

BEST PRACTICES GUIDE TO AKC FAST CAT (FAST COURSING ABILITY TEST)

By the Herding, Earthdog, and Lure Coursing Committee of the AKC Delegate Body

FAST CAT is a 100-yard dash Coursing Ability Test where a dog's time is converted to miles per hour. First offered as a titling event by the AKC in 2016, it has grown rapidly in popularity with dog lovers of all breeds, including "All-American" dogs. With this growth, the Herding, Earthdog, and Lure Coursing Committee (HEC) of the AKC Delegate Body (the governing body of the AKC) has collected from the participants and FAST CAT-offering clubs insights into what makes an enjoyable and safe event for all—exhibitors, dogs, and the hosting clubs.

SAFETY

Lure coursing events are fun for dog and owner alike, but as a prey-driven activity which demands athletic exertion, there is always a concern for the safety of the dog. All decisions made concerning the running of a FAST CAT event should be based on what is safe for the dogs, participants, and spectators in accordance with AKC rules in effect on the date of the event.

The club shall have a veterinary clinic or a veterinarian on call whose name, address, and phone number shall appear in the premium list, along with directions to the clinic. Directions and this information should be posted in a prominent place at the test site as well. As most such events are on a weekend, make sure that the veterinary clinics listed offer weekend hours.

Dogs may run without a collar or wear any type of collar except choker collars, electronic training collars or head collar. Collars should be snug. Hanging tags pose a safety concern and it is suggested that tags be secured to the collar with tape. Dogs may run muzzled if desired. Clips or rubber bands may be used to keep long hair from falling across the dog's field of vision.

CLUBS

Adding CAT and FAST CAT events to a club's offerings has been an excellent way to attract new people into the world of dog sports.

Clubs interested in hosting FAST CAT are encouraged to approach local lure coursing clubs for expertise, especially in the area of lure operation and equipment. Existing AKC coursing clubs are encouraged to share their experience freely with clubs wishing to move into offering CAT and FAST CAT.

The best way to start growing interest in your area is to host "fun run" practice days. Such events also help to prepare your lure operator(s) and club members to run the official events safely and efficiently.

THE FAST CAT Event Committee

The FAST CAT Event Committee must be fully knowledgeable of FAST CAT regulations. The committee is responsible for the layout of the track to assure it abides by the FAST CAT rules and

more importantly is safe for dogs of all sizes and breeds. The committee should consist of a Secretary, Hunt master, paddock master, inspection team, lure operator, timer(s) and recording secretary. At least five members of the committee must be from the club offering the event and at least three members must be present during the event.

The comprehensive Premium list should include the following:

- Whether flag start with stopwatches or Break Beam Timers will be used
- If the club's setup will be a drag lure or a continuous loop lure
- Description of how the inspection will be conducted at check-in
- If the FAST CAT track and run-out is fully fenced
- The length of the run-out area (see more about this under THE FIELD AND COURSE, below).
- Canine Partner Forms in Premium List

To provide an orderly, novice-friendly, smooth-running event:

- Roll call and start of event should commence promptly at published time
- Offer new participant orientation (this is normally called an "owners/handlers meeting" and is held prior to the first runs of the Test).
- Competent lure operation & working timing equipment/timers in place
- Flexible roll call/run schedule if test is offered in conjunction with another event such as a dog show or CAT Test
- A public-address system is highly recommended.

A critical member of the FAST CAT Committee is the Paddock Master. The Paddock Master shall ensure that as a FAST CAT entrant is being run, the next entrant is present at the FAST CAT entry area, but not so close as to potentially distract the running dog either visually or by excessive barking/howling. A suitable catcher for each entrant can be in place in the finish area prior to the FAST CAT entrant being released at the start of its test.

THE FIELD AND COURSE

Items important to both the safety of each runner and the accuracy of recording the entrants' true speed include:

- FAST CAT tracks must be straight, close-mowed, and as near to level as possible for the entire length of the 100-yard timed distance. The track should be checked for ruts, holes, or any other hazard, including in run-out/stopping area.
- The track should be fully grassed or of soft sand/dirt. Gravel driveways or paved surfaces in whole or in part are not suitable.
- Grass and string height should be low. A string just a few inches off the ground may be too high up the legs of shorter breeds such as a French Bulldog or Dachshund for example. Taller grass has a negative impact on speed, especially for smaller, shorter-legged breeds.
- The lure must be a white plastic strip or a squawker. Care should be taken to ensure the lure does not bounce, possibly setting off the timers prior to the dog crossing the finish line.
- The track area should be enclosed and gated with temporary gates at both the release and

the finish areas. Snow/construction fencing works well for this. Minimize opportunities for an uninterested dog to leave the start area and run to onlookers, parking, or paddock areas.

- In no instance should the lure be run under any fencing or barrier prior to the retrieval of the dog at the end of the test.
- In no instance should hold-down pulleys be used on the track between the starting area and the end of the run-out area.
- A dog that has completed a run should be off the track before moving the lure.
- The dog's front feet in the release area may be no further back than a line 10 feet behind the first timing poles or the first stopwatch operator's location (the "start line"). Dogs may start with their front feet on this line or closer to the start line at the handler's discretion.
- The stop distance (the "run out") should be a minimum of 30 yards and preferably closer to 50 yards. This allows for the lure to be taken at consistent speed until the dog has passed the end timing poles (which is important for accuracy), then given enough distance for the lure operator to gradually slow the lure without the dog risking hitting the barrier at the end of the track.
- If run-out area for the finish is limited, utilize shock-absorbing barriers at the end of the finish area that are sturdy enough to contain the dog if it wished to leave the track, but which have some give to avoid injuring a hard-finishing dog that might slide into them. If metal re-bars or harder fencing is chosen, cushion potential impact points with softer materials such as hay bales.
- If the FAST CAT is held in conjunction with a CAT or another visually distracting event, there should be a visual barrier or screen between the start area and each FAST CAT dog's potential view of that ongoing event.

LURE OPERATION

The lure operator's skill is essential to ensuring an event where all dogs have the opportunity to safely complete their FAST CAT run and display their maximum speed possible on the day. Lure operators should keep the lure moving at a consistent pace and distance in front of each dog so that the dog does not react to any noticeable slowing down or temporary stoppage of the lure prior to the finish line.

The lure operator shall stop the lure and either cut the line or remove the line from the wheel immediately upon any indication that any part of a dog's body or haircoat has become caught or tangled in the lure line.

RECORDING SECRETARIES

A committee person serving in this capacity shall promptly record the time for each dog's FAST CAT run (if qualifying) and write the time and calculated speed with the name of dog on a scribe sheet and ribbon (if offered), and make this sheet available to the owner of that dog. Ribbons and awards can be offered as well as any special or breed-specific prizes.

OWNERS/HANDLERS

Some pointers for the owners/handlers:

- Fitness is fundamental. Dogs can become very stimulated by the sight of a moving lure and an unfit dog may push itself too hard for its overall conditioning level. Bring your dog trim, well-hydrated, with nails of acceptable length to the FAST CAT starting line. Owners of dogs which can have difficulty in extremely hot or cold conditions should use good judgment and not endanger their dogs by running in conditions for which it is not well suited according to its age, coat type, or breed type.
- Understand the rules. If you are unclear on any point, ask during the handler's meeting at the start of the event.
- Be prompt to the line. If exhibitors at a 60-dog event each take an extra minute to get to the line, the event runs an hour longer.
- Make sure that your dog has relieved itself prior to running.
- Volunteer to help. As FAST CAT, unlike CAT, requires both a releaser and a catcher, if you are by yourself offer to help others with this in exchange for help with running your dog. It's a great way to make a new friend!
- HAVE FUN!

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