but to me nothing beats watching the pointing breeds do their thing. Judging the SAVHDA tests is most rewarding of all, because one is judging the total versatile dog, with ample opportunity to see each dog in all phases of its work from searching and pointing to drags to water tests! As thrilling as it is to see outstanding field work culminating in an intense and productive point, it is equally thrilling to see an outstanding piece of water work,



with the dog hitting the water like a freight train, searching in it with energy and focus, and finally retrieving a duck or goose perfectly to hand.

To see a dog who has had outstanding work in the field and water, appear from out of sight on a 300 meter drag, proudly returning with a big hare, is quite something (and let me tell you, the handler will be bursting with pride but too scared to show it!). It never ceases to amaze me what these dogs can do: multi-tasking is their forte and to see really good ones in action is incredibly rewarding.

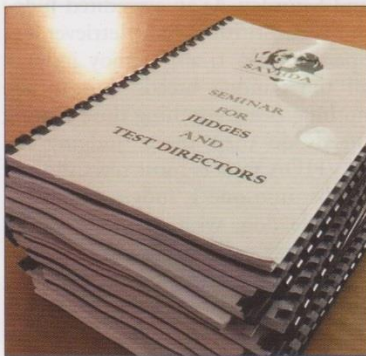
arrived at, immediately in the field to the handler and gallery. This total interaction results in a more relaxed environment, and it is especially gratifying to see a new handler achieve what he or she thought they and their dog couldn't!

Make no mistake, however, the tests are demanding and handlers are understandably on edge no matter how hard the judges may try to maintain a calm and even environment!

We focus on the Junior Versatile Hunting Test and Novice Hunting



Monty owned by Andrew O'Dell. Photo by Sarah O'Dell



Another enjoyable aspect of the SAVHDA Tests is that judges may interact with the handler when and as they feel necessary. These tests are not competitions; each dog is judged to a standard solely against that standard, and the goal is to genuinely assess the true aptitude and performance of the dog under judgement.

It is perfectly acceptable to talk with and guide the handler if necessary in order to get the best out of the dog, and handlers are encouraged to ask questions if they are uncertain about something. SAVHDA also follows a system of open judging, in which the judges give scores, once

Test. Our main focus in testing has been in the two lower level (but nonetheless important) tests: the Junior Versatile Hunting Test (JVHT) and the Novice Hunting Test (NHT).

Since the SAVHDA tests are new to most handlers, it is understandable that these are the tests that most people will enter. They are easy to understand and not too daunting for most handlers and well-bred Versatile dogs. Until we have a well-established culture of versatile testing, these will likely remain SAVHDA's key tests for some time.

SAVHDA's Junior Versatile Hunting Test (JVHT) is our Natural

Ability test. It is the same test that NAVHDA offers, and almost identical to the German Natural Ability Test (VJP). Seven hereditary characteristics fundamental to the makeup of a good, reliable versatile hunting dog are tested.

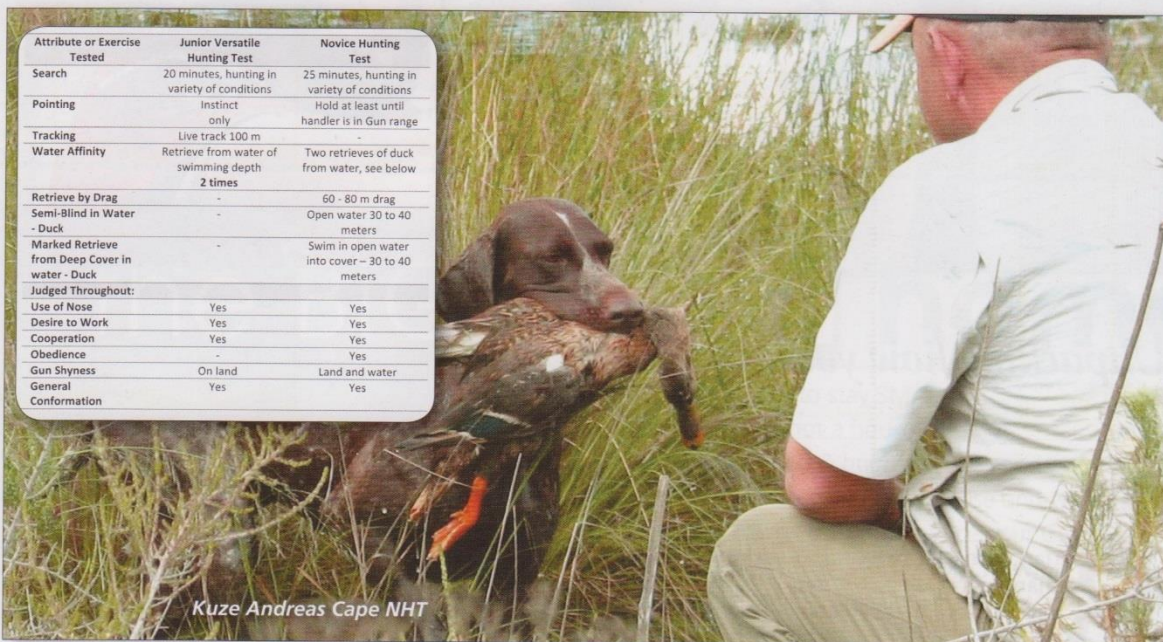
Only dogs of 16 months or less are eligible to enter this test. The Novice Hunting Test (NHT) bridges the gap between the Junior Test and the demanding Advanced Tests, helping guide training towards them and measuring progress along the way. This test is also a good measure of

and dogs usually work on a variety of wild birds and in varying cover for 20 – 25 minutes. In these genuine hunting conditions, the more experienced dogs can shine - and the less experienced dogs often really begin to come into their own!

Recently in Derby, we had a variety of gamebird species to work: Swainson's Francolin, Orange River Partridge, Coqui Partridge and Guinea Fowl. I saw some very nice work on Coqui and Orange River Partridge from multiple dogs of different breeds. Back at Boavida,

and far between. One had to start somewhere, however, and we enlisted interested HPR field trial judges and people with experience in the German testing systems. Hunting experience was also essential, since these are practical hunting tests. With that core we began, and each new judge added had to go through learner judging appointments and attend workshops.

We now have a reasonable bank of judges, and our experience base is growing with each test offered. We were especially pleased to be able to



Kuze Andreas Cape NHT

Natural Ability, and as such it caters for dogs that were unable to be tested in the Junior Test.

Dogs that pass this test will produce game for the gun, retrieve game from land or water, cooperate with the handler in order to do so, and present themselves as a reasonably capable roughshooter's dog. Passing the Novice test indicates good natural abilities and that trained abilities and obedience are well under way. (For more detail about these tests, refer to the chart above of tested attributes.)

The field work in all the SAVHDA tests is conducted on natural game

dogs also worked Swainson's in thick cover, presenting them nicely, to the surprise of a few less experienced handlers!

Dams with lovely expansive water and good cover are utilized in the tests. Dogs can show their water skills, using their independence and perseverance, courage to tackle heavier cover in water to recover a marked duck, as well as trust and cooperation with the handler in taking a semi-blind where they have not seen the duck fall.

We are often asked who judges these tests. At first, experienced judges were understandably few

draw on the expertise and knowledge of some JGHV (German Hunting Dog Association) accredited German Hunt Test Judges in September!

Next year we will carry on much as we did in 2017, testing more dogs, continuing to build our judging base and offering more tests at advanced levels. Blood tracking testing is also on the cards, and I now have a freezer full of blood and buck skins thanks to a very keen participant! So, be on the lookout for more workshops and training days, as well as more tests.

Interested in finding out more? Visit our FB page or website: www.savhda.co.za