

Training

When Should I Start Training?

By Dave Duffey

The most frequently asked question by both experienced and beginner gun dog owners is “when should I start training this new puppy?” The answer is: On the day the pup arrives. Age is not the criteria. Any pup old enough to survive separation from its dam is ready for training and can learn. If you want a well-adjusted, easy to get along with hunting companion the time to begin the training is the moment you bring this mighty mite home.

This is imperative. Not only does a pup “start school” as early as four to five weeks of age (as a practical matter most pups go into their first homes at six to 12 weeks of age) because it can learn, but because regardless of what you do or do not do with it, every puppy will learn.

Life with a gun dog is a lot less complicated if you get things off on the proper paw. Guide the pup into learning “good things” that will benefit both hunter and hunting dog. Such guidance may be technically classified as “informal”

training; in contrast to the serious, by rote, “formal” training worthwhile gun dogs must undergo as they mature.

It may be that the stuff absorbed in an almost osmotic process is more important, than the controlled, mechanical learning that comes later. Canine learners might be fairly compared to human children who learn a great deal and form much of their adult character before any exposure to primary, secondary and advanced education.

The photos and the texts explaining them represent only a few of the things sportsmen and their family members can do to ensure the pup of their choice turns out according to expectations. It has nothing to do with breed or pedigree. It applies to all dogs, whether they become superlative bird finders and retrievers or fall short of that goal from lack of that combination of natural ability, opportunity and training which makes really good hunting dogs.

First-time gun dog owners may look on this as a revelation. Hunters who have experienced success with the development of one or more good hunting dogs probably have done all these things without giving much thought to why they did or how it affected the finished product. Even proven trainers, doing what ought to be done subconsciously, sometimes forget.

So, in whatever category you place yourself, seeing some things, that ought to be done ought to be helpful to all. Even more important (in my spectrum of priorities), when faced with the task of developing a good gun dog, this “play training” will make a “dog’s life” a great deal easier and more enjoyable. Casual, day to day introduction and integration with a human lifestyle isn’t madness. It’s a method that brings out the best, now and in the future, in good gun dogs. Good luck



Very early introduction to and acceptance of other pets in a household will help avoid future embarrassment or worse, caused by adult hunting dogs that will attack rather than put up with or ignore other domestic animals. Keeping a cat to “felinise” pups won’t be included in every hunter’s bag of training tricks. But it is worth consideration and justifies the presence of kittens as well as puppies in a sportsman’s household.

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