

The Future Messenger Dog

The Future Messenger Dog (FMD) designation is given by the Belgian Sheepdog Club of America (BSCA) to the dogs who pass all the components of the FMD Evaluation.

The FMD evaluation consists of three parts. Part One includes the Basic Control Exercise, an Honor Exercise and a one minute Stay Exercise. Part Two, the Search Exercise, shows that the dog can solve a simple puzzle to find a toy or treat. Part Three consists of two Messenger Runs with two handlers per dog.

The FMD was designed so that a well mannered dog would find it to be a reasonable test of their social skills and recall ability. The FMD evaluation is intended to be about the level of a Canine Good Citizen (CGC) evaluation. The main differences between the FMD and the CGC will be in the length of stay and the type and length of sends/recalls done in the Messenger Runs. And of course, the fun Search Exercise!

Part One

Basic Control

The purpose of the Basic Control Exercise is to demonstrate that the handler understands and respects the dog, and that the dog respects and will obey the handler.

Walking with Handler (on lead)
Dogs being tested must wear a buckle, plastic snap or slip collar. A 6 ft leash is to be used for this portion. The team will walk a pattern designed by the evaluator; using signs similar to those used in Rally Obedience, or alternately, with commands called out by the evaluator or helper. The pattern will be the same for all teams, and must use the following signs or commands: START, FINISH, one ABOUT TURN (LEFT or RIGHT), two changes of pace (a SLOW or a FAST followed by a NORMAL), one HALT and at least one TURN (RIGHT or LEFT).

The dog may walk on either side of the handler, but may not interfere with the handler's movement. The dog's position should leave no doubt that the dog is attentive to the handler and is responding to the handler's movements and changes of direction. The dog needs not be perfectly aligned with the handler and needs not sit when the handler stops, but may sit if desired. The precision of competition Obedience or Rally is not required, but is allowed if the handler wishes.

The handler may not physically guide or touch the dog, but may talk to the dog and encourage him or her in a happy tone of voice or modest hand motions such as clapping, patting the leg, etc...

No loud or rough commands or motions will be allowed. This must be a positive experience for all.

Honor

After a team (Team A) completes the Basic Control Exercise, they will go to the Honor station. They will remain there while the next team (Team B) completes the Basic Control Exercise. Team A leaves the test area after Team B completes the Basic Control Exercise. The evaluator will tell both teams when the exercises are finished.

The Honor Exercise is performed on a 6 ft leash, within the evaluation area but well away from the other team. The handler asks the Honoring dog to either sit or down and the dog must remain in the selected position until the other team finishes their exercise. The handler may encourage and talk to the Honoring dog and repeat the request as necessary.

Stay

Only one team and the evaluator are in the ring for this exercise. The handler will ask the dog to stay in either a sit or down and once the dog is in position, the handler will move to the end of the 6 ft lead. The dog must remain in the chosen position for one minute. The evaluator will time the exercise. The words "return to your dog" and "release your dog" will be used by the evaluator for the benefit of the handlers who wish to perform

this exercise in a more formal manner. However, for the FMD, the evaluator is only scoring whether the dog stays for one minute as originally directed. No formal style of sit or down is required. No formal manner of returning to the dog is required. The handler may encourage and talk to the dog and repeat the request as necessary.

Part Two

Search Exercise

The Test Area will contain four to six (4-6) empty boxes with the flaps cut off. The boxes may be rearranged between runs, but the same box will be used to hold the treat or toy for each competitor. The boxes should not be extremely far away, but the nearest box should be no closer than ten (10) feet from the dog.

For the test, each handler will provide a small treat or a toy their dog is familiar with. The dog will do the entire exercise on a loose leash. Some encouragement by the handler is permitted, but the dog should clearly find or indicate the treat or toy on his or her own. Remember, no part of the FMD is timed, so feel free to take your time in allowing your dog to search and find the treat or toy.

At the start of the exercise, the handler and dog face the test area. The dog is on a loose lead next to the handler. The handler places the treat or toy on a clipboard provided by the tester or steward, who will place the treat or toy in a box. Upon direction from the tester, the handler will command and/or encourage the dog to search the boxes and find the treat or toy. The lead must be loose enough to allow the dog to work. Feel free to encourage your dog and allow them to explore with their eyes or noses at their own pace. The dog must retrieve or clearly indicate he has found the treat or toy, at which time the exercise is finished and the dog may eat the treat or briefly play with the toy.

"Encouragement" in this exercise generally means upbeat verbal communication or hand motions. Some pointing and indicating may be

allowed, but the handler should not come within a foot of the boxes, or assist the dog in a manner that appears to help the dog find the treat or toy. The dog should be allowed to search and indicate the treat or toy on his or her own.

Part Three

Messenger Runs

The team consists of two handlers and one dog. The handlers may be people who both train the dog, or if only one handler is available, the evaluator may act as one of the handlers.

Handler A sends the dog to Handler B; then Handler B sends the dog back to Handler A: that is one run. The second run is a repeat of the first. The distance will be no greater than 50 yards. More often it will be less due to constraints of designating available safe terrain. For example, it may be performed in an empty agility or obedience ring. The dog does NOT need to carry a message or wear a collar in the FMD. The dog may wear one of his or her own, or one provided by the evaluator (usually made of survey tape) if the handler chooses.

We've been asked this question about the messenger runs. Which is better, to train the dog to be 'sent' or to be 'recalled'? For the FMD, the area is often quite small. At that level, to cue the dog to run from person to person, either method would work fine.

But remember, in the next level, the Junior Messenger Dog (JMD), you must use a 'send'. In the highest levels of Messenger Dog Trials; the dog will be running over greater distances and can't see the person he or she is running toward. It would be impossible for the distant handler to 'call' or 'recall' the dog.

Therefore, we advise starting at the FMD level with a foundation you can build upon and using a 'send' if you've had time to train that cue. But since the FMD is impromptu for many teams, the evaluators will accept the use of a 'recall' cue.

You may wish to use a different cue than you use for obedience or agility 'sends'. One

old book on training Messenger Dogs used the word 'Report' to send the dog. Not something you're likely to use for anything else! Or use 'Allez!', French for 'Go!' Be creative and have fun.

General Information

Treats & Water

Dogs should not be lured by treats during the test or rewarded with them after each exercise. The FMD is generally of short duration and dogs should wait for treats until after all exercises of the FMD are completed. The exception to this is the treat that may be eaten in the Search Exercise.

The handlers may provide water for the dogs and the dogs may have water in between all of the exercises, including in between the two Messenger Runs.

Title & Certificate

Teams must pass all the items on the evaluation to earn the FMD certificate. The FMD is a BSCA designation and not an AKC title.

The Future Messenger Dog and the Junior Messenger Dog evaluations are done in a smaller area and under more control in order to prepare the dogs and handlers for open field work in the higher levels of Messenger Dog Trials.

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Explanation Of Exercises and Evaluation Objectives



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