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FCI RULES FOR NATURAL HERDING

APTITUDE TESTS

“FCI NHAT”



June 1st, 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

The **FCI Natural Herding Aptitude Test (NHAT)** is an international test and is meant to establish the main characteristics all different herding dog breeds have in common:

- interest in flock animals;
- willingness to cooperate with its handler;
- the drive to control the movement of the flock;
- the natural aim to search for the balance position to gain better control of the flock.

Herding instinct is a complex of hereditary characteristics and abilities which makes a dog useful to control flock animals. It is stereotyped, compulsive and still purposeful behaviour of sheepdogs, which is not the result of learning or experience.

By the limited conditions of this test dogs can only show these basic features. It should be noted that only training and experience will allow the dog to face more difficult trials, in which the most gifted dogs will be able to express at the maximum level of their natural aptitude.

2. GENERAL CONDITIONS

The FCI Natural Herding Aptitude (NHAT) is open to herding dog breeds (listed in ANNEX 1 of the **General conditions for the organisation of FCI international Herding events (FCI-NHAT – FCI-HWT – FCI-IHT)**). The dogs have to be registered in a studbook/appendix to the studbook which is recognized by the FCI. The minimum age for entering is 9 months.

The dogs may wear a collar. Harness, choke chains, electric collars and spiked collars are forbidden. During the test the dog may not wear a muzzle.

It would be better if the dog has no specific training on flock animals, but some basic obedience training would be appreciated (stop and come when called).

The FCI Natural Herding Aptitude (NHAT) must be recognized by all FCI members and contract partners.

The test may be a useful instrument for breed clubs to preserve the specific behaviour of herding breeds.

The results must be noted in the dog's scorebook or any equivalent document.

3. ORGANISATION

The test can be organised by a club or a herding group which has got permission of its National Canine Organisation (NCO), which has to be a member or contract partner of the FCI.

The test can only be judged by qualified herding judges who must be recognized by the NCO of their country, affiliated with the FCI.

The judge has to control the behaviour of the dog. The judge can stop the test at any time.

It is the judge's responsibility to verify the identity of the dog by checking the tattoo or chip number before the beginning of the test.

The Organising Committee is responsible for a suitable area for the test, for the flock, the pen for the flock and for the necessary assistants.

The test may be held on sheep and cattle.

The flock should be selected in such a way that each participant shall work with animals of equal quality. Preferably the animals used for the test shall all come from the same flock and be similar in type. They shall be used to dogs and in good health. Lambs should be old enough to be weaned.

The Organizing Committee should make sure to have enough animals in order that each lot of them should not be stressed and must not be used more times than necessary.

The area where the test on animals is held must be about 75 meters long and wide enough to provide a space around the pen of 10 meters between the pen and the edges of the field. The enclosure for the animals must be at least 10 meters in diameter, the size will depend on the number of animals. The fence must be appropriate to keep the flock animals in and to keep the dogs out. For a test on cattle one or two refuge areas ("bullfight type") will be provided.

For each test a number of minimum 10 sheep will be used or a minimum of 5 cattle. Any replacement of the sheep must be decided by the owner or the judge.

The number of dogs to be tested should not exceed 30 dogs by day and judge.

4. TESTING PROCEDURE

In this test the dog will be judged on its functionality as a herding dog. The test is divided in two parts, the first one aims to verify the basic sociability of the dog and the second part tests its aptitude as a herding dog.

4.1. 1ST PART: SOCIABILITY

a) Contact with people.

The judge looks for contact with the dog to verify the sociability and self-control. The judge already had a chance to test the sociability of the dog when checking the tattoo or chip number.

The dog, kept on leash by the handler, passes among a group of people.

Aggressiveness and fear towards humans is not tolerated, but a natural reaction of alert, typical in several sheepdog breeds, will be tolerated.

b) Contact with dogs.

The handler with his dog on leash will pass among a group of people with leashed dogs. The dogs in the group have to behave calmly. In this case also, the dog has to show normal neutral behaviour towards other dogs.

c) Sensitive to noise

During this part of the test, the judge or an assistant makes a loud, sudden sound. The dog should react without fear; a natural reaction of alertness will be admitted. The sound may be caused by something like a rattling plastic bag or similar noises. Gunshot is not allowed.

d) Relationship with the handler

The judge will appreciate the trust the dog has in its handler in unfamiliar circumstances. It is not judged as an exercise in obedience. This is an important test of the natural, open-minded behaviour of the dog.

The dog respects the handler (position and commands) and cooperates with him. The dog is expected to have a good relationship with the handler, which will be demonstrated during the exercise of a short country course with the unleashed dog.

Obstacle

The dog has to be led over an obstacle like a low hurdle or a low ramp.

Absence of handler

While the dog is kept on leash by a helper or by the judge the handler walks away about 15 meters or more and stops on a sign of the judge. The dog has to show no stress or panic.

Recall

On a sign of the judge the handler calls his dog while the helper unleashes it.

4.2. 2ND PART: HERDING DOG APTITUDE

In general, the judge will give the dog sufficient opportunity and time to show his aptitudes.

The judge can instruct the handler during the test, to encourage or accompany the dog. The handler is allowed to encourage his dog by praise but not by feeding it or playing.

a) Approaching the flock

On the way to the starting position of the test the handler with the dog on leash walks around the pen with the flock in it and makes sure the dog notices the animals, encouraging him to take interest. Then the handler walks with the dog on leash to the starting position of the test.

At the starting point, on a distance of about 50 meters from the pen, on a signal of the judge, the handler starts walking slowly towards the pen and unleashes the dog after walking about 10 meters. At this moment a command may be used to set the dog free.

From the moment the handler starts to walk, the interest of the dog in the livestock will be judged. On a signal of the judge the handler walks straight up to the pen without giving any signals or commands to the dog. It is highly appreciated when the dog starts to show interest on a distance of the pen.

The judge may ask the handler to walk around the pen, turn or stop. Dogs that have the instinct to circle and look for a balance point opposite of their handler show very strongly the right aptitude of a herding dog. To wake the interest of the dog the judge may ask the handler to enter the pen without his dog and move the sheep around.

b) Contact with the flock.

The judge may ask the handler to enter the pen with the dog on leash. If the dog shows the right attitude the judge can decide to let the dog off the leash.

In case the dog shows aggressive behaviour or fear, the test is stopped. In case of fear the handler is authorized to calm down his dog before leaving the pen.

c) Interest and initiative

During the test the dog should be interested in the animals.

To establish the initiative in the dog, the judge will appreciate the drive of the dog to control the movement of the flock without any commands of its handler.

5. EVALUATION

The test of the natural sociability and the test of the herding aptitude will be judged separately.

a) The Sociability Test

The judge will make short notes on the behaviour and qualify the dog as Passed (P) or Not Passed (NP) or Disqualified (DIS) in case of aggression.

When a dog does not pass the sociability test it is not allowed to enter the 2nd part.

b) The Herding Aptitude

The results can be:

- Passed (P)
- Not Passed (NP)
- Disqualified (DIS) – only in case of serious aggression on the sheep or to people. Disqualified dogs are not allowed to enter any test again for one year.

A dog has passed the FCI-NHAT if it has passed the sociability part and the aptitude part in the same test.

6. CLOSING PROVISIONS


6.1. These rules fully replace the rules valid from 1st January 2018.

6.2. These rules were approved at the meeting of the FCI Herding Dogs Commission held in Dortmund (DE) on 9th-10th July 2022.

6.3. These rules were approved by the FCI General Committee on 21-22 March 2023 in Budapest. They are valid from 1st June 2023.

6.4. In case of translation discrepancies, the English text is considered the original text.

ANNEX: RECOMMENDED JUDGES SHEET "FCI NHAT"

		SCORE CARD NHAT		Catalogue No
				Start No
Event		Place		Date
Dog name				Born
Pedigree No		Chip		Sex
Owner		Breed		
Handler				No
Exercises		Comments		Time
Contact with people		Sociability part		
Contact with dogs				
Sensitive to noise				
Relationship with the handler				
Obstacle				
Absence of handler				
Recall				
Evaluation		Passed	Not Passed	Disqualified
Approaching the flock		Herding Dog Aptitude part		
Contact with the flock				
Interest and initiative				
Evaluation		PASSED	NOT PASSED	DISQUALIFIED
Judge No., name, signature			Clarification	