

How to Get Started in Lure Coursing

By: BARRC Lure Coursing Committee of 2002

The first thing you need to start lure coursing is to own a sighthound, which Rhodesian Ridgebacks are considered in the US and some European countries. The second thing would be a breeder/mentor to help you along with their knowledge. If the second resource isn't available, maybe the following will help get you and your dog out on the coursing field.

There are two organizations that offer lure coursing: The American Sighthound Field Association (ASFA) and The American Kennel Club (AKC). You can get lure coursing championship titles from both organizations, although the requirements are different for each. The qualifications to run competitively in each organization are different also.

How do we start?

By bringing your dog out to an ASFA or AKC run trial and soaking up information from all the other enthusiasts. You will also be getting your dog used to the noises of the lure machine and all the other sighthounds. When the trial is over, most clubs will run practice and certification runs. Here's where the real fun starts! If you have a puppy, the Huntmaster (person waiting for you to bring your dog to the start) will ask you how old he/she is and help you determine how far you want to try running them. You don't want to have a puppy run the whole course, even though a tired puppy is a good puppy. If your dog isn't a puppy, it's a good idea to tell the Huntmaster that this is their first time.

When may my sighthound start coursing?

Dogs may officially begin competing at the age of one year. But you can introduce your dog to lure coursing much earlier than that. You can familiarize your dog with the lure, the equipment, and to determine their level of instinctual prey drive by running very short runs of 10, 20 or even 30 yards. You can cause harm to your young dog's growing bones by running them longer and younger than is recommended. You may want to consider waiting for your young dog to reach 15 to 18 months old before competing while they're still growing.

Some dogs will immediately understand the concept of chasing the lure and will be after it on their first time out. Other dogs need to think about it more and better understand exactly what's going on. Don't give up. A few months of maturity can change a dog that was previously disinterested in the lure to a lure fanatic.

What do I need to bring?

When you first come out to practice or certify your dog you may not have any of the equipment that you will need if you are going to continue to course your dog. Not to worry, experienced Ridgeback coursing people are happy to lend you coursing blankets and slip leads for the first couple of times. If you and your dog take to coursing you will soon be buying your own equipment. The really good thing is that new enthusiasts are always welcome and if your

dog likes to run it is a wonderful sport for both of you.

For your dog, bring shade, a crate or x-pens and water. For yourself, bring shade, food, drinks and a chair.

What's the basic etiquette on the field?

NEVER call to your dog when it is actually running on the field or cheer it on during its run. If you are holding your dog near the field make sure you have a strong hold on the dog so that it doesn't get loose and interfere with the course. You want your dog to be enthusiastic, so leave the strict obedience at home! You want the dog to be under control but free to revel in its instincts! Don't put your dog in the position of pulling and lunging field side in a choke chain. Once your dog has the idea, let him rest away from the field and save his energy for the chase. Many a beginning (and experienced!) dog has shown enthusiasm at course-side and then been too tired to run enthusiastically when its turn has come to run!

What time are the trials over and when does practice start?

An important thing for people new to the sport to understand is that this is pretty much an all day event. Don't ask a veteran coursing enthusiast to tell you exactly at what time your breed will be up or when practices will be. Due to large entries of dogs, fog, equipment that breaks down, lines that snap, dogs that run the course a second time (unofficially) or ones that can't be caught, all contribute to a possible delay. Even though no one intends for these things to happen (but do hope for a large entry), they do.

Usually practices are held on a Saturday of a trial and sometimes on a Sunday as time allows. Again, usually they don't start before 1pm. Just remember that you will meet some very interesting people interested in your breed and knowledgeable about coursing and want to impart that information to you!

A lot of the fun is hanging out with other dog people as crazy about their dogs as you are about yours!