Barn Hunt New Handler Tips:

1 - Trial Entry – Check the Barn Hunt website for upcoming trials. The Trial Premium is printed out and mailed to Trial Secretary with entry fees.

2 - Day of Trial Entry – The premium will note if day of show entries are available. Before traveling hundreds of miles, you should get confirmation that the show is still open. (This is not always possible.)

3 - Typical Trial/Entry Strategy – A typical trial weekend is Saturday and Sunday, with two trials each day for a total of four trials. This varies by region; trials may last longer than two days. Typically Instinct Class is offered only once a day at the first trial in the morning. Instinct is not required to enter Novice. I recommend entering in both Instinct and Novice at Trials. Over a typical weekend, this would be a total of six entries over four trials.

4 - Move Up – If you are lucky and receive 3 Novice Qualifying legs, you can move up to Open Class. The move up request is made with the Trial Secretary after the close of the most recent trial. Note: Please be patient and respectful. The Trial Secretary has a limited time to get ready for the next trial.

5 - Read the Rules – Print off the Rule Book or save the PDF to your phone or iPad. Read through the rules. Make note of any questions that can be asked to Mentors or at the Trial Judges Briefing. I recently posted tips and recommendations on Facebook to help the Novice Barn Hunter.

6 - Judge’s Briefing – At the beginning of each Instinct and Novice Trial, there will be a briefing. The judge will go over the course and basic elements. At the briefing, judges are Ambassadors of the sport and want the Novice Barn Hunt Team to be successful.

7 - Cell Phones/Food Treats – No cell phones are allowed in the ring or blind! This include smart watches. (Regular watches and FitBits are OK, but always get clarification from Judge.) Treats are allowed in blind... but not on the course. Cell phones and treats are not allowed in your pockets, even if the cell phone is turned off.

8 - The Blind – Each class will have blinds that are typically a popup tent with five chairs. Know the order of the blinds and which blind you are in. Make sure your dog has had a chance to relieve itself before entering the blind. No cell phones are allowed in the blind! Don’t talk to anyone outside the blind!

9 - Dogs Run Naked – When called to the ring, you will be asked to remove leash. Have a leash that is easy to remove. Slip leads work well.

10 - Hunting Style – Don’t over handle or direct the dog. Let the dog lead.

11 - Instinct Class Basics – Three tubes are visible (one tube is empty, one tube has litter, and one tube has rat and litter). Only requirement is to find the rat in one minute. There is a tunnel and bales stacked two high, but neither a tunnel nor climb is required.

12 - Novice Class – Time is two minutes and starts when handler releases the dog. Three tubes are hidden (one tube is empty, one tube has litter, and one tube has rat and litter). The dog is required to find the rat, tunnel, climb (all four feet must make contact with bale; no jumping over bale).
13 - Course Strategy/Time management – It’s difficult to get a feel for the time; sometimes it goes fast, other times it goes slow. I recommend that you encourage your dog to work areas; don’t over handle the dog.

14 - Calling the Tube – The primary job of the handler is to call out and point if your dog has identified the rat tube. Most people call “RAT!”

15 - Things Not to Do – Don’t deliberately touch your dog during the time trial. You only touch your dog to restrain it during the rat tube removal. Don’t touch, sit, or step over a bale of hay. Don’t push your dog out of the starting box. If the handler swears or the dog eliminates on the course, you and your dog will be immediately dismissed from the ring.

16 - Novice Safely Removing Rat Tubes – There are three ways to remove a tube. Please read rules and the Judge will go over at briefing. At the Novice level and first time Barn Hunting, I suggest reading “Handler Restraint.”

17 - End of Run – If the dog doesn’t find the rat, the Judge will show the rat tube to allow the dog to sniff and lightly work the tube. Don’t take advantage and let the dog overwork the rat tube. Follow the Judge’s lead. When you leave the ring, place your leash on the dog and immediately leave the area so the next run can begin. Your dog may be excited; take your dog outside for an elimination break.

18 - Volunteer – Please help out and volunteer. You will gain knowledge and better understanding of the sport as you watch other teams.

19 - Have fun!!! Some of my best Barn Hunt memories have been participating in the Novice Class.