

## Starting Young DD Puppies

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I am often asked what kind of training folks should be doing with their Deutsch Drahthaar puppy in their first year. The first year is all about exposure and basic obedience. You are laying the groundwork for much more advanced training to come. We teach our pups all of their basic obedience (sit, down, stay, heel, come, and halt) immediately. Dogs are creatures of habit. So the more obedience you instill early on, the less time they have to develop bad habits that you are going to have to correct later.

I should start by saying that I think the single most important command that you can teach your DD is the Halt command. Rather than double the length of this article by inserting a section about training the Halt command, I wanted to just mention it here and encourage you to read my other article, [\*Whistle Training 101\*](#), in addition to this article.

DDs have a strong pointing instinct. This is something that I do not usually spend very much time on. I think that many people spend way too much time working on pointing and steadiness. Less is more in a retrieve-driven breed like a DD. I plant a couple of pigeons for my pup to point. If she does not point them that day, I flush one so she can watch it fly off (this seems to help them make the connection that pigeons are game). And then I go home. For whatever reason, it seems to help dogs to sleep on something just like it helps us! A few days later, I try again with the planted pigeon. Again, if the pup does not point it, I flush it and let them watch/chase it. If they do point, I quietly praise them and keep a hold on the check-cord. Once my pups point a bird, I never let them chase another bird again. Chasing is just another bad habit that you will have to break later so I see no reason to let them get used to it. In fact, after a couple training sessions where my pup is pointing well, I put the live birds away. I will not really be using them again until after the pup is force-fetched. I do not like to shoot birds for my dogs to retrieve until after they are force-fetched.

Most DDs have a strong retrieving instinct, but again, why let them mess around trying to figure out how to pick up a shot bird and then play around with it while bringing it back? It could develop into a bad habit. But yet a retrieve is the ultimate reward for pointing. So that is why I just stop all pointing work until my dogs are force-fetched. I do not agree with those trainers who just keep making their dogs point over and over again without giving them a retrieve. And I do not agree with those trainers who shoot a bunch of birds over their young dog just to have to coax them into a really sloppy retrieve. Again, my training philosophy is to limit creation of bad habits so once I am confident that my pup points birds, I stop all upland bird work until I am confident that my pup will retrieve a shot bird properly (I work on steadiness at that time as well).

DDs are one of the strongest gundog breeds in the water. Most DDs absolutely love the water once they realize that they can swim. So with a really young puppy, I just want to properly motivate them to get into swimming depth water. I often toss Cheetos into shallow water to entice pups into the water. All puppies love eating Cheetos and they float nicely on top of the water. All you have to do is gradually toss the Cheetos further and further into the water to get your pup swimming. Another option is just to wade into the water yourself. Your pup will hate to be left behind so coaxing your pup into the water behind you is always the best method for getting that initial swim.

Once the puppies realize that they like to swim, I NEVER throw anything for their pup to retrieve in the water from my shoreline. I know this is contradictory to what a lot of folks do with their pups. Most people are so eager to ensure that their pup loves the water that they throw countless sticks and dummies into the water for the pup to retrieve. First off, do NOT throw sticks. We do not want your puppy thinking that sticks are an acceptable thing to bring back for you. Can you imagine the embarrassment if your pup is running in a test and brings back a stick instead of a duck? Or perhaps more appropriately, do you want your pup bringing you back a stick instead of the duck you just shot while hunting? Always use training dummies or ducks at the water.

I know that we all love to play fetch with our pups in the water and I totally support that. But I do ask that instead of you throwing a dummy while your expectant pup waits at your feet, please have a training partner throw a dummy from the opposite shoreline instead. I know it's hard to always find another person to train with you, but I promise you that it's worth the effort. For the HZP, there are two blind retrieves where your pup will need to swim across open water to the opposite shoreline to find either a dead duck or start searching for a live duck. As a judge, I see so many dogs that potter along the near shoreline instead of just entering the water and swimming across. So believe me, your life will be a lot easier if your pup learns early on that all of the action is always on the opposite shore. What I like to see in an adult dog is a dog that always looks to the opposite shoreline for ducks whenever she is brought up to any water body. Rather than commanding them to swim across and make a retrieve, I am just releasing them to let them go find something cool. That is a big difference in a dog's head. You can get there with your pup too if you make sure that your pup learns that all cool stuff always comes from across the pond. To help build up that confidence, you of course, have to be sure that there is always something cool for them to find across the pond. So again, once your young pup is swimming, you should NEVER throw something from your near shoreline again. We want your pups to be looking out across the water for game...not looking at you to provide them with game.

It is also important to do some early tracking work with your pup. You can choose whatever dead game you have in the freezer (duck, pigeon, quail, rabbit, etc.) and take it to the field. While the pup is crated in the truck, tie a drag rope around your game and mark a starting point. You will then want to walk at a normal pace while dragging the game behind you. Always lay drags downwind or crosswind. If you lay the drag into the wind, the pup is more likely to pick up her head and go into a search. But we want her to focus on tracking. So anyways, drag the game a short distance. You will increase the distance and the difficulty of the drag (adding turns, etc.) as the pup gets older. When you get to the end of your drag, pick up the game and lay down a small pile of treats in its place. Walk back to your truck (making sure to be far downwind of your drag trail) and hide the game before getting your pup.

There should always be some ritual associated with starting a track. Personally, I like to blow the dog down with my halt whistle. Then I grab my slip lead and loop it through the collar and underneath the pup's armpit that is closest to me. I always use a slip-lead instead of a regular leash because I do not want to distract the pup once she is on the track. So the slip-lead will allow the leash to quietly release the dog once she has started. I point at the feathers/fur/or whatever I left to mark my starting place and make sure that the pup gets her nose into it and is really interested. Once she is really into it, I take a few steps with her at my side to encourage her along the track. When I am confident that she is on the track, I let go of the slip lead as she works the drag trail ahead of me. Young puppies will probably get off the track every now and then. Do not say anything. Let them work it out. This is as much about them building confidence in using their nose as it is about anything else. She should eventually make her way to the treat pile at the end of the drag trail. Give her lots of praise as you watch her consume her snack. And then call her back to you. When she gets back to you, please make her sit at your feet. At the HZP, she will have to pick up dead game at the end of the drag and retrieve it back to you. So you can help yourself out a lot if your pup is already in the routine of coming back to sit for you after completing each track. I do not swap out the treats for actual drag game until after the pup is force-fetched. Again, I do not want the pup to develop any bad habits that I will have to fix later.

I just mentioned that one simple thing you can do now to make training easier in the future is to train your pup to sit every time she comes to you. I say this because it seems like one of the trickiest phases of force-fetch for most dogs is to hold onto the dummy while sitting to present it to you. So if your pup is already conditioned to sit every time she comes to you, it will be much easier for her to make that transition into force-fetch. And frankly, having a dog used to just sitting every time they come to you makes it a lot easier to break that nasty habit some dogs have of jumping up on people.

And finally, please take advantage of your pup's many naps and rest times to get her used to having people's hands in her mouths. At all levels of testing and the breed show, judges will need to check your dog's bite and teeth. As a judge, I can tell you that it is very frustrating when dogs are ill-behaved for this. I start off by lifting

my pup's lip up whenever she is asleep or resting. And then I start opening her mouth and holding it open (so I can count teeth). Eventually, I can move to doing this while she is wide awake. I start doing random teeth/bite checks regardless of her activity level. And then I ask friends that come over to open up her mouth as well. Your pup needs to get used to strangers digging around in your mouth. In addition to making judges' lives easier, your veterinarian will also thank you for this!

