

You Too Can Hunt Your Jack Russell Terrier (Part I)

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Is your Jack Russell Terrier always digging up your yard looking for moles and chipmunks? Is it always sniffing the ground and anywhere else that looks interesting wherever you go? Does it chase squirrels and really loves the GTG, Trailing and Locating and Super Earth at trials? If these things are the case, your terrier is exhibiting many signs of wanting to hunt. You have begun wondering how you could really find out if hunting would be good for you and your JRT. Where do you start?

You are urged to NEVER go out in the field alone to hunt your terriers for several reasons:

1. In the beginning, you are a novice and need guidance, training and help of an experienced hunter. There are many JRT owners who hunt their dogs frequently and sometimes these people welcome company. In fact, the very first time you go out, it is probably a good idea to leave your dog(s) at home and just go out with the experienced person(s) and watch their experienced dogs work to get a feel for what it is all about so you can really decide if hunting is for you.
2. A major reason for the “Working Judges” that are listed toward the front of “True Grit” magazine every month is to provide names of experienced hunters. Call one of these judges and set up a date to go hunting with them. The judges have places to go where you are most likely to find quarry and they know what to do to encourage your terrier and help it hunt. They also know what to do when a terrier gets into trouble and this is very important. The judges have necessary equipment for hunting and they usually have an all-terrain vehicle that can go off road to the best places for hunting. All “Working Judges” have participated in a training and evaluation program before being officially designated as “Working Judges”.
3. Another reason to avoid hunting alone is that accidents or illnesses can happen to your or your terriers when you are hunting. If you are in trouble, you need someone with you to either help or go get help.
4. You need to carry several pieces of equipment when hunting and it helps to have more than one person to lug this equipment.
5. You need to be aware of where your dog is at all times. Two or more sets of eyes can do a better job of keeping track of terriers you have running around. You do not want a terrier to go-to-earth somewhere and suddenly realize you have not seen that terrier for a while so you haven’t a clue where it might be.

If you can arrange to hunt with a “Working Judge”, your equipment needs are minimal because the judge would have the necessary equipment. However, you do need to bring the following personal items for your first hunt.

1. Tough, briar resistant pants to keep your legs and fanny from being scratched by thorny bushes.

2. Good, water proof, comfortable, hiking boots. You will be walking a lot, often through wet areas and nothing is more miserable than blistered or wet feet. You will also be using a shovel and your footwear must be able to stomp on the shovel because YOU WILL BE ASKED TO HELP DIG.
3. You need adequate jacket, long underwear, warm socks, etc. appropriate for the temperature of the day. A warm hat or sun protecting hat (depending on the weather) is necessary. You also need a good pair of tough, leather, work gloves.
4. Bring a day-pack to carry water for you and your terrier. Bring a lead for your terrier – hopefully one that can be slipped on and off the terrier’s head easily. The so called “racing leads” are great, but NEVER bring a flexi lead as they are more hindrance/hazard than useful in the woods. Leave your dog’s collar with the licenses, rabies tags, etc. in your pack. Hopefully, the judge has a first aid kit but I bring my own anyway. A pair of clean socks and a dry “T” shirt would be good to have. If you are worried about eating regularly for health reasons, bring snack bars or an apple or two in your pack because if you are in the middle of a big dig, you aren’t going to stop and go somewhere for lunch. A small flashlight is good to have in case your ‘big dig’ extends after dark.
5. Always bring a few dollars so you can buy lunch and cold drinks for both the judge and yourself with enough left over to fill the gas tank of the judge’s vehicle at the end of the day. Oh yes, don’t forget to bring your camera and some mosquito repellent. Finally, unless you want to be “charbroiled” after a day in the sun, bring some Sun Block.

The judge or person taking you hunting should have a well-equipped hunting pack and the following digging equipment.

1. The judge’s pack will contain, a Yo-ho (small hand trowel with hopefully at least an 18” handle), a small folding saw, a flashlight, stakeout chains for at least two terriers and a “Ferret Finder” box with several collars containing fresh batteries. The “Ferret Finder” allows you to pinpoint exactly where and how deep your terrier is located below the earth. The judge should also have a first aid kit and maybe a cell phone. The judge will probably have water for both you and your dogs, and some of the same things you have in your own pack.
2. The judge will probably have both a long handled and a short handled spade, bar with a point on one end and chisel on the other end, post-hole digger and maybe a snare to use to snare the quarry. The first four items are usually available at any good hardware store although you may need to have someone cut off an end of the bar that might have a tamping foot and grind that end into a point. The snare can usually be purchased through a quality, hunting equipment catalog or store.
3. The judge’s vehicle should be equipped with crates – one for each terrier you have. If the weather is hot, crate fans would be good to have. If you are not riding with a judge in his vehicle and your own vehicle is not a 4-wheel drive or is low slung, then beware because I once almost ripped the gas tank off my Chevy Venture trying to use it like an off-road vehicle.

Important things to remember:

1. Your judge or person you are hunting with is giving up a day of their time to take you hunting.
2. The judge is probably driving their vehicle so fill that vehicle's gas tank after the day is over.
3. For most hunting, you will drive to the judge's location and you may have to spend one or two nights there. Do not expect the judge to be your hotel.
4. Buy the judge's lunch and sodas/beers and maybe offer to take the judge and their spouse out to dinner in the evenings.
5. You might consider a small gift for the judge as thanks for taking you out.

Okay, you are ready to go on your first hunt. In the next installment, we will discuss more about the actual hunting and what you can expect.