KENNEL TALK

Training Rules to Live By

By Ken M. Blomberg

If you're like me, you can always use a few dog-training rules. Over the past 50 years of working with gun dogs, I've collected a few training rules to live by. It never hurts to take a good look at our training methods and resolve to; Keep it simple

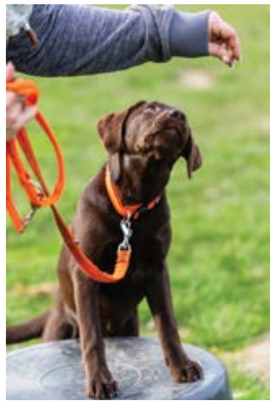
Training dogs isn't rocket science. Approaching the task at hand without complicating matters can mean the difference between success, and failure. If you're confused, imagine how bewildered your dog is. Limit the number of commands you teach and avoid buying all the electronic gadgets on the market. There's a time and a place for their use and by seeking the advice of more experienced trainers, you may avoid creating problems that don't exist.

Think obedience

The job of a trainer is to teach our pups manners at home and in the field. A well-bred hunting dog is born with the instincts necessary to locate and retrieve birds. I was lucky with my first gun dog named Buck. After getting the upper hand on obedience, I let him hunt on his own. He taught me how to hunt birds and left me with a lasting impression. All the dogs that followed got the opportunity to use the hunting instincts their parents passed on. When they faltered, I stepped in and gave them a hand.

Never give a command that you can't enforce

During the early stages, soft control can be assured with the use of a light check cord. As the dog matures, a heavier hand can be used. Be sure you'll be able to immediately correct mistakes. Never punish a dog unless he knows what he's getting it for. Pretty self-explanatory, but important enough to discuss. After-the-fact discipline can be tricky. A good rule of thumb is to correct mistakes immediately after the infraction. If too much time has elapsed, set the dog up to repeat the offense and then immediately let him know what he's getting it for.



Repetition and consistency

Repeating commands over and over is a key ticket to success. Repetition is critical during early lessons - like teaching a dog his name, being taught the meaning of "No'" and coming when called. Repeat the same command like "Here!" or "Come!" again and again until it sinks in. And it will.

Association

Another key component in training is making sure your dog associates various situations with something pleasurable. For example, by introducing your pup to loud noises while he's feeding, chasing birds, or retrieving training dummies, he will learn that noises won't hurt him. Later, he'll associate loud noises like gunfire with things that are pleasurable, like finding and retrieving game birds.

Shorter is better

Keep your training sessions short and sweet. Multiple ten, or fifteen-minute sessions are much better than longer, thirty minute ones. Keep an eye on your pup's attention span, which grows with age. Loss of interest is a good indication that it's time to end the training session.

Don't rush the process

Most pros will tell you that the first six to eight months should be considered "play-training". Beyond that, more formal, "restraint training" should begin. Heeling is a good example. Steadying is another. Applying too much pressure to a young pup can backfire and set the progress of your training backwards.

It takes birds to make a bird dog

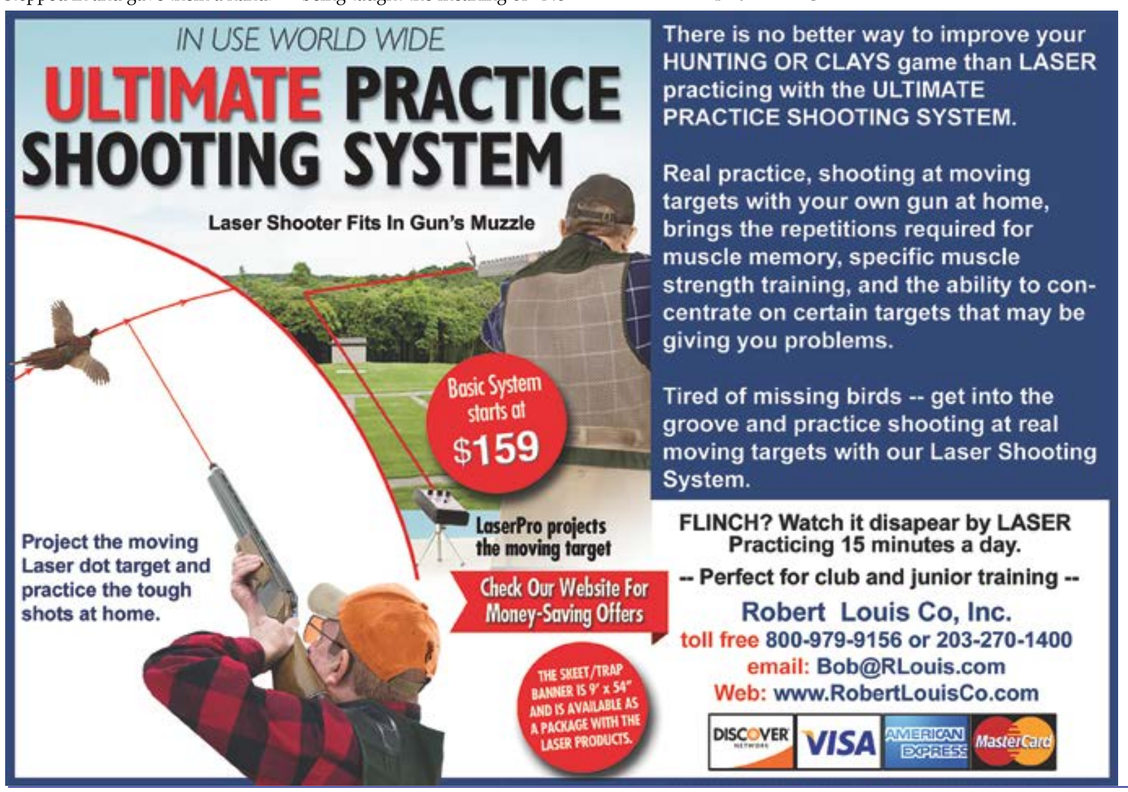
Wild birds are best, but in their absence, pen-raised pigeons, quail, pheasants and ducks will work fine. Find a source and keep an ample supply on hand. Check local and state regulations on permits and licenses.

Always end training sessions on a good note

Before you kennel up your dog on a sour note, sit down with your canine buddy and count to ten. Then throw the dummy, or practice a command you know is working and end the session with praise and a hug. It'll make you both feel better.

Join a club

No matter what breed of gun dog you own, there's an organized group of enthusiasts with similar interests. Do some research before the spring training season begins and become a member. Before you pay your dues, a word of warning may be in order. Be prepared to get an earful of free advice. Some good, and some not so good. If you get confused, go back to training rule # 1.



Dog Safety

Spring Dog Hazards

Spring dog hazards include **toxic plants** (lilies, azaleas, daffodils), lawn chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides), parasites (fleas, ticks), and seasonal allergies. Other dangers are chocolate, xylitol, warmer temperatures causing heatstroke, and dangerous wildlife or slimy critters. Keep chemicals locked away, supervise outdoor time, and ensure up-to-date pest prevention.

Parasites & Infections: Fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes become active, increasing the risk of diseases like Lyme disease and heartworm. Slugs and snails in wet spring weather can carry the dangerous lungworm parasite.

Allergies & Wildlife: Dogs can suffer from allergies, with symptoms like itching and sneezing. Active wildlife may cause encounters, while insects like bees and wasps can sting.

Food & Household: Spring holidays often bring dangers like chocolate and xylitol.

Temperature & Water Hazards: Rising temperatures increase the risk of heatstroke. Ponds, rivers, and lakes present risks to dogs, especially if they are not strong swimmers.

Identification: Ensure your dog has a collar with tags and a microchip.

Supervision: Monitor your dog in the garden and during walks to prevent ingestion of hazardous plants or materials.

Preventive Care: Consult your veterinarian for year-round flea, tick, and heartworm prevention.

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The Last Battle

If it should be that I grow frail and weak,

And pain should keep me from my sleep,

Then will you do what must be done,

For this, the last battle, can't be won.

You will be sad I understand,

But don't let grief then stay your hand,

For on this day, more than the rest,

Your love and friendship must stand the test.

We have had so many happy years,

You wouldn't want me to suffer so.

When the time comes, please, let me go.

Take me to where to my needs they'll tend,

Only, stay with me till the end

And hold me firm and speak to me,
Until my eyes no longer see.

I know in time you will agree,

It is a kindness you do to me.

Although my tail its last has waved,

From pain and suffering I have been saved.

Don't grieve that it must be you,

Who has to decide this thing to do;

We've been so close,we two, these years,

Don't let your heart hold any tears.

