

Earthdog

continued

with Laurie McKenzie

After your dog has completed and passed the three senior earthdog tests the next level is the master test. The test is designed to come as close as possible to a natural hunting situation. On a natural hunt the dog is expected to locate the den and enter without encouragement. It should remain in the den working the quarry in a manner that will allow the hunter to locate both the dog and the quarry. If the quarry is unreachable by the hunter e.g. in a rock or a den located in the mountainside, or if the quarry is not to be taken by the hunter, the dog must leave the quarry and exit the den when called by the hunter.

The master test den design is used with two modifications discussed below. The den entrance is not readily visible and is blocked with a removable constriction. A scent line approximately six metres will lead to the den entrance, and an unscented false entrance visible to the dog is located midway along the scent line, at least 1.5 metres from the scent line. The first modification is a constriction point which consists of boards or slats approximately 3.8 cm wide and 45.6 cm long, placed opposite each other to narrow the tunnel opening to approximately 15.2 cm wide. The ends of the boards or slats should be bevelled or rounded.

The second modification is an obstruction which is a 15.2 cm diameter PVC pipe placed crossways in the tunnel and loosely mounted on 2.54 cm dowel so that it is movable (it should move approximately 6.3 cm each way). The portion of the den liner above the obstruction (22.8 cm on each side of the PVC pipes centre line for a total of 45.6 cm) is elevated 15.2 cm above the main liner and naturally covered or camouflaged.

Neither the constriction nor the obstacle is to be placed within 1.5 metres of the entrance or the quarry end of the tunnel.



First part of the master test

The handler is positioned with the judge, and they proceed in the direction of the scent line from a release point approximately 100 metres from the real den entrance. The dog must indicate the real den entrance before the judge reaches the den entrance to qualify. (The judge should reach the den in about 60 seconds.) If the dog barks at or in the false den or does not indicate the tunnel entrance it will not qualify, but can continue to be tested.



Obstacle inverted



Constriction



Obstacle upright

Second part of the master test

When the removable constriction is removed the dog must reach the quarry within 90 seconds and begin working the quarry. Work shall continue for 60 seconds for artificial quarry.

While the dog is working, the judge will create a distraction in the working area by lightly striking the top of the working area for 30 seconds with a piece of wood to simulate digging sounds. The dog should continue working the quarry and ignore the overhead distraction. As stated with the previous tests if in the opinion of the judge the dog is not reacting to the presence of the artificial quarry, the judge may attempt to interest the dog with no penalty to the dog. This may include manipulating the artificial quarry or the use of a noise-maker or voice encouragement. Once the dog has completed the second part of the test the judge will instruct the handler to remove the dog from the working area without injury to the handler. Dogs must pass both parts of the test to qualify.

When the dog has a record of having qualified in the master earthdog test at four ANKC club tests under two different judges an ANKC master earthdog (ME) certificate will be issued to the owner and the dog will be identified as a master earthdog in all official ANKC records by the suffix title ME which shall supersede any ANKC earthdog test title that may have been previously earned.

Strong dog earthdog test

In October 2008 an additional test was introduced called strong dog, this test is designed to test an earthdog's ability to draw a quarry from a den. To be eligible to enter strong dog test, dogs must have achieved the title of novice earthdog.

The test consists of two parts. A: approaching the quarry
B: drawing the quarry from the den, to be retrieved by the handler. The quarry shall consist of a 7kg weighted pelt.

The test is conducted using the normal novice den design, i.e. 9 metres long with three 90-degree turns. The dens can be buried or placed above ground. The full length of the den is scented and the weighted quarry is placed at the end of the tunnel. The dog is given the opportunity to identify the scent just prior to being entered at the entrance by the handler.

The dog has one minute to locate the quarry and may give voice while locating the quarry, but must remain silent once it has latched onto the quarry. The dog is allowed five minutes to draw

the quarry to the den entrance where the handler retrieves the quarry from the dog. The handler may give verbal commands to the dog throughout the test. The dog must complete both parts of the test within the time limits in order to qualify.

The strong dog earthdog title (SDE) is awarded to any dog that qualifies on three separate occasions under at least two different earthdog judges.

Training your dog at home for earthdog tests

Make up three sections of dens using an empty refrigerator or washing machine cardboard carton that can be obtained from your local white goods retailer. Cut the cardboard into strips as long as possible and 70cm wide, then measure in from each side 23cm and draw a line along the full length. Then with the back edge of a knife or scissors score along the lines and bend the sides in, to form the den. You can use the dens inside the house, the garage or out on the lawn and when not being used it can be flattened for easy storage.

Start your dog by using one length of the cardboard den and encourage the dog to go through the tunnel by using a ball or calling it through. When the dog has passed through the den a couple of times add another length and a 90-degree bend with an extra length of your cardboard den. When your dog can traverse the den with the 90-degree bend it is ready to try the introduction to quarry and then the novice earthdog test.

Warning: If you have more than one dog, only allow one in the training area and never allow two dogs to enter the dens from opposite ends.

Our club, the Lure Racing and Earthdog Club of Victoria Inc conducts practice days for earthdog and enquiries are welcomed by contacting 9546 7317 or email lurerace@bigpond.com

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