THE STEADY SINGLES CHAMPIONSHIP

The Steady Singles Championship is run as a friendly marking competition for Flat-Coated Retrievers at the annual National Specialty. The stake consists of single marked retrieves of graduated difficulty, on land and water, with a process of elimination determining one winner, the Steady Singles Champion, on the basis of exceptional marking ability. Other finalists shall be awarded without ranking “Judges Award of Merit.”

This document provides a description of the stake, eligibility rules, handler rules, judges’ guidelines, and guidelines for clubs holding the stake.

Description of the Stake:

The stake consists of a land and water series with the following elements:

- Land Series
  - 2-3 single marked retrieves
  - Moderate cover (ideally)
  - Falls generally not more than 200 yards, depending on terrain
  - As the level of difficulty increases, one retired gun mark might be used, although this is not required.
  - Birds shall be dead ducks

- Water Series
  - 1-2 single marked retrieves
  - Cover to open water
  - Falls are generally no more than 200 yards, depending on the water and terrain
  - Entries to water may be long and/or angled, at judges’ discretion
  - Birds shall be dead ducks

- Optional Land and/or Water Run-Off Series
  - Upon completion of the land and water tests, a third series run-off will be held, in case of a tie or when the stakes are divided.
  - May be land and/or water
  - 1-2 single marked retrieves

Marks should be clearly visible throws.

A test dog shall be used for each test/series.

Decoys may be used on land and/or water.

Gunners shall wear white jackets or shirts.

Gunners shall precede each throw with a popper shot; shotguns must be used.
Gunners shall not use any bird calls.

Handlers should be prepared for the possibility of one retired gun mark, as the successive series increase in difficulty.

Gunners may use wingers or strong arm devices to ensure consistency of marks.

**Rules and Guidelines**

**Eligibility:**

This event is open to any Flat Coated Retriever:
- At least 6 months of age on the day of the test, and
- With an individual AKC registration number, foreign registration number, or an ILP number

**Rules for Handlers:**

- Handlers may wear light or dark clothing.
- Dogs must come to the line off-lead and without a collar.
- Dogs must be steady. **Breaks or controlled breaks** shall result in **mandatory disqualification**.

  *Creeping:* If a dog creeps or jumps forward slightly as birds are thrown and the handler makes no effort to stop or restrain the dog, it shall not be considered a controlled break unless the dog goes beyond a point acceptable to the judges. If the handler does attempt to stop or restrain the dog, the judges shall consider the dog to have broken and shall disqualify the dog. The judges may require a dog which has crept or jumped forward within the acceptable distance to be brought back to heel position before releasing the dog to retrieve.
- Dogs shall not be sent for a bird until released by the judges.
- Dogs must deliver each bird to hand.

**Mandatory Elimination or Failure at the Steady Stake:**

1. Handler releasing the dog to retrieve before the dog is released by the judge.
2. "Breaking," i.e. dog leaves the line to retrieve before being released by the judge.
3. Loud or prolonged barking or whining in the holding blind or at the line.
4. Dog refusing to leave the line when sent (one recast is allowed, in cases of confusion).
5. Dog returning to the handler, either without the bird or without having been called in, except when the dog is obviously confused as to whether it was ordered to retrieve.
6. Dog stopping the hunt, or requiring assistance from handler or gunners; use of a signal, vocal command, or throwing anything to direct the dog to a fall or to
persuade it to enter the water.
7. Dog failing to find a bird that should have been found.
8. Dog giving up after a search for one bird and going to the area of a previously fallen bird, i.e. "returning to an old fall."
9. Dog ignoring a bird when found and leaving it, "blinking the bird."
10. Dog badly damaging game which, in the opinion of the judges, was caused entirely and solely by the dog without justification, "hard mouth."
11. Dog unwilling to release a bird on delivery until compelled to do so by severe means, extreme "freeze."
12. Handler allowing a competing dog to watch the location of a fall for another dog before its turn to run. This will be a mandatory elimination of the dog, and possibly an elimination of the handler from the test if the judges or event committee believe the violation is deliberate.

Judging Guidelines:

Judges for the Steady Singles Championship will see a wide range of training and experience, in dogs and handlers. Some dogs will have limited experience, including those barely steadied, while others may be seasoned competitors in field trials and/or hunt tests. However, if judges set up good test series, they should perceive that Flat-Coats are enthusiastic workers with fine natural marking abilities.

The tests consist of single marked retrieves of graduated difficulty, on land and water (see stake description section above). Judges are encouraged to creatively use terrain factors, cover changes, wind, distance, and influence of previous marks. Distances and difficulty of marks are to be adjusted to the quality of the field, but the distances generally should not exceed 200 yards. Cover conditions should be taken into account in determining the distance of marks, with heavy cover and obstacles dictating shorter marks, and lighter cover allowing for longer marks.

Because this is a fun event to challenge the dogs' natural marking abilities, judges should avoid:

- Trick marks
- Marks set up to intentionally confuse the dog
- Marks where avoiding cheating is the main criteria
- Use of more than one retired gun. Scenarios should not include hidden guns.

All dogs are guaranteed two single marks, unless the dog is out of control in the field or with respect to bird handling. Typically, the first two marks will be land singles, with a possibility of a third more challenging land mark offered by invitation of the judges. Dogs that successfully retrieve all land marks will be called back to a water series of one or two single marks. When two marks are offered, only the dogs that successfully retrieve the first water mark shall be invited to run the second.
Judges are encouraged to be generous with their callbacks and not to eliminate dogs who have indicated awareness of the area of the fall, solely because of indirect lines, hunts in the area of the fall, brief hunts behind a gun, etc.

From the group of finalists, the judges will select one winner. When the size of the entry necessitates a division of the stake, the judges of each flight will select one winner to go on to the run-off, where the winner will be chosen. In determining the winner, the judges shall take into account the qualities of steadiness, style, trainability, and most especially, excellent marking ability. The judges shall reach a unanimous decision, and their decision is final.

The other finalists will be awarded, without ranking, Judges Awards of Merit. The generous awarding of JAMs is encouraged for all dogs that have successfully and honestly completed all of the series.

**Guidelines for Holding Steady Singles Stakes:**

**Judge Qualifications:** The Specialty Field Events Committee should select judges who are experienced Field Trial judges and handlers. They should be capable of setting up tests with creative use of terrain factors, cover changes, wind, distance, and influence of previous marks.

**Dividing the Stakes:** The Committee should have maximum flexibility in determining how to organize and run this stake, and when and how to divide the entry into different flights. Consideration should be given to the size of the entry, the adequacy of grounds, both land and water, availability of workers, fairness to exhibitors, time constraints and logistics. (See addendum for examples of the different ways this stake has been run in recent years.)

When the stake is divided, two judges will be assigned to each flight. Ideally, all sets of judges will set up all the marks as a group, to ensure equitability between the different flights. It may also be practical for the judges to share the land and water series set-ups, with one flight starting with the land series, while the other flight starts with the water series. In this case, both sets of judges must agree to the test set-ups in all series, without any changes. Callbacks from the land test will proceed to the water test and vice versa. Judges stay with their own flights. This strategy is particularly useful when land, water, and/or time are limited.

Judges should be instructed to offer two retrieves to each dog whenever possible, regardless of success on the first mark, unless the dog is out of control in the field or with respect to its handling of the birds. Only dogs successful on the first two marks should be invited to run a third, or to go on to the next series.

**Award of Steady Singles Championship and JAMS:** After completion of the land and water series, the judges shall choose a first place winner. (When the stake is divided, the judges of each flight will choose a winner to go on to the run-off.) The judges will also
decide on the group of finalists to receive Judges Awards of Merit (JAMs), without ranking, and they should be encouraged to be generous with these awards to all dogs who have successfully and honestly completed each series.

When the stake is divided, the run-off will determine the ultimate winner, the Steady Singles Champion. The run-off conventionally takes place at the end of the day, when all series have been completed, conducted by all the Steady Singles judges. The run-off may also be postponed to another day, in order to be held in conjunction with the field banquet. In this event, the Specialty Field Committee may decide whether the run-off should be judged by the original stake judges or by FCRSA members with experience in field judging. (FCRSA members cannot judge their own dogs, or dogs they co-own or have bred.)

The decision of the judges is final. The Steady Singles Champion will hold the traveling FCRSA Steady Singles trophy for one year, and the dog’s name will be engraved on it. The Specialty Field Committee may also want to consider the awarding of some special award to the run-off finalists.

The announcement of the Singles Champion and the JAMs should take place during the field banquet, whenever Specialty scheduling permits. Awards shall be published in the Specialty issue of the newsletter.

**Gunner Eligibility:** Gunners must meet the AKC age requirements and demonstrate gun safety at all times.

**Running Bitches in Season:** Specialty Field Committees have discretion to decide whether bitches in season are allowed to run the Specialty non-AKC events. The decision to allow bitches in season may depend on scheduling of the other events, as grounds where bitches in season have run should not be re-used for AKC events. If bitches in season are allowed to run, they must run last, and logistics must be worked out when the stakes are divided. These bitches may have to be judged by two sets of judges, requiring cooperation between the handler, judges and marshals. (Marshals might need to ensure that Judges’ sheets for these bitches are provided to more than one set of judges.)
THE UNSTEADY SINGLES STAKE

The Unsteady singles is a stake to introduce novice and young dogs and their handlers to field work. The stake consists of single marked retrieves, of graduated difficulty, on land and water, to assess a dog’s natural marking abilities. It is hoped that once novice handlers see how much their dogs enjoy this activity, they will become interested in pursuing field work, and utilize the natural and intended purpose of the breed. While competitive in nature, this event should be conducted with exceptional friendliness and good sportsmanship, in a manner that encourages the pursuit of future field activities.

This document provides a description of the stake, eligibility rules, handler rules, judges’ guidelines, and guidelines for clubs holding the stake.

Description of the Stake:

The stake consists of a land and water series with the following elements:

- Land Series
  - 2-3 single marked retrieves
  - Moderate cover (ideally)
  - Falls generally not more than 150 yards, depending on terrain
  - Birds shall be dead ducks

- Water Series
  - 1-2 single marked retrieves
  - Light cover to open water
  - Falls are generally under 150 yards, depending on the water and terrain
  - Birds shall be dead ducks

- Optional Land and/or Water Series, at the discretion of the judges
  - Upon completion of the land and water tests, ties shall be broken by a third series run-off.
  - May be land and/or water
  - 1-2 single marked retrieves

Marks should be clearly visible throws.

A test dog shall be used for each test/series.

Decoys will not be used on land or water.

Gunners shall wear white jackets or shirts.

Gunners shall precede each throw with a popper shot; shotguns must be used.

Gunners shall not use any bird calls.
Gunners are to remain conspicuous (preferably standing) at all times while the test is ongoing; there are no hidden or retired gunners.

Gunners may use wingers or strong arm devices to ensure consistency of marks.

Rules and Guidelines

Division of Stakes:

The stake will be divided into two sections, with eligibility determined by the field/titling experience of the handler and dog, and the age of the dog. Each section will have a 1st place winner, as well Judges Awards of Merit, without ranking. JAMs are awarded to those dogs that have successfully and honestly completed all of the series, demonstrating innate marking ability.

Eligibility for Unsteady Singles A (Novice Handlers with Novice Dogs):

- Dog must be at least 6 months old on the day of the test, and
- Dog must have an individual AKC registration number, foreign registration number, or ILP number
- Dog may not have earned any ribbon in a previous National Specialty Unsteady Singles A- or B-level stake. (Dogs that have earned a ribbon in Unsteady A may enter Unsteady B.)
- Dog may not have run in any field event requiring steadiness, or be entered in any field event requiring steadiness at this Specialty, i.e. Steady Singles, WCX, Senior, Master, Derby or Qualifying
- Handler may not have previously placed any field title on any retriever, including AKC, UKC, CKC, or any other registry, or WC/WCX.
- Dog may not have received "considerable professional training." (Those dogs that have spent time away from their home and owner for the purpose of being trained by a person other than the dog's owner shall be considered to have received considerable professional training.)

Eligibility for Unsteady Singles B (Experienced Handlers with Young or Novice Dogs):

- Dog must be at least 6 months old on the day of the test, and
- Dog must have an individual AKC registration number, foreign registration number, or ILP number
- Handler and/or dog may have earned field titles, but the dog may not have run in any field event requiring steadiness, or be entered in any field event requiring steadiness at this Specialty, i.e. Steady Singles, WCX, Senior, Master, Derby or Qualifying
- Dog may not have earned any ribbon at any previous National Specialty Unsteady Singles B stake, with the exception of dogs who have not yet reached their third
birthday on the day of the event. Dogs under the age of 3 may enter, whether or not they have earned a previous ribbon.

Rules for Handlers:

- Handlers may wear light or dark clothing.
- Dogs may be brought to the line on lead, and should be under the control of the handler.
- Dogs may run wearing a flat buckle collar, without tags or other attachments.
- Dogs may be held gently on line, by the collar or with a line slipped through the collar or D-ring of the collar.
- Dogs shall not be sent for a bird until released by the judges.
- Dogs need not deliver to hand, but must return the bird to a designated area.

Mandatory Elimination or Failure at the USS Stake:

1. Handler releasing the dog to retrieve before the dog is released by the judge.
2. “Breaking,” i.e. dog leaves the line to retrieve before being released by the judge [Note: a dog will not be eliminated for a “controlled break,” when dog leaves to retrieve before being sent but is quickly brought under control by a verbal command or whistle without manhandling, and promptly returns to the line.]
3. Handler noisily or frequently restraining a dog from breaking, from the time the handler has signaled the judge until the dog is released.
4. Loud or prolonged barking or whining in the holding blind or at the line.
5. Dog refusing to leave the line when sent (one recast is allowed, in cases of confusion).
6. Dog returning to the handler, either without the bird or without having been called in, except when the dog is obviously confused as to whether it was ordered to retrieve.
7. Dog stopping the hunt, or requiring assistance from handler or gunners; using a signal, a vocal command, or throwing anything to direct the dog to a fall or to persuade it to enter the water.
8. Dog failing to find a bird that should have been found.
9. Dog giving up after a search for one bird and going to the area of a previously fallen bird, i.e. “returning to an old fall.”
10. Dog ignoring a bird when found and leaving it, “blinking the bird.”
11. Dog badly damaging game which, in the opinion of the judges, was caused entirely and solely by the dog without justification, “hard mouth.”
12. Dog unwilling to release a bird on delivery until compelled to do so by severe means, extreme “freeze.”
13. Handler allowing a competing dog to watch the location of a fall for another dog before its turn to run. This will be a mandatory elimination of the dog, and possibly an elimination of the handler from the test if the judges or event committee believe the violation is deliberate.
Judging Guidelines:

Dogs entered in the Unsteady Singles Stakes are to be judged on their natural marking abilities, without penalty for inexperience or lack of sophisticated training. This event should be conducted in a supportive manner that encourages handlers to continue to pursue field activities with their dogs. All judges should feel free to offer assistance to handlers, particularly in USS-A, which may be the first field experience for the handler, and is intended as a pleasant and educational experience. However, help should be brief enough to not interfere with a smooth running order.

Steadiness is not required. Dogs may be gently restrained on line.

Delivery to hand is not required, but judges should designate an acceptable area for return of the bird. Dogs delivering to hand shall not outscore dogs delivering to the designated area.

The tests consist of single marked retrieves of graduated difficulty, on land and water (see stake description section above). Judges are encouraged to creatively use terrain factors, cover change, wind, and distance. Distances and difficulty of marks are to be adjusted to the quality of the field, but the distances should not exceed 150 yards, and initial marks might be much shorter. Cover conditions should be taken into account in determining the distance of marks, with heavy cover and obstacles dictating shorter marks, and lighter cover allowing for longer marks.

Because this is a fun field event to challenge the dogs’ natural marking abilities, judges should avoid:

- Trick marks
- Marks set up to intentional confuse the dog
- Marks where avoiding cheating is the main criteria
- Use of retired or hidden guns

All dogs are guaranteed two single marks, unless the dog is out of control in the field or with respect to bird handling. Typically, the first two marks will be land singles, with a possibility of a third more challenging mark offered by invitation of the judges. Dogs that successfully retrieve all land marks will be called back to a water series of one or two single marks. When two marks are offered, only the dogs that successfully retrieve the first water mark shall be invited to run the second.

 Judges are encouraged to be generous with their callbacks and not to eliminate any dog who has indicated awareness of the area of fall, solely because of an indirect line, hunt within the area, or a brief hunt behind a gun, etc.

The same judging standards and guidelines should apply for both the USS-A and USS-B sections of the stake.
The judges will select one First Place winner and JAMs for each section. The generous awarding of JAMs is encouraged to all dogs that have successfully and honestly completed all of the series.

**Guidelines for Holding Unsteady Singles Stakes:**

**Judge Qualifications.** The Specialty Field Events Committee should select judges who are experienced Field Trial and/or Hunt Test judges and handlers. They should be capable of setting up tests with creative use of factors, terrain, cover change, wind, and distance. Additionally, the judges should be able and willing to set up fair challenges for these inexperienced dogs, testing natural abilities.

**Combining the A and B Stakes.** If the combined entry numbers for USS-A and USS-B total less than 40 dogs, one set of judges will probably be sufficient for judging both stakes. The marks and judging standards for both USS-A and USS-B shall be identical in this situation.

**Separating the A and B Stakes.** If more than 40 dogs are entered, the stakes may be split, with an additional set of judges required. It may be practical for the judges to share the land and water series set-ups, with one section starting with the land series, while the other section starts with the water series. If test set-ups are to be shared, judges in both stakes must agree to each of the set-ups, without changes. Call backs from the land test will proceed to the water test and vice versa. Judges stay with their own sections. This strategy is particularly useful when land, water, and/or time are limited.

**Award of Stake Winner and JAMS.** After completion of the land and water series, the judges shall determine a First place winner and Judges Awards of Merit from among the USS-A dogs, and a First place winner and JAMS from among the USS-B dogs. Judges should be generous in awarding JAMs to those dogs who have successfully completed all of the marks.

A run-off series may be required to determine the winner from among the top few contenders. When the USS-B stake is divided, a run-off will be necessary between the winners of each section. This run-off conventionally takes place at the end of the day, conducted by all the judges for the stake. It may be postponed to another day, in order to be held in conjunction with the field banquet. In this event, the Specialty Field Committee may decide whether it should be judged by the original stake judges or by FCRSA members with experience in field judging. (FCRSA members cannot judge their own dogs, or dogs they co-own or have bred.)

The decision of the judges is final. Whenever Specialty scheduling permits, the announcement of winners and JAMs shall take place during the field banquet. Awards shall be published in the Specialty issue of the newsletter.

**Gunner Eligibility.** Gunners must meet the AKC age requirements and demonstrate gun
safety at all times.

**Running Bitches in Season.** Specialty Field Committees have discretion to decide whether bitches in season are allowed to run the Specialty non-AKC events. The decision to allow bitches in season may depend on scheduling of the other events, as grounds where bitches in season have run should not be re-used for AKC events. If bitches in season are allowed to run, they must run last, and logistics must be worked out when the stakes are divided. These bitches may have to be judged by two sets of judges, requiring cooperation between the handler, judges and marshals. (Marshals might need to ensure that Judges' sheets for these bitches are provided to more than one set of judges.)