

Trials Start at Heel, Not in the Cover

Line Routine / Field Trial Tip

*Your line manners is the first thing
the judge will notice.*

Most Handlers Think the Performance Starts in the Cover

In field trials, the common belief is that the "real performance" begins when the dog hits cover — when birds fly, when the retrieve happens, when the action unfolds.

But that belief is wrong.

The trial starts the moment you walk to the line. Your line manners is often the first thing noticed — because it reveals the truth about the team before the dog ever gets sent.

Your Line Manners Are So Important

A Calm Line Tells the Judge Everything

A Calm Sit/Hup

The foundation of control. It shows the dog is settled physically and mentally, not vibrating with chaotic energy waiting to explode.

Steady Eye Contact

Focus on the handler, not the distractions. It signals readiness to receive direction and work as a partner, not a solo operator.

A Clean Release

Explosive power with permission. It proves the dog is working **with** you, waiting for the command rather than anticipating the action.

"We're working together."

Not: "Go lose your mind and I'll try to catch up."

Adrenaline Shows Up Early

If your dog can't hold it together on the line, it won't magically gain self-control when birds start flying.

The line is the highest-pressure moment of the day. Adrenaline is at its peak. Distractions are everywhere — other dogs, handlers, judges, birds in the distance.

If your dog falls apart here, the rest of the run is already compromised. Composure at the line is the first test of readiness.

Your Dog Rehearses the Mindset You Allow

Every time your dog pulls, vocalizes, spins, or creeps at the line — and you allow it — you are reinforcing a habit in the most charged moment of the day. These behaviors don't just "happen." They are practiced and permitted.

Pulling

Lunging forward before the release.

Vocalizing

Vocalizing or whining with excitement.

Spinning

Spinning or pacing with uncontrolled energy.

Creeping

Creeping toward the mark before being sent.

Each repetition deepens the pattern.

What you tolerate on the line becomes the dog's default under pressure.

A Clean Release Creates Clarity

The Bridge Between Discipline and Performance

When the dog learns to wait until sent — and then go with purpose — that is steadiness in its earliest and most essential form. The release is not just a command; it is the bridge between discipline and performance.

It transforms chaotic energy into focused drive.

A clean release teaches the dog a powerful sequence:



Judges and Handlers Notice

Even when it's not judged on paper, line behavior affects how the whole run feels. It sets the tone for everything that follows.

Control

You are managing your dog with confidence. It shows you are the leader of the team, not a passenger.

Professionalism

You take the work seriously. A chaotic line suggests a lack of preparation; a steady line commands respect.

Teamwork

You and your dog are operating as a unit. The connection is visible before the first bird is even thrown.

First impressions matter. The line is your first impression.

The Goal: Composed, Not Flat

Channeling Drive, Not Suppressing It

The Distinction

There is a critical difference between a dog that is shut down and one that is composed. A flat dog has checked out; a composed dog is tuned in.

The Objective

The goal is not to suppress the dog's drive or break its spirit. The goal is to channel that intense energy into a focused, waiting state.

The Formula

High Drive
+
Clear Head
=
Performance

*"A composed dog is alert, engaged, and waiting with purpose.
A flat dog has lost its spark."*

Tighten the Routine

Four Steps to a Better Line

If your dog turns into a different animal at the line, don't keep "running more birds" and hoping it improves. Instead, address the line directly:

1 Walk Up Like It's Training

Approach the line with the same calm energy you use in practice — not like it's a showdown.

2 Enforce the Sit/Hup Like It Matters

The sit is non-negotiable. If the sit breaks, reset. Every time.

3 Reward Calm, Correct Intensity

Acknowledge and reinforce the behavior you want — focused energy, not frantic energy.

4 Release Only When the Picture Is Right

Don't send the dog until everything is in place. The release is earned, not rushed.

Want a Sharper Line and a Cleaner Release That Carries Into the Cover?

Your line routine is the foundation of every successful field trial run. Start building it today.

START HERE

www.spanieltraining.com