

# A Beginner's View of the VJP Test

by Todd Hedenstrom

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So you're a new Drahthaar owner, or you're thinking of getting a pup, and you've heard all this stuff about the testing program. You're totally confused about what you should be doing to get ready for that first test, and nervous because you have no clue what's going to happen at the first test.

Well, don't worry, you're not alone. Unfortunately, there's never been a whole lot of good 'beginner' info in the Verein Deutsch-Drahthaar, and if you're not close to someone who's already trained for and run in some of the tests, it can be a somewhat unnerving experience. I live in Georgia, and the nearest person to me who could help was three solid hours away. I 'went it alone', but I'm writing this to help others so they won't be quite so 'in the dark' as I was.

This article is about the **Verbands-Jugend-Prüfung**, or (as it's referred to in the 'official' VDD/GNA rule book) the **Association Youngster Test**. The most common way you'll hear this test referred to is by its German initials, **VJP**, or sometimes as the '**Spring Natural Ability Test**'. This test is the first that a Drahthaar will run in his/her life- entry is limited to dogs at or under 15 months in age. The VJP is a puppy test, to evaluate the dog's natural abilities at an early stage in the dog's life.

The first and most frequent question everyone has about this test is: *How should I train for the VJP??* The answer is really simple- *As little as possible*. Really- this is a natural ability test, not a field trial. The important thing you can do is **expose** your dog to everything they'll see in the test. If you find an area (such as pointing) that your dog doesn't seem to be catching onto, then you should do some light training, but really- **don't overdo it!**

This article doesn't go into training- that's an arena in which I don't (won't) claim expertise. What I'll do is tell you what you should bring to the test, and describe a test that I watched, and perhaps throw in a few comments about the tests that I've run in for good measure. I've run two dogs through VJP, and witnessed three other VJPs. The pictures that accompany the text are from a test that I witnessed near Nashville, Tennessee, in the spring of 1995. No, I'm not in any of the pictures, I was running the camera.

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## Essential Equipment

### Bring:

- a dog

- that dog's Ahnentafel - the green pedigree papers for the dog.
- proof of rabies vaccination - for the dog, not you.
- a good leash and collar - the dog will spend a **lot** of time on lead.
- boots - for you, not the dog. Be sure they're comfortable, you're going to be walking a lot. Waterproof is good, there's likely to be mud and water to cross.
- rain gear - it never fails to rain when I leave my rain gear at home.
- briar pants or chaps - I've never seen a test where there weren't briars.
- patience - for the dog, the judges, and the test coordinator, but mostly for yourself.

### Have:

- the *Judges' Manual for Association Breed Tests (VZPO)* - an incredibly mistranslated name for the book, this manual isn't for judges, it's for handlers. This book is an English translation of the German manual titled '*Ordnung für Verbandszuchtprüfungen*', which translates to *Regulations for Association Breed Tests*. You'll need this book, it has all the rules for the VJP, and the HZP, and some other stuff such as how to fill out entry forms and such. Don't let the title fool you (personal experience)- get this book **well** before you go to the test, and read it. Contact the VDD for a copy, or [email me](#) and I'll try to get you in contact with the current source of them in the organization.

## The Test

Ok, this is the story of a test I watched- bear in mind that each test is different, there are no set 'standard' agendas, so don't expect your test to be identical to this one. It will likely be similar, but it won't be the same.

Early in the morning, all the handlers, spectators, and judges met at a McDonalds south of Nashville. The test was to be run near Percy Priest Lake, on land that was ordinarily used for bird dog and beagle field trials. The first order of business was for the judges to collect Ahnentafels and rabies certificates from the handlers- they keep these until the test is finished. After a short 'hey how are you?' session, we were off to the test site.

*Note: In tests I've attended, meeting places have generally been fast-food places, but at my last VJP, the hosts had a nice breakfast set up for us at thier lodge. This was a really first-class test!! My thanks again to Bob, Hollie, and Andy.*

At the test site, the judges got the handlers together for an introduction meeting and general orientation. The judging team is headed by a senior judge, and he has two other full-fledged judges assisting. At this test, as usual, there were two apprentices, who were studying to become judges. Once the senior judge had finished his introductions, and had answered any questions the handlers had, it was time to start the test.



The first thing the judges asked the handlers to do, one at a time, was to release the dogs from lead, and let them run around for a while. During this short romp, which allowed the dogs to get stretched out and loosened up after the night in the kennel, the judges conducted the



**gun sensitivity test.** With the dog a fair distance from the judge and handler, the judge fired a shotgun (loaded with blanks) into the air, twice. The dog's reaction is noted- if a dog is gunshy, the fact is noted on the test sheet, as gunshy dogs are disqualified from the VDD breeding program. I have **never** seen a gunshy Draughthaare at a test.

Next came the field **search** portion of the test. Each dog was released again into the field, and another dog/handler followed at a distance, with the dog on lead. The reason for this is that if the dog searching was to flush a rabbit, the dog following would be set on it's track. Also, when the first dog's field search was through, the next dog was right there ready to go, without a long trek back to the test headquarters.

Also during the field search, the judges watched the dogs carefully to see what use the dogs made of their **nose**. If the dog found game, and went on **point**, that too was judged. At this test, only one dog found birds to point during his field search. The handlers were instructed to treat this search phase as if they were out hunting with the dog- not to try anything specific. The dogs searched both field and the forest.

One little hint I can give you here has to do with 'exposure', like I mentioned before. It's very likely that you'll be followed around in the search phase of the test by upwards of five people. At one test I ran in, we had three judges, three apprentices, and me in the field- my pup didn't know if it was a party or a hunt, and she spent quite some time visiting with all the folks who were out there with us. If you're out with your pup, ask some friends along- get that pup used to more than just yourself behind her, or she may not know quite what to do when the circus follows her around at the test.

Every so often, after the judges finish watching a dog work, they get together in a tight little 'covey' and talk about what they've just seen. They make notes in little books.

This can be quite unnerving when you don't really understand what's going on. They're not over there trying to figure out an easy way to tell you that your dog is terrible (geesh, I hope not). They're comparing notes on what they've seen, so that a consensus can be reached on a score for that phase of the dog's work. Also, the apprentice judges get insight here on what the elder judges feel is good work, and what isn't.



during the test. These little the other end of the field don't let them rattle you. If something, **ask**.



If you've got questions during the test at **any time**, then by all means ask the senior judge. The association claims to have an 'open' judging policy, which means that you can ask the judge anything knots of judges way off on can be intimidating, but you want to know

The next phase of the test was **pointing**. Because wild game is pretty scarce in most parts of this country, most (all I've seen) VJP tests will plant pen-raised birds for the pointing test.

The dogs are expected to point naturally- that is, without a command. They aren't expected to hold point for a long time, and chasing the bird into the next county isn't held against them- these are young, (for the most part) untrained dogs, after all. Also, a dog that lies down on point is fine, too- the Germans don't mind a dog lying down on point.

At this test, two quail were planted for each dog, in a field of moderate cover. The handlers released thier dogs, and worked easily into the birds. The day of the test was quite dry and hot, so the dogs had a bit of trouble with the scent conditions, but in the end all the dogs pointed.

Following a quick lunch, it was back to the field, this time in search of the elusive 'bunny rabbit'.

This phase of the test was the longest of the day, and has been at every test I've attended. Mostly it consists of walking around for a few hours, with your dog on lead, watching the judges beat every bush in the county with big sticks.

Every so often, a rabbit would be seen bolting from a bush, presumably to avoid being beaten with the large sticks. The judges would note the path the rabbit took while making good his escape, and call forward a dog. The handler was told the basic path that the rabbit ran, and told to put his dog on the track of the rabbit.

The handlers each came up, took thier dogs off lead, and watched carefully as thier dogs followed the exact path of the rabbits. Some of the dogs bark when following a track, even if the rabbit is nowhere in sight. This is noted by the judges as 'spurlaut', or 'loud while following scent', though it is by no means a negative mark. Other dogs will bark when chasing the rabbit- this is marked as 'sichtlaut', or 'loud on the sight of game'. Again, this is not a negative mark, just a notation about the dog's style of hunting.



Each dog was given the opportunity to track at least two rabbits, to demonstrate their dogs ability to track to the fullest. The judges kept the handlers apprised of how well the dogs were doing- the handlers had the option of continuing to look for rabbits if they felt that their dogs could improve their scores with more attempts. However, the handlers were also warned that if the dog did **worse** on other tracks, their score could also go down as well.

Finally, the field work (and the walking and beating of bushes) was over. It was time to relax for a bit, and wait for the judges to add up the scores. But first, the dogs were each inspected for disqualifying faults for the breeding program. This is done at each test.

The dog's ear tattoos were compared to those on the Anentafel, and the dog's teeth checked for problems such as underbite, overbite, and cross-bite. The dog's eyes are checked for entropionism or extropionism. Male dogs are checked for monorchidism (single testicle). This was much like a dog show, only nobody was judged winner or loser, it was strictly an inspection for serious faults.

While all the tooth-counting was going on, the subject of 'P1' teeth came up. Some dogs have extra P1s (that's the designation for a certain tooth- each has a designation), and some don't have quite enough. In either case, a notation is made, but it's not considered a serious fault. Any teeth missing or extra other than the P1s is considered a problem.

The wait on the scores is likely the most frustrating time of any test. It's such a long time because the judges have to be very precise in their paperwork, and it's all in German. Each dog's Anentafel is marked with his score, and a certificate is filled out for each dog who passes the test, to be presented to the handler when the scores are announced.



The happy handlers, having passed thier first test with thier pups, pose for a group photo. The handlers and thier dogs, from left to right, are: Klaus Medenbach and Zack von Schadwalde (a Deutsch-Langhaar), Thomas Suding and Daisy vom Jägermeister, Billy Avery and Andrea vom White Oak, and Jeff Parks with Ike v.d. Jägerhütte.

That's about it- the VJP is the first test you'll run with a VDD dog, and in my opinion, the most enjoyable. The only piece of real advice I can give is 'don't sweat it'. If your pup delivers you the performance you like, then it doesn't matter what happens at the VJP. I've seen dogs do **terrible** in the VJP, yet they're great dogs. That's what dogs are like- some days they're on, some days it's best to leave them in the truck. But ain't that the way it is with us, too??

Hope to see you at a VJP real soon...