

FARM DOG CERTIFIED (FDC) TEST

CITY DOG HAS FUN ON THE FARM

**By Sandy Crawford
Bonnycastle Westies**

It was early summer when I first heard about an upcoming Farm Dog Certified (FDC) test. The test was hosted September 23rd and 24th, 2017, by the Bellevue Dog Obedience Club of Nebraska, sounded interesting and I wasted no time researching what I thought seemed like a fun challenge for my dog and me. After all, my Westie “Saylor” is a city girl and I thought it would be a fun adventure to introduce her to the sights, sounds, scents and livestock found in a farm environment.

Introduced by the American Kennel Club starting July 1, 2016, the Farm Dog Certified test provides a series of twelve exercises that represent situations a farm dog would encounter in a typical farm environment. The basic test requirements are designed to emphasize a dog’s trainability, courage, self-control, confidence and trust necessary to succeed in any canine-human partnership.

The test is a non-competitive pass/fail evaluation designed to assess the overall conduct of a dog. The dog wears a flat buckle collar during the test and is on leash at all times or confined to a crate. Handlers can talk to their dog during testing, use hand signals, use limited praise but there are no food treats allowed.

TWELVE TEST ELEMENTS WHAT ARE THEY?

- 1. Greet the judge**

- 2. Walk around the farm and a passive stranger**
- 3. Jump on hay/straw bale**
- 4. Walk past farm animals**
- 5. Walk over or through unusual surfaces**
- 6. Supervised separation in crate**
- 7. Pass through gate**
- 8. Handler feeds livestock**
- 9. Reaction to another dog**
- 10. Reaction to noise distraction**
- 11. Dog approaches livestock**
- 12. Physical exam by handler**

THE JOURNEY

Two practice sessions were offered at Sunshine Farm in Council Bluffs, Iowa, prior to the actual test. This provided the dog/handler teams the opportunity to gather information regarding their strengths and would also indicate which areas would need more training. My Westie's AKC agility measurement card indicates she is 9 ½ inches at the withers. I quickly discovered a bale of hay is approximately 14" to 16" high. We had work to do. "Jump, Girly, Jump!"

The first day of the test arrived and we were excited. An hour's drive to the country took us to the farm where we had practiced and where the two-day test was being held. The sun was shining brightly as the two of us walked past the cornfields and to the sheep field where the test was already in process. A light breeze was blowing and I felt confident that my dog and I were ready. We were team number fifteen so we watched and patiently waited.

Judge Terry Workman of Bennet, Nebraska was ready to meet us as directed for test number one. We walked onto the sheep field following the numbered course and past various farm items such as feedbags,

a tractor, cement blocks and an individual sitting in a chair. And next, there it was...the hay bale. Could my Westie jump high enough to land on top and prove her athletic ability? Would she stay until released by the judge and look relaxed and comfortable? I smiled my best smile and gave my partner the command to “up!” I held my breath a moment and “up” she jumped and lay down; clean landing with a great stay...good girl! Test four transitioned to a sheep paddock that featured sheep as well as a barn. As my Westie peered through the fence at the sheep, I calmly reminded her to “leave it” as she looked, listened and demonstrated great self-control.

Moving on we walked across a full sheet of plywood, over a blue plastic tarp and across a series of logs. We passed through a farm gate where I tethered my dog while I fed the chickens. With varied enclosures and terrain, the remainder of the testing involved farm noise such as the starting of a tractor engine, pounding and sawing. While on a loose lead, my girl took one last look at the sheep, and then we went on to meet a dog and concluded the test with the physical exam performed by me. I checked her eyes, ears, coat and toes for plant material or other debris that she might have picked up during the farm test.

Day two was a repeat of day one. Judge Ken Theus of Boerne, Texas gave us our needed second pass.

Janice Sondys, AKC Senior Companion Events Representative, confirmed that our Westie Mardot Hot Lips “Saylor” is the first West Highland White Terrier to be issued the AKC Farm Dog Certified (FDC) title.

You can find an upcoming FDC test in your area. Visit the AKC Events Calendar and spend some fun time in the country!