

The Basics Of A Draft Test

Swissies have a long history of pulling carts in Europe. Weavers, dairymen, butchers and peddlers all could be found using Swissies in pursuing their daily tasks. The draft test helps to carry on the working tradition and strengthens this innate behavior in our dogs. The draft test consists of exercises designed to demonstrate skills resulting from both natural ability and training that are applicable to realistic work situations.

There are two levels to this title, Novice Draft Dog, and the more advanced, Open Draft Dog. Teams consist of either a handler and a single dog, or a handler and two dogs (a *Brace*). The exercises in the Open Draft Dog are done off lead. A dog must pass all six parts of the test in order to earn its title. The test is conducted with the primary concern being for the safety of the dogs at all times. If a Judge determines a particular dog is in distress or about to put itself in a dangerous situation, the Judge will use his or her discretion to excuse the dog.

The following sections are a general overview of the draft test. **PLEASE REVIEW THE OFFICIAL DRAFT TEST REGULATIONS FOR SPECIFICS ON ANY PART OF THE TEST ABOUT WHICH THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE QUESTIONS.**

Basic Control. In this part of the test, the handler and dog are tested to verify the handler's control over the dog. Unlike AKC Obedience Trials, no point system exists and handlers are permitted to talk to and encourage their dogs during the exercises. These exercises are judged less formally than in AKC obedience trials, with the judges allowing a little more latitude in the dog's relative positioning to the handler. In a GSMDCA draft test, this portion is conducted in a ring separate from the Maneuver Course. Under GSMDCA draft regulations, dogs with CDs may waive this portion of the test.

During the Heel, the handler walks a pattern called out by the judge and will display basic obedience skills such as "slow", "fast", "right turn", "left turn", "about turn" and "halt". The dog must stay in the "heel" position while executing these maneuvers. While the handler may encourage and command the dog, he must not touch the dog.

During the Recall exercise, the handler leaves the dog sitting on the far side of the ring. When instructed by the judge, the handler calls the dog. The dog must respond to the first command or signal to come. The dog will come to the handler near enough to be touched and should sit facing the handler.

Group Stay. This is a one-minute down stay with the handlers across the width of the ring.

Harness, Hitching and Equipment Check. This part of the test demonstrates the handler's ability to correctly harness and hitch the dog and the willingness of the dog to be hitched.

The handler positions the dog at least twenty feet away from the draft rig and harness, which has previously been positioned by the stewards. The handler leaves the dog, gets the harness, returns to and harnesses the dog. The dog then backs 4 feet in the direction of the cart.

The handler hitches the dog and the dog cooperates in this process without opposition. Once the handler indicates the team's readiness to proceed, the judge then instructs the team to pull forward 20 feet, where the judge then inspects the equipment.

Maneuvering Course and Basic Commands. This part of the test demonstrates the dog and handler's ability to obey basic commands while hitched to the draft apparatus. The handler may

work in front of, beside and/or behind the dog. However, the handler may not physically impede the dog's movement at any time.

During the maneuvering the judge will give certain commands. On *Slow*, the dog and cart must noticeably slow its pace for 10 feet. On *Halt* the team must halt for a friendly stranger, be greeted, and receive/secure a load. Later it will unload this cargo. It will also encounter an obstacle that that handler will have to leave the dog to remove. In all cases the dog may not move the cart while halted. On *Back* the handler must instruct the dog to back up for a distance of 3 feet for Open.

The maneuvering course includes circular patterns, broad curves, weaving or slalom patterns, at least one 90 degree turn to the right and to the left, a narrow area that is one foot wider than the widest part of the cart, and a removable obstacle. During the Maneuvering course event each dog will be subjected to a visual and auditory distraction. It should take note of them, yet not significantly follow, show fear, or try to veer out of the ring because of them.

Also at some point in the test, the handler will leave the dog and walk at least 30 feet away for Novice or out of the dog's sight for Open. After three minutes, the judge signals the handler to return to the dogs and it must have not moved out of its location.

The Distance Freight Haul. In this part of the test the dog and handler traverse a preset course with a freight load. The weight of the load must be between 25 to 100 pounds. The teams negotiate different types of terrain and must demonstrate control of the cart in both uphill and downhill slopes. The length of the course is one mile.