

# **USBCHA Trial Management Recommendations**

The sport of sheep dog trailing in the US is growing at an exponential rate. New trials are popping up all over the country and, as the sport grows, we have many new folks involved and many 1st time trial managers learning the ropes. The following is a list of livestock management recommendations endorsed by the USBCHA to be set as a guide by trial managers in order to facilitate a smooth running event.

## **SHEEP**

The sheep are the most important facet of any trial. Their handling and care during the trial, as well as sheep management in the set out and exhaust pen will make or break the success of many runs. Availability of sheep is often a challenge, especially for trial managers in the eastern part of the country. If sheep numbers are limited, it is often the case that the sheep need to be re-run several times during the day in order to accommodate all the dogs entered. There are limits to the number of times a sheep can be used in a trial. This will be dictated by many factors including: temperature, length of the outrun and course condition of the sheep (dry ewes being more durable than lambs or recently weaned sheep).

There is the conception that hair sheep and lighter breeds are more capable of running several times during a day. This is only true to a point. Extreme heat, large courses are just as tiring for fast moving "light" hair sheep as they are to heavy wool breeds.

It is recommended that any sheep not run more than 3 times during a single day.

## **SET OUT**

Dog trailing is a sport full of "luck of the draw" situations so it falls to the trial manager to try, as best he can, to level the playing field; to try to reduce the variations in draw, to make the groups of sheep as uniform as possible. The care that the sheep receive in the set out and exhaust pen is paramount. There are many possible designs for a set out

system. Topography, available equipment, visibility from the post, ease of sheep movement and set out and available help will all influence the location and design.

The ideal set out has a couple of pens to hold the waiting sheep, a pen large enough to hold 3 or 4 runs worth of sheep followed by 2 pens in series, large enough to hold a run each. There will be shade, water and hay feeders available. If the pens are designed well, then one person will be able to sort and release sheep to the set out person efficiently. Properly designed pens do NOT require a dog to move sheep through them. If the set out post is close enough then often one person can do all the work at the top. The location of the set out post varies between classes and should be far enough from the holding pens to eliminate the draw back to the sheep in the pen. If topography allows it is beneficial to have the set out post out of sight from the holding pen and preferably not perpendicular to

the set-out point in the field (more behind the set point than directly to the side of the set point).

There should also be a reject/ injured /return pen at the set out and exhaust. This will be used for sheep that break back to the set out during the run or at set out, for injured sheep or for sheep that are identified as unfit during the trial. Unfit sheep should be marked. Separating and marking the sheep saves sorting these sheep out continuously during the trial, facilitates treatment, avoids accidentally using sheep that should not be run. Any sheep abused by a dog during the trial should not be run again regardless of whether it shows obvious injury or not. Sheep chased, run off the field, crashed into fences, gripped and knocked down all constitute abuse.

Hay and water should be provided.

If a sufficient number of sheep are available to run the entire day with fresh sheep for each run then the sheep should split and the afternoons sheep not brought to the set out till the middle of the day. This means that no sheep will be held in the set out all day waiting to run.

In the event that sheep are set from a stock trailer then they should have a sufficient area in which to rest and feed between runs.

The set out itself is often a major determining factor in the success of a run. Sheep must be handled in a calm workmanlike way both in the pens and during the set out. Sheep that are roughed up, crowded, abused by a dog in the pens, mishandled to load into the chutes and then fought with on their way to the set out post are not "winning sheep" for the handler standing at the post. Set out help is often selected from the handler's attendant. A good rule of thumb is to limit the dog handlers at the top to experienced handlers and dogs. The opportunity to set sheep is NOT a venue for training or to take the edge off a "hot" dog. While Novice handlers are often keen to set sheep at a trial it is not always conducive to have inexperienced help in this job. Rather, have the less experienced volunteers work in the pen, sorting and loading sheep WITHOUT a dog. Given proper guidance and support, it is a much better way to use help and to aid in the education of the less experienced handlers. Likewise a crew of kids in the set out pen may seem like a cheap option but is often disastrous to the well being of the sheep. Less is more when it comes to help at the top; Properly designed

pens and some ground rules as to how the job will be done are necessary for the job to go well.

Some trials have enough money to hire set out crews. Regardless if they are paid or volunteer, be sure to keep them well fed and watered, provide water for dogs and horses and to keep in contact with radios. Several good radios and plenty of batteries are a must.

## **EXHAUST**

Exhaust pens must consider many of the same details as the set out. Water and hay for sheep, room to rest, multiple pens to avoid rerunning sheep too soon. The sheep in the exhaust should not be visible from the field. Cheap plastic snow fencing is a popular choice to reduce visibility. The entrance to the exhaust should be designed to facilitate removal of sheep from the field quickly. Often a separate gate for the handler and dog is included. Plenty of fresh water for the dogs and sheep is a must.

If possible, sheep should be given the maximum amount of time to rest between runs. This often is best served by having multiple pens in the exhaust area. Sheep may then be

held separately during the running so that the earlier run sheep re run first, giving the later run sheep time to rest and recover.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Water may be provided on the course for competing dogs if humidity, temperature, elevation or a combination of conditions applies. Handlers may send the competing dog to water at their discretion with no loss of points. Time will not be stopped. The judge may call a run, with points held to that point, if they deem the dog or sheep are in distress.

Have plenty of marking crayons or spray at both ends of the field. Have a basic first aid kit and an on-call vet in the local area.

There are as many ways to put on a trial as there are trials and locations and people involved. Our spectators, our sponsors and our fellow handlers need to be confident that as trial managers we are doing all that is possible to put on a quality event and as our sport gains in popularity it is our responsibility as handlers and as stockmen to keep the welfare of our charges in mind.

## **RUN ORDERS**

Many people think that trials should randomly draw run orders in accordance to the rules that apply to the Nationals. This is not the case. However, it is good trial management to try to be sure that the run order is fair. One way is to draw out of a hat. More important is to try to be sure that the dog that has an early draw the first day has a later draw the next day. Handlers want an opportunity to run both early and late, believing that a particular time of day is more favorable under the circumstances. Those circumstances vary widely and a handlers' assumption about a "good draw" may be wrong, but if they draw up late both days or early both days, there is a perception that the draw was not as fair as it could have been. Many trials simply draw for one day and then, on the second day, start halfway down that run order, which, in effect, gives most handlers a different time of day. That is more fair than simply reversing the run order, which puts those in the middle of the day back in the middle the second day.

