

Teaching Surf Instructors to Teach



National Surf Schools and Instructors Association Instructors and Coaches Training Manual



Surf Dog Contest Judging

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Contest Judging

Judging surf dog contests requires a basic understanding of surf contests in general, and the criteria by which the contestants are judged. The contest judge is the person who decides which surf dog performs the closest to the established judging criteria in any heat. Judges require both experience and knowledge with surf dogs to allow them to make objective calls.

Judging Criteria and Protocol

Judging criteria has not been formalized for surf dogs. This section covers some very general criteria. A few simple-judging procedures to observe will save much dissatisfaction from those who have entered their dogs at a meet. The most important of these is not to miss any wave ridden or parts of rides, as well as looking for interferences. Additionally, under no circumstances should a spectator or dog handler speak with a judge or in any way cause a distraction that could result in a missed ride. Contest officials should only be spoken to during lulls when no dogs are taking off. Spotters or recorders should be the only ones talking to judges during periods of larger or very consistent rideable set waves. A judge should also never talk to another judge about a ride until after the score has been recorded.

The score should not be awarded until the surf dog has completely finished the ride. Never give a score for just the outside ride, and then watch another dog outside while the first dog gets a good ride on a re-formed shore break inside. This might require watching two rides simultaneously by the judge, but is still preferable to missing part of a ride where points could accumulate.

It is difficult to judge when multiple surf dogs are riding waves at the same time in a large heat. This situation can occur during a set when waves roll through in quick succession, or while some dogs are staying inside, and others are outside catching the bigger waves. Stay particularly aware when the waves are breaking outside and stay formed clear into the shore break, chances are good that most contestants in the heat will take off during this type of set.

The best procedure for conducting a contest in consistent conditions is to keep the heats small. If you are judging a larger heat, let your eyes follow each dog, moving back and forth in quick succession, trying not to miss when important maneuvers might be performed. Yell out the color and score to your recorder immediately when a ride is completed, when the dog finally dismounts, and be sure to continue to follow the remaining surfers.

Judging Scale

A judging scale similar to traditional surfing of 1 to 10 points, with 2/10 point increments, is preferred for surf dog contests. Additional flexibility in the scoring may be necessary to prevent ties, especially when conditions are poor.

The judge's first responsibility after deciding on the scoring system is to determine the score for an average ride on an average contest wave. This could vary depending on the conditions, from 4 points in poor conditions to 6 points in excellent conditions. In large surf the average wave could be as much as 8 points.

For most surf dog contests taking off on a normal whitewater mid to inside wave and then continuing straight to the shore is considered an average ride.

Once the average score for an average wave has been established, the point spread can be determined for the level of performance on better or worse than average waves. One very common situation is when the surf dog takes off on a closed-out wall and then gets tubed before being bombed by the crashing white water thereby creating a very short ride, particularly at Huntington Beach Dog Beach. This type of ride should get no more than 5 points. Sometimes judges get carried away by the crowd reaction and tend to score more than is deserved on a short shore-break tube that closes out. A shore-break ride should almost never be scored higher than an average wave on an outside set.

Things to Look for When Judging

Judgment is in reality an opinion based on subjective consideration of the conditions, ability of contestants, and experience. Finer techniques displayed by the dog are easily spotted once the judge knows what to look for, but placing a figure of merit on these techniques is not so simple. This section will present a brief summary of important areas to consider when judging and giving a score for these techniques.

List of Dog Surfing Top Judging Criteria (see Contest Judging section for details):

1. Length of ride
2. Size of wave ridden
3. Catching a critical part of the wave
4. Confidence on the wave
5. Maneuvers or skills on the wave

More points are awarded to dogs for the following:

1. Standing on the board on all fours, as opposed to lying down.
2. Performing maneuvers (360 or 180 or riding backwards) or some other trick, such as riding holding a ball or toy in their mouth.
3. Human surfing with dog on board or multiple dogs on board
4. A dog should never be leashed to the board, but when the contests first began, this was an issue that was developing, and some dogs were scored higher for not being leashed.



Wave Judgment

The right wave choice is essential for maximum performance. Position in that wave has an equally important role. Look for the surf dog that takes off on the largest and most challenging MAKEABLE wave in the most critical position.

Takeoff and Turns

The way a wave is entered by the surf dog/handler team should fit the type of surfing conditions. The direction the handler pushes the surf dog off is extremely important. If

the dog follows through with that same line and continues to the next section on into the shore, the dog deserves a higher score than that awarded to a dog positioned to just ride straight in.

A late takeoff from way outside on a steep wall necessitates pushing the dog while paddling towards the shoulder with only a slight twist downward at the top of the wave. A late takeoff can be used to obtain maximum speed and critical positioning.



In slow, mushy waves, board positioning is very critical. Slanting after takeoff, by either the dog or the handler because the loss of momentum on a bottom turn will cause the surf dog's board to stall slightly allowing the wave to catch up and wash right under the board, slowing it down. The best scores are given for the surf dog that can be positioned well under the peak and then moving down into a critical position on the wave with no loss of speed.

Evaluating Maneuvers by a Surf Dog That Give "A Little Extra"

A surf dog that can move to reposition itself during a wave in order to maintain a comfortable ride is preferable to one that stays flat to the board, lying down, or moves on the board in a nervous manner. The dog appears nervous when it looks as if they want to jump off the board or looks back for the handler. Looking straight ahead and moving to maintain balance exhibits confidence and control and should get a better score.



Inside the Tube

One of the classic positions in surfing is the tube ride. This sometimes occurs when the surf dog gets underneath the breaking lip and well back into the wave and makes their way out still riding the board. Judges have traditionally scored a tube ride higher than

virtually any other positioning maneuver in surfing. Even a short shore break tube can earn an extra point or so during a competition.

Length of Ride

At least one or two points should be reserved for rides where the surf dog exhibits many different abilities. The surf dog that can maintain control from outside clear into the shore break should score higher. However, simply riding a long wave in a squat position with no maneuvers does not score as high as a dog that performs an additional maneuver. No matter what tricks are accomplished on an inside wave, the surf dog on a shore break white water wave should never be awarded a score as high as the average ride on the outside wave, even if it is a slow moving.

Style

Since style is developed by striving for the ultimate attainment of perfection, at least one point may be reserved for surf dogs that look comfortable, display confidence and therefore exhibit style, particularly on quality wave breaking days.

Interference

Interference is a determination made when the right of way of the surf dog is encroached upon. The situation arises when a dog is interfered with by another handler who launches their dog into another dog or an inside helper gets in the way of the surf dog on a ride. It is up to the individual judge to determine whether the surf dog has possibly been hindered in its scoring potential. The key word in these criteria is “possibly”. It is a subjective determination that each judge must decide for him or herself.

What a judge considers:

1. Which surf dog has the right of way?
2. Was there interference or not? Did the surf dog with the right of way have its scoring potential possibly hindered?
3. Just like in traditional human surf contests, did the dog get pushed by the handler in a way causing them to drop in snaking the wave, or simply by going out where a dog is coming in on a ride.
4. Does the action cause interference with a dog on a wave by blocking the dog from completing a section or to breakdown a section of the wave. These actions can also be considered excessive hassling of the other contestants.
5. Helpers and/or handlers on the inside should never interfere with other competitors.

Interference can take place while a surf dog is riding a wave by a competing handler, helper, or another surf dog getting in their way. If *a majority* of judges agree on a handler or helper interference, the judge will mark the scoring sheet with a triangle around the interfering surf dog's name, even if it is the surf dog's handler or helper that interfered. An arrow will be drawn on the score sheet to a circle around the surf dog's name that has been interfered with. Two points will be deducted from the interfering surf dog's highest scored wave and that ride will be counted as one of the waves for the surf dog's score in the heat.

Use of a Leash in Contests

While surf dogs need to wear a life preserver, leashes are NOT recommended in contests.

Summary

This section includes a summary of maneuvers used in traditional surfing techniques. Surf dog judges should make themselves aware of these maneuvers and classic surfing in general by studying suitable reference material in the form of magazines or movies from that era. Knowledge of these concepts is critical in order to give the surf dog owner a strong foundation in the techniques that will optimize their success and experience when surfing their dog.