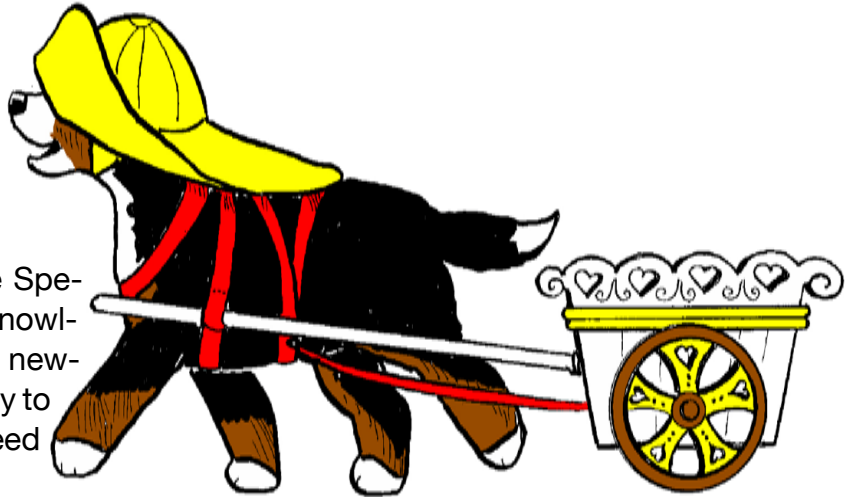


DOGS AT WORK!



The Draft Test is one of the events at the Specialty that always draws a crowd of both knowledgeable and curious spectators. For the newcomer, the National provides an opportunity to learn about the working history of our breed and how we keep that heritage alive.

Why do we do it?

Whether you enjoy your Berner as a family pet, an exciting show dog, or a willing obedience partner... the structure and temperament you cherish today has its roots in the working farmhand role played by the early dogs. Many of us have seen the photographs of a Berner or two hooked to a cart, pulling a load of milk cans or kids through mountainous terrain. In addition to being nostalgic and fun to look at, these images tell us much about the Bernese. They tell us that the BMD must be physically strong and sound, well trained, adaptable, and of good disposition. They must work well with their handler in a variety of situations that might be encountered on the farm or on their way into town. Draft work is a way to involve ourselves in the heritage of the breed and a way to gain a fuller understanding of our dogs ~ not to mention that for most Berners, it is a job they love to do! The Draft Test is designed to insure that the Bernese Mountain Dogs of today are a tribute to the working traditions of the past.

The Classes: Novice and Open

Dogs exhibiting in the Novice class will perform their exercises on leash, with the exception of the recall, harnessing and hitching, and group stays. When the dog has successfully completed all exercises in one Novice draft test, he will be awarded the BMDCA title of Novice Draft Dog (NDD). The Open class is for dogs that have already earned their NDD title. All exercises are performed off leash, except that dogs may be kept on leash while waiting in the ring for the group stay or for their awards. A dog earns his Draft Dog title (DD) upon successful completion of one test at the Open level.

Both of these titles may also be earned in a brace, in which the two dogs are hitched side by side and work as a team to earn the title brace novice draft dog (BNDD) or brace draft dog (BDD). The following titles are earned after passing the respective class five times under at least seven different judges– Advanced Novice Draft Dog (ANDD) for Novice, Master Draft Dog (MDD) for Open, Advanced Brace Novice Draft Dog (ABNDD) and Master Brace Draft Dog (MBDD).

How it works

Teams will be judged on whether the exercises are completed smoothly, safely, and with demonstrated ability and cooperation. Unlike obedience classes, where a score is obtained based on how well a dog completes the exercise, draft work is done on a pass/fail basis. The most frequent problem areas are a tight leash, failure to halt on command, and bumping the cart into the narrows obstacle. You'll usually find a posting board set up near the entrance to the ring which will be updated to keep the audience informed on which exercises have been passed by each dog.

What do they have to do? The Exercises:

Basic Control- This exercise demonstrates the dogs ability to respond to commands from the handler, a critical necessity as a hitched dog out of control poses a danger to itself and others. While unhitched, the dog is expected to heel within arms' length of their handler at all times, adjusting pace accordingly. After the heeling pattern, the dog will be placed in a stay, and the handler will leave the dog to perform a recall from approximately 30 to 50 feet away. The dog is expected to respond to the first call but additional hand signals, verbal commands, and praise are permitted once the dog has begun to move. Note that the cart is inside the ring for novice dogs and outside the ring for the open dogs—this will come into play in the next exercise.

Harness and Hitch- The dog must cooperate with the handler and show a willingness to be harnessed and hitched. In novice, the exercise starts with the dog and handler positioned directly in front of the draft rig. In open, the dog and handler proceed to the harness and hitch location designated by the judges and the dog is placed on a stay command. The handler will leave the ring, bring in the draft rig and harness, and position them immediately behind the dog. In addition to uncooperative behavior, an open dog that does not stay while the rig is brought into the ring, or a dog that is incorrectly harnessed or hitched will have a failing performance. More than one nervous handler has had trouble with correct use of the harness on draft test day!

Practical Draft Work- On the judges commands, the team will demonstrate their ability to move forward, make right and left turns, perform circular patterns in both directions, change pace, and back up (ever try backing up with a trailer hitched to your car?). All must be accomplished without physical guidance of the dog/rig by the handler or a tight leash (novice) and without upsetting the rig! Since this exercise is designed to emulate the variables a working draft dog would run into, an auditory and a visual distraction will be introduced. The dog may stop what it is doing and look at the distraction, but may not divert its course or move the rig if it was in a stationary position. The team must demonstrate that the dog responds to a halt command, waits while a light load is placed in the cart and the dog is greeted by the judge or steward, and cooperates during unloading. In addition, the team must demonstrate maneuvering ability through a narrow area, and removal of an obstacle.

Group Stay- The handler gives the stay command (once) and the dog is expected to remain in the sit, stand or stay position the handler has left it in for three minutes. In novice, the handler remains inside the ring, in open the handler is out of the dogs sight.

Freight Haul- The team will pull a loaded draft rig for 1/2 mile uphill and down over varied terrain. Novice dogs will carry a load of 20 pounds; open dogs will carry a load equal to their weight rounded down to the nearest 10 pounds.

At the end of the day, it's been a long haul...

Give a cheer for the exhibitors, the dogs, the judges, and the stewards who have all been working to keep the heritage alive.