

TRAINING THE VERSATILE HUNTING DOG – THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAY

~ PUPPY TRAINING ~

FIRST PHASE

2-7 months

PREFACE

These training notes are the outgrowth of many years of working with versatile dogs and their owners. Time and time again I've seen owners struggle to train their dogs because of a lack of suitable training guides and videos. And because there is so much confusing advice out there!

Traditionally here in SA, we inherited more or less the British way of training simply because the vast majority of breeds were Retrievers or Pointing breeds. Popularity of the Versatile breeds began to rise in the 1980s and they are now the most numerous breed type amongst hunters here.

Clubs were and are few and far between, so getting help could be quite limited. Nonetheless, basic training content was available from books or from other individuals. The basic commands of Sit, Come and Fetch, with perhaps a "Steady" being thrown in was the norm. Little attention was paid to the retrieve quality - we just expected them to do it! More video training content eventually became available, primarily from the USA. But...our ability to implement some of it was limited due to a lack and use of many of the electronic devices, launchers, tables, barrels, etc. And, once again, most of it was geared to the retrieving and pointing breeds. So, we brought in or even built what we could and carried on.

Presently there is an amazing amount of training content available across all breeds! But where does one start?? It's enormously confusing and often conflicting with the vast information now available. So, what is the most practical and effective way to train our dogs here in SA given our resources and circumstances?

Only more recently, with the introduction of the German and Versatile hunting tests, have some of us begun to look at more of the "German" ways of training. Language plays a part of course and makes it more difficult. But the main issue is one of changing our culture to incorporate new ideas and ways of training that can potentially be of great benefit. The Down command is one example. It is not often used here. But why not? Why not implement a well proven way of training that works for our breeds? Why re-invent the wheel? Another example is why not bring in the gentle training of a proper Hold and retrieve to the young dog - instead of just hoping your pup will do it on its own - and then not knowing what to do when problems arise?

These training notes are an attempt to bring together new, old, and classic training techniques that are applicable here in SA and that anyone can follow. You don't need a lot of training aids and you don't need a degree in dog psychology! You just need the willingness and determination to make the effort to train your new puppy or dog.

Whatever approach you take, it must work and it is my hope that some of the content herein as well as the valuable links to other training content will give you a head start to successfully train your versatile HPR puppy!

Be Mindful of the Following 5 Critical Development Periods (Scott and Fuller):

| Period | Weeks | Basic Needs | Mental Capacity | Trainability | Notes |
|--------|---------|--|---|---|--|
| 1 | 0 – 3 | Warmth. Food. Sleep. Mother. | Nearly Zero. | None. | Little or no handling by humans. |
| 2 | 4 | Warmth. Food. Sleep. | All senses functioning. | Slight. | Extremely critical period. Do not remove from littermates or mother. Introduction to human society should be instituted but carefully controlled. |
| 3 | 5 - 7 | Socialization within litter. Socialization with humans. | Capable of responding to voices. Ability to recognize people. | Developing. | Awareness of difference between human and canine society. |
| 4 | 8 - 12 | Remove from littermates and mother. Supervised human socialization. Love and security. | Ability to establish permanent bond. Ability to establish confidence. Capable of accepting gentle discipline. | Ability to learn respect. | <u>Critical. Avoid all potential scare or hurt situations.</u> Introduction to humans is very important. Expose gradually to loud noises. |
| 5 | 13 – 16 | Love. Attention. Discipline. Socialization. Security. | Fully developed, needing only experience. Will attempt to establish dominance. Mind still being influenced. | Capable of adopting a positive or negative attitude towards training. | <u>Praise is very important for establishing a positive attitude to training.</u> |

TRAINING YOUR YOUNG PUPPY:

Your puppy is capable of learning from a very early stage - from about 7 weeks. However, puppies are not, and should not be ready for "formal" training until they are about 6 months of age, some even much later, depending on the individual. By formal training, I mean training in which you expect a high degree of obedience, which you will enforce with corrections when you do not get the usual response to a known command. Although some puppies are capable of taking mild corrections from 3 - 4 months of age, it is undesirable to expect too much too soon. It is very easy to ruin a puppy by pushing them too far before they have had a chance to have their puppy hood. So, let them have their puppy hood! However, do not let these early formative stages go by without training and exposure, because it is during these early months that the puppy's desire to please you and to learn can be nurtured, so that you will have a strong foundation for more advanced training later on.

So, what sort of training does one do with a very young puppy? For lack of a better term, early training can best be described as "play training", where the training time spent is really more **structured play** than anything else - think of it as preschool. You will spend your short training sessions shaping the puppy's behaviour through fun lessons with mostly **positive reinforcement** as your training tool. It should be fun for both of you, with little or no pressure on the pup. A cowed, fearful or confused pup is incapable of learning. So, always look for the signs in your puppy that he is confident and happy - eager demeanour, wagging tail, looking to you for approval and for "What's next!" If these signs are there, then you will be on your way to fulfilling the objectives of your early training, which are outlined below.

EARLY PUPPY TRAINING - OBJECTIVES AND COMMANDS:

Your objectives of early training are many, the most important of which are:

- Developing a strong, positive bond with your puppy
- Establishing yourself as "leader"
- Developing the pups desire to please you
- Developing the pups desire and capacity to learn
- Balancing obedience, socializing, retrieving and free hunting – this is important for the pup's development!

If your early training/shaping is done correctly, then the above objectives will be fulfilled as a natural progression of your training program. So, what does one expect of the young gundog puppy? You will "teach" the following things to your puppy:

BASIC COMMANDS and EXPERIENCES:

- Puppy's **NAME**
- **"COME" OR "HERE"**
- **"SIT"** (means Stay!)
- **DOWN or HALT/Platz** (also means Stay)
- **"OK" OR "RELEASE"** command
- **"NO"**
- **"FETCH" and "GIVE" OR "LEAVE"** through **Play Retrieving**
- **"HEEL"** on lead
- The **SHORT WHISTLE** peeps for **COME** in.
- The **LONG WHISTLE** for **SIT or DOWN**.
- **INTRODUCTIONS** – Introduce your pup to the world - early experiences, socialising, the field, cover, hunting, birds, water, shot.
- **POINTING**

EQUIPMENT YOU WILL NEED:

1. Collar(s)
2. Lead
3. Whistle(s)
4. Dummies (land and water) *Note – a good start is to get a couple of paint rollers! Then you can use your commercial dummies when you get them (if you don't already have them 😊)*
5. Game bag or training vest
6. Crate for house and vehicle
7. Checkcord or long lead
8. Treats and maybe a treat bag
9. Clicker (optional, depending on how you want to train)
10. Placeboard and/or shaping box (optional)

During your training sessions you will spend time with and get to know your puppy - and he will get to know and love you! Do not let your training sessions become so focussed on "lessons" that you both forget to have fun - a puppy will learn and benefit as much through structured play during the day as through formal lessons. Also, do not let these training sessions be the only quality time spent with your pup. A great deal of your

puppy's bonding and lessons can be accomplished through the daily feeding, care and petting routine that you establish. Your training sessions can be carried out in your house and/or garden at first and should be very short - 5 minutes at first - and always end on a positive note. There should be no distractions. 5 minutes twice a day is better than 10 minutes once a day and your sessions should be daily if at all possible. Later, the length of your training sessions will increase, but for now keep them very short and frequent.

A good rule of thumb in training is the **3-time rule**. If you get the desired response from your pup 3 consecutive times, then praise the heck out of the pup, and give the pup something fun to do (a retrieve or just play and run around etc) and then move on to something else or quit. The response should be given on his own, that is, without you having to reinforce the command or make him do it through some sort of coercion. The 3-time rule helps you keep your lessons short and ending on a positive note!

I cannot stress enough the importance of **praise**. Many older books insist that a pat on the head should be enough praise for a puppy, but it is not, particularly with some individuals. You must let the pup know that he has pleased you immensely, particularly with new lessons, and you can do this with gentle physical contact and stroking him or lightly patting him (but not on the head, most dogs don't like this). However, your most important communication tool is your tone of **voice**, which you can use to great effect to convey your pleasure to your puppy. The tone of voice you use will depend on the puppy - some need more excitement than others, but as a general rule, use rather high-pitched tones or phrases (low-pitched or growling tones are threatening). The combination of pleasant verbal and physical praise will really get through to your pup when he has done something right and that you are pleased with him. You will give more praise at certain times than at others, when you are especially pleased that he has mastered a command or exercise. At other times, less enthusiastic praise is required, but you should still give some praise for the correct responses.

Your puppy must also be able to clearly tell when he has displeased you through the tone of your voice along with a very stern **NO**, given in a low, gruff voice. Your displeasure and subsequent correction should be commensurate with the "misdeed" and with the pups' temperament. Some pups only ever need a stern voice – others need more than that. Whichever type of pup you have, save the stern "no" lessons for instances around the house or garden when he has done something unthinkable, such as stealing food or getting on the forbidden furniture, and do a good job of it. He will then learn the command in a situation that is not "training" and will come to understand your displeasure and its consequences without making a bad association with any of your training commands or acts.

I have emphasized "praise", and for good reason. However, food can also be employed to reward your pup for a task well done, provided you are not treating constantly for everything. Even at a young age, pup must work for his praise, or food. Clicker, or Marker, training has many uses and if you want to explore it and bring it into your training there is a lot of good content on YouTube and other media. I'll give some of the links at the end of these notes.

Your puppy should know his **NAME** and associate it with something pleasant, so during the course of the day or night, hold him and say his name often, call him to you by name and pet him or give him a tidbit. It won't take long for him to respond and learn his name.

Try not to use his name to stop him from doing something unwanted. The command **NO** or a gruff word or noise is for that. **NO** means simply "stop what you are doing" and should only be used to stop a specific action. **NO** should not be used during training to indicate to the puppy that he is not responding correctly. Your puppy will not understand what you want unless you show him the correct response. Saying **NO** if you are trying to train the sit, and he is not sitting, for instance, will only confuse him. He will only understand what you want when you reward him for the correct response and will only learn the correct response through you showing him what is required if necessary and through repetition and reward.

TRAINING STRATEGIES

Before embarking on your training journey, it is a good idea to try to decide what sort of training program you are going to follow. There are as many different training methods as trainers!! So, it can be quite difficult as an inexperienced person to make good decisions that work.

There has been a huge push lately for “positive only” training. Unfortunately, it is not possible to train a good working gundog without applying some sort of pressure or corrections. That’s just a fact of life. However, newer methods of training employ more positive methods, and these have been incorporated by many trainers and into many training programs.

The training of South African versatile hunting dogs tends to use a combination of predominantly positive methods, balanced with the pressure necessary to help the dog to understand what the desired outcomes are - in the most effective and kind way.

The main types of training today employ a combination of operant conditioning techniques. The training that is presented here and in the versatile clubs use one or all of the techniques, below:

1. “Classical” training with both positive reinforcement (praise, treats, or play) and negative reinforcement (for instance, lead pressure to get the dog to yield and go into the correct position to relieve a minor amount of discomfort). The positive far outweighs any negative reinforcement! One can estimate at least 90% positive or more, especially when starting with puppies.
2. In Clicker or Marker training a cue (a click or specific word) is issued precisely when the dog’s action is correct, and the dog understands that his reward is forthcoming. Rewards may be treats, toys or play. Marker training thus relies on the dog making the correct choice on his own to obtain the reward. Thus, it is positive reinforcement only, unless combined with other methods.
3. Luring may also be employed, and food or toys are used to guide the dog into the correct positions. The action is then given a name and repetition builds understanding. It does take a lot of repetition on its own, so it is usually combined with marker and/or classical training methods.

Not everyone wants to use food rewards, alternatively many people do. It is up to you to decide, provided whatever training technique(s) you are using are effective! You’ll learn more about these techniques as you watch the various videos suggested and will gain even greater understanding if you attend training classes with one of the clubs or professional trainers. Whatever you eventually decide, try to stick with it – keep to the methods, or program you have chosen.

HOUSE RULES

Your new puppy is not only going to be a versatile hunting dog, but he is also going to be a valued member of your household. Therefore, you need to decide on various house rules so that your hunting companion is also a wonderful companion in and around the house. Having said that, we are all different. What is acceptable to me, might not be to you, and vice versa. Nonetheless, here are some suggestions:

- Pup should know his name and respond to it
- Pup should know basic commands and obey them (sit/stay, down/stay, recall, No, etc)
- No biting or chewing on you or other people
- No jumping on you or other people
- Playtime is outside unless you decide otherwise
- Crate training – pup should be able to stay in crate and be relaxed and quiet. This is extremely important and also ensures pup will travel in the crate in the vehicle and settle in other circumstances or lodging. See these instructions for how to on this website: <https://www.prairie-flusstal.com/training-articles-by-prairie-flusstal>: “Crate Training Your New Puppy”.
- Pup should wait to go in and out of doors
- Pup should stay off of certain or all furniture
- No counter surfing, begging or stealing food

Again, it is up to you to decide what suits you. But set some house rules and stick by them.

BASIC COMMANDS:

Try to develop a "command" tone of voice so that your commands are authoritative and cannot be misunderstood by the puppy - without intimidating him. When your puppy is learning the command, it is fine to repeat it a few times to get the message through. However, once the command is understood and learnt, do not repeat yourself. Give the command once and then see that the puppy obeys - even if you have to physically make the puppy do what is required.

Your pup does not know at first what any command means. It is up to you to show him what it means, or to put him in a position so that the correct response is automatic. To teach the Sit command, for instance, you give the command and then gently push the pup's hindquarters down so that he does sit. Alternatively, use treats or marker training to get the desired response. After a number of repetitions of this, he will associate the command with the action and is therefore learning what "sit" means. Many more repetitions will be required before you get an automatic response in a variety of situations, but that is what training is about – repetition, reward/praise for the right response, or correction to achieve the right response if it is not achieved at first.

Give praise for the correct response each time that the pup obeys on his own (without your intervention). While learning, reassurance and mild praise is fine so that the pup remains confident and understands he is on the right path. Once the general response is understood, however, praise should be given more when the pup responds on his own. Then, it should be given lavishly and there should be no doubt in your pup's mind that he has really pleased you. Take care, however, when praising that you do not cause the pup to become so excited that he "disobeys", ie., if he is sitting and you praise and allow him to start jumping up then he is no longer sitting and has broken your command. Keep the pup doing what you want him to while praising so that you do not inadvertently cause him to break the command – in this situation, for instance, hold the pup in the sit position while you praise him, and then give a release command.

Let's say that in a training session your pup finally SITS on his own on command with no intervention from you. Great, praise! Continue working on the command until you get him to do it 3 times in a row and then quit! Praise for these correct responses. That's the 3-time rule, and with a pup it is important not to overdo things or to train too long. Pup has done this lesson well, so quit before he becomes bored and give him something fun to do to take the pressure off and keep him happy.

Once fully learnt and understood, commands should not be repeated. Give one clear command, and if the pup does not respond, make the pup respond (push hindquarters down to sit, for instance) and give the command at the same time. If you begin to repeat commands without requiring an immediate response, pup will begin to take advantage of it and simply ignore you, since you obviously don't mean what you say! Eventually he will not bother to obey at all if he doesn't feel like it. That is training on his terms, not yours, and you will end up with a disobedient pup that you are constantly nagging.

The commands **COME/HERE**, **SIT/STAY** are easily taught during feeding, particularly since you will have the puppy's full attention during mealtime! **SIT** and **STAY** are effectively one command, that is, once you have commanded your pup to **SIT**, he should not move until you release him with your release command (**OK**). However, many people use the **STAY** command as well, but it is up to you. Your puppy will be especially eager to please if he knows it results in something very pleasant for him - food. These commands can be taught in a variety of ways and circumstances, you can refer to the training manuals and videos for instruction on how to teach them. If you call your puppy to you for every meal and reinforce this by calling him during the day and giving him treats or praise, the puppy will associate **COME** with pleasant things and will be conditioned to respond to **COME**. As a separate exercise, the **SIT** can be taught with treats, and once pup knows both **COME** and **SIT**, you can combine them at mealtimes to really reinforce the response to these commands. In a short time, you will be able to call your pup, sit him, make him wait until you put the bowl down, and then eventually release him to go and eat. He is leaning mild control in a low-level stress situation, which you will extend to other areas and the field later on.

As you give the puppy the verbal commands **COME** and **SIT** you can also begin to condition him to the hand signals for these commands, and later the whistle signal. Tapping the side of your left thigh with your left hand

will bring the pup in to a good position or you can simply clap your hands together enthusiastically. Use the verbal **COME** command and tap your thigh with your left hand or clap your hands together. The pup should come racing toward you, but if he doesn't then kneel down and encourage him until he understands what you want. After a few days of this, get the pup's attention and signal him to you and then use the verbal **COME**. He will soon respond to the hand signal alone. When necessary, back away to have the pup come all the way in enthusiastically. Please remember that your hand signals – indeed your whole body language – must be absolutely consistent for the pup to be consistent with what you are teaching him!

You will also begin to teach the **DOWN/HALT** or **PLATZ** command. In this position, the dog is laying down, with his body pressed flat to the ground. The head may also be pressed flat to the ground (Down/Halt). There is not space here for a full description of this training and its permutations. Suffice to say that it should be thoroughly taught if you want to get the most out of your pup and have good control and obedience in the field. You will follow the same advice as with the Sit – do it often around the house, make pup Down when feeding, etc. I do recommend teaching this when the dog is still quite young! My experience (admittedly a bit limited with the Down) is that it is much more difficult to get the older dog to understand and comply, especially if they already have the pattern of “sitting” for everything well-ingrained.

In the German and Versatile Hunting training the hand signal for the **DOWN** command at distance may also be the police-style hand up to stop, with the palm facing forward. However, this is also the hand signal for the **SIT** command as is often used in the HPR/Retriever/Spaniel training. Either command requires that the dog go immediately into the action (Sit or Down) at distance (for brevity, I'm going to refer to this as the “Drop”). You will need to decide which one you are going to give preference to for the hand signal and especially for the whistle command! The whistle command for either is traditionally a single long blast. *NOTE: If you begin by training your puppy inside, and the room has tiles or a hard floor, be sure to put a piece of carpet down or something comfortable for the puppy to go into a down position on.*

The Down/Halt is a strong command, and it is important enough that a totally different whistle is used only for it. You can use a dual tone whistle or two different whistles to achieve this. Whichever you decide to use, the whistle command for the **DOWN** is usually done with a pea (triller) whistle. The other whistle is used for the other commands (Come, turns in field, release).

Once your pup understands the command you intend to use for the “drop” at distance, give your pup the verbal command and at the same time raise your hand up. Do this for a few days, and then give the hand signal first, followed by the verbal command. Soon, he should begin to anticipate what you want and begin to respond to the hand signal alone.

Once verbal and hand signals are understood, you can introduce the whistle commands. For the come-in, multiple short peeps on the whistle is traditional (peep-peep-peep, peep-peep-peep, peep-peep-peep). For the **Drop** a single long blast is used (brreeeeeeeeep). Do not overdo the volume, keep your commands quiet and your dog will learn to respond to quiet handling - their hearing is at least as good as ours so if you can hear it, he can. Again, when first using the new whistle commands, use them with the known hand signals. Then, use the whistle command followed by the hand signal until the pup responds to the whistle alone.

Once **COME, SIT and DOWN** are thoroughly learnt and the commands are obeyed swiftly, the **duration** (or sitting-staying/down-staying) for a longer period of time can be introduced, but only for brief periods at first. Most pups are too active to stay put for long, and it is only asking for trouble to try to make them stay too long – they are bound to go wrong, and success is more important than extremely long sit/down/stays from a puppy.

A very common mistake made when teaching the pup to remain in place is to command the dog to Sit or Down and then once the pup obeys, to call him and praise him. Don't call him back to you - go back to praise the pup for staying and then release him - otherwise the pup will not stay but will keep coming back to you for praise. Once he has learnt what is required you can begin calling him to you from the sit position, but always mix it up a bit, sometimes calling him and sometimes going back to him to praise him.

The "**RELEASE**" command is a command that says to the pup, "OK, you are free to go play and relax" or free to get up from the Sit or Down, free to eat, etc. It may seem strange that such a command is necessary, but it is as important as any of the others. Your puppy will need to know when he can forget about his lessons and can go play. He needs to know when he can get up from the SIT or Down, which is only going to be on your command. Later on, he will need to know when he can start or resume hunting, and your release command will play a part in this. I use **OK** "go play" as a release, others use "release", and you can use what you want as long as it doesn't sound like another command. Use it during your informal training during the day after the **COME** or **SIT/DOWN**, or when your formal lesson is over, or when you take him off the lead and give him his freedom, or at mealtimes when you give him the **OK** to go and eat his food. The pup will pick up the meaning very quickly just through association, and you do not have to teach it formally.

It is good practice to also use a physical touch to release the dog from the DOWN position. This may be achieved by tapping the dog on the side and giving the verbal release command. It is not advisable to release the dog from the DOWN position from a distance or to ever call the dog to you from the DOWN position. Always try to go back to the dog to release him from the DOWN.

There are two excellent YouTube series that are very applicable to all versatile hunting dog breeds and fit in well with how we train our Versatile dogs in South Africa. They are a bit different in approach to one another, and one may suit you better than the other. This is fine, it's normal for trainers to have differences and different approaches. Nonetheless, have a look at each and find what suits you and your dog. Between them, you will gain a much better understanding of the versatile training process. **Participating in training classes with a club or a trainer will be of great benefit in helping you understand and apply various training methods here in South Africa, and to apply those that suit you. This is invaluable for you and your dog!** *(The "Welpenfernkurs" videos are in German, however you will learn quite a lot by watching the videos and will be able to understand what to do even if you don't understand all of what the trainer says.)*

**1. Cortney Schaefer - Advice for Training a Young Drahthaar Puppy YouTube Video Series
Playlist – 14 videos**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiQscgF-s4qhZg85L3CULBGi9IzjZ62EV>

The above video playlist is accompanied by Training Notes in pdf format – "**Age-Appropriate Training Advice for Raising a Deutch Drahthaar Puppy**":

https://cdn.website-editor.net/s/fd9f17e5ecbe4898963f7945d54f44f3/files/uploaded/Age Appropriate Advice for Raising a DD Pup-Video_Series_Outline.pdf?Expires=1739423780&Signature=IMrfs-jbJv9ivIQPKrN8AdgvyQYPXpYYzPND3m5wqfH9BovauiktqbPFILiGRZ9x7jABUo4I-qs2EKY0JXCQXoIqNBSDwEj-1bhHb-ce2HAyCnDN6rrr5dGBgNTnontW4yXiVnqL2cYk2wgDa8iOao7loUg8W4VK1Dvi3hRxoedzK5HiywHynP8llc8OOquxHYky0ZTUDawheyTPmjaqFr-vH0w3kk3tAPDRvW4EluL0rmq6mksmS1f3-Y8jNwd6LNplwjXeYMqbdTTXitM30oO4O-6qIVC4qEqX-b5okMxdCUTLZwGSKpZnkZP156Y10i0c7U7CTIIZEPWCSYSw_&Key-Pair-Id=K2NXBXLf010TJW

2. Hundeschule Kompetenzzentrum "Welpenfernkurs" Lektion 1 - Futter nutzen für Gehorsam | Hundeschule U.B. - First of 17 videos to watch -

(Puppy online course – Lesson 1 - Using food for obedience)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dHTO5dwkis>

GENERALIZATION:

Dogs are very place conscious, meaning that they need to learn actions or commands in a variety of places before they are proficient in them. They do not automatically transfer the training you do in the house, garden or even local park, to other areas. Therefore, once your pup has learned a lesson in the house, he will need to learn the same lesson in the garden, and then the same lesson in the park, etc.

This is an important concept which should not be overlooked. How many times do you see someone in a training lesson say: "but he always does it at home!". Well, this is why. Therefore, teach your pup his commands in a variety of environments, understanding that you may need to back up a little each time to help him understand that you require the same response even in a different location or environment.

Distractions also play a role here. Increase the distraction level and watch all of your training seemingly disappear! So, distractions also need to be introduced in your training and in a gradual way. Training in a group presents very strong distractions for your pup and is also good for socializing.

THE PLACEBOARD OR SHAPING BOX:

Although the placeboard has been used for years in other applications, it has only fairly recently been incorporated into the “gundog” pointing world. It is an extremely useful piece of equipment that can aid the handler and the dog because it makes it easier for both to understand what is required. Dogs especially benefit from the specific place – they do not have to think about where they should be and when because the placeboard or shaping box gives them an easy target that they enjoy being on. For some other applications, the shaping box helps even further because it is a smaller target on which they must perform various actions – thus developing good body positions with minimal input from you.

Either of these items can be a really useful tool to begin training your puppy! But like any tool, you use it as required and don't depend on it forever! There are many uses and ways to train – the videos below are just a start to help you understand a little about them.

1. **Cornerstone Gundog Academy - The Importance of Introducing a Place Board**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pauF9WYUnyY>
2. **Pettycord Gundogs - Gundog Training - "Training With Ted" - The Place-board – YouTube**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPWsEsZ-vBI>
3. **Hundeschule Kompetenzzentrum - "Welpenfernkurs" Lektion 11 - Placeboard | Hundeschule U.B.**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cwIzfVRGfg>
3. **German Wirehaired Pointer Training and Obedience – (note: prepare to have your mind blown!!)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwuDu1hkMpw>

PLAY RETRIEVING/RETRIEVING:

FETCH or whatever command you will use for retrieving can be taught through association during play retrieving. The general idea is not so much to teach the pup **FETCH**, which he is likely to do and enjoy anyway, but to encourage the pup to return to you each and every time you throw something for him. When the pup is secure with you (knows his name, looks to you as a fun pack leader and will come to you when called), you can start to work on his retrieving by tossing a small dummy for him a few times every other day or so. **Do not do this too often or too many times a day – two or three at the very most, a few days a week.** Puppies are easily bored, and they can be sickened of retrieving by the eager owner who constantly throws objects or dummies for them.

Your puppy will need a couple of dummies for the retrieving lessons. These dummies are never for playing – only for “training”, and your pup will only see them when you are doing the retrieving lessons. Do not throw toys or other objects for your pup, and if you have children, they must also understand that they are not to throw any objects for the pup. If you do not follow these guidelines, one of two things will happen: either the pup will get tired of retrieving and won't bother to retrieve his dummies for you at all, or he will develop the habit of playing, dropping or not returning to you with the dummy during your lessons.

Before you begin your retrieving lessons, pup should be comfortable with you and his environment. He should be coming to you when called or be put in a situation that he must come by you or close to you with the dummy to get to wherever he wants to go with it. The dummies you use should be an appropriate size for a puppy, neither too small nor too large and heavy.

When you throw the dummy give the command **FETCH** each time, he will soon come to know it and associate it with the retrieve. Sit down or get on your hands and knees and call him back to you and make a big fuss of him when he returns to you. Get him into your lap and let him hold the dummy for a while, praising him and then gently take it out of his mouth, using the command **GIVE** (some trainers use "leave" or "dead" or “out”). Throw the dummy again for him a couple of times, so he does not think you are just going to take it from him and put it away every time he brings it to you. This should be a fun game he wants to play, so keep him excited and wanting more.

Only praise the pup when he has come to you with the dummy and is holding it. Do not praise until he is all the way to you and is holding the dummy. If he drops it, stop praising. When he picks it back up, praise and pet him.

If your pup is reluctant to let go of the dummy, let him hold it for a while, then either blow lightly in his face and take the dummy, or if he is really determined, take it by putting your finger in his mouth and pressing down *gently* on his tongue - he will release the dummy without a fight and without you having to pry his mouth open.

It is very important that the pup return to you with each retrieve. In order to achieve this, it is good practice to do your play retrieving in a long hallway in which one end is open and all other doors are closed – so that the pup has to come back by you to get to the open doorway. I do this in our hallway. In our old house I used to position myself in the doorway to our bedroom, and throw the dummy down the hall, send the pup and the pup will come running back to the only open room and one that he enjoys going into. Sometimes we will both end up on the bed with the retrieve in order to give the pup lots of praise before taking the dummy. You can be creative with areas – even using his bed or “place” because he will certainly return to his familiar place. Once returning with the dummy becomes a habit you can venture out to other places.

As pup gets older, it is a good idea to keep the pup on a long lead (a checkcord or rope attached to his collar – 15 – 20 meters in length) when you first venture out to the garden or field to do your retrieving. That way you can ensure that he returns to you every time. If you find you do not need it, great, dispense with it. But if you do need it, at least you have it to prevent the pup from developing a bad habit of not returning. Working with the checkcord takes some practice, so keep at it and learn to reel it in and keep it from getting tangled in bushes. The checkcord should be used like the lead – do not apply constant pressure but use it to bring the pup to you in short, gentle tugs and releases: Use a couple of light pulls to bring him toward you and then release as he is coming on his own - if he stops or veers away short tugs and release as he is coming toward you. In this way he learns to do it “on his own” because if he is responding correctly the discomfort (pull on his neck) stops, or if he is not the discomfort continues.

Do not try to make pup SIT to deliver at first. A sitting delivery of the dummy can be trained once the pup is returning happily and consistently. The most important thing to do now is to make it pleasant for the pup to return to you as quickly as possible. Making a young pup sit on return, especially with a retrieve, can inhibit a fast return, and in some cases, becomes a correction for the pup because it may not be very pleasant. Put yourself in your pup’s place: here you are running full tilt back to your owner with a dummy, and he shouts “SIT”. Pup may sit and wonder why he got stopped from racing to you. The pup may not sit, in which case you will have to correct him – and therefore have effectively ruined your chance to praise for the recall. Pup may also drop the dummy and he probably won’t pick it up again – so you’ve ruined your chance to praise for returning all the way back with the dummy.

See this video for the first steps to encourage and build puppy retrieving:

Bhulisa Versatile Videos – Developing Puppy Retrieving
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DF-UPZ1q8wA>

Some trainers don’t mind if the dog drops the dummy or retrieve item on return. This may be because they use food or they make the pup sit, and this works for them because they **correct** this behaviour later with Force Training the retrieve. Personally, I find it better to develop a good habit to begin with, rather than have to extinguish or break a habit later. There will be plenty of opportunity to teach your pup to SIT on return to you in the next few days or weeks. You can practice sitting in front of you it with the lead on by backing away and making the dog SIT as you bring him to you. This is a low stress method to start building the action. You will also train this thoroughly when you start **HOLD** training with your pup later, at which time you will also refine his delivery position.

There are many do's and don'ts while teaching and encouraging retrieving. However, the golden rules are: **never** punish the pup for bringing something to you, **never** throw something (or let your children throw things) you do not intend to have the puppy bring back to you, **don't** get into a tug of war with the pup (unless you are using it as a training exercise) or chase him when he has something in his mouth, and **never** snatch something from the puppy's mouth. Almost **always** praise the pup for bringing something to you.

For pointing breeds, it is not advisable to use lots of game or birds until they have started pointing. It's fine and advisable to allow them to retrieve some game occasionally, but don't overdo it in the first few months until they have shown pointing ability. First of all, if you use a lot of game the pup will probably become less interested in dummies – and you will need to continue using dummies. You don't want the pup to decide not to retrieve them because they now only want game. Secondly, if your pup has a poor pointing instinct it is best to develop that, before giving them a lot of game in which they are encouraged to move into scent and grab the game. Use your judgement here.

Do not indulge yourself in lots of throwing, chasing, fetching games! This will only teach your pup the ingrained behaviour of CHASING, which can be very difficult to stop, and will be a serious handicap for later training. In most instances, your pup will be a keen retriever and you do not really need to make him even keener by overdoing the retrieving and chasing. With the really keen retriever, you don't usually need to do much to excite him about the retrieve – normally what you really need to work on is encouraging a good return. With the less enthusiastic retriever, you should allow some chasing in order to get him excited about the retrieve. It's easy to tell the difference between these two types of pups – the really keen retriever will be difficult to hold back, while the less keen one will not exhibit a lot of desire to run and pick up the object or will only want to retrieve once before getting bored (sometimes not at all).

Once the pup is retrieving enthusiastically and returning to you, you can begin the rudiments of steadying (teaching him to wait for your command to retrieve) by kneeling down and physically holding him back with your left hand just for a second or two before you give the **FETCH** command. This should not dampen his spirits and if it does you may want to lay off trying to steady the pup at this point. If you find that the pup is losing his confidence and enjoyment in retrieving, then do not try to steady the pup yet. Wait until he is older and ready for a little more pressure.

Some pups are ready for initial steadying at 3-4 months – others only at 6 months or even later. It depends very much on their inherent desire to retrieve and their mental maturity. Some pups are so sensitive that you cannot put much pressure on them until they are older. Others just don't have as much drive, and you have to allow them to develop their drive before trying to steady them up.

However, if you have a pup that is confident and happy with the situation and exhibits good retrieving desire, and is returning to you with the dummy, then you can begin the steadying. Once the pup has gotten the idea to wait, then you can take your hand away, make him wait and then send him on command. Occasionally, you can still toss the dummy for him without holding him, just to liven him up and make things fun, but give your fetch command first to send pup quickly. As he becomes more reliable at waiting for your command, you can begin to make him wait while you pick up the dummy occasionally. This will teach him that the retrieve is a privilege that you allow him, and that every dummy is not his – which is the basis for steadiness.

As a separate exercise to build happiness and bonding with your pup, you can play with the pup anytime you are training. Play can be with a dummy, a ball on a string, or just chasing you. There are various ways to do this – and – if you are using a dummy, it can be a good way to begin to encourage and shape a good Hold of the dummy. I demonstrate this with a mature dog using a dummy, but it works with puppies, too!

Bhulisa Versatile Videos – The “Play Retrieve”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5I4TfiAJIU&t=278s>

At this stage you may want to start some gentle **HOLD** conditioning. Ueli Bartschi demonstrates this with a few videos that you can watch and learn from. Before starting this sort of training, your pup must be under control and be able to Sit well and be easily restrained. You can start in your house (no distractions) and even use an elevated placeboard to make it easier on yourself. Since this is in German, you may want to get help from a trainer here to get you started! However, just watching the videos will give you a very good idea what to expect. Note how he gently restrains and handles the pup – or puts pup on a placeboard – for control.

1. Hundeschule Kompetenzzentrum - Basic Structure for the Hunting Retrieve Part I “Made Easy” | Hundeschule U.B

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LS4nBvhks4o>

2. Hundeschule Kompetenzzentrum - Basic Structure for the Hunting Retrieve Part 2 “Holding a Neutral Object Firmly | Hundeschule U.B

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm8_pkNPFUs

HEELING:

You will need to introduce your puppy to a lead and to teach him to "**HEEL**" with a lead on. Generally, Pointing breeds or Spaniels are not required to heel strictly off lead until they have developed their hunting to a fair degree. It can be very confusing to them to be taught that they have to heel and be close to the handler, and then all of a sudden be told to go off and hunt! If the early heeling is overdone it can be quite difficult to get them out from under your feet later on. This is particularly true of dogs with lower hunting drive. Therefore, get them used to a lead and teach them to heel reasonably well with it on a loose lead, but leave it at that for now.

1. Bhulisa Versatile Videos - Puppy Chronicles - Cocoa and Red II – YouTube – puppy heeling and basics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H02hWdF8CoQ>

2. Hundeschule Kompetenzzentrum - 5 tips on how to get your dog to walk on a leash quickly | Dog school U.B.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feIfOzfseWc>

EARLY EXPERIENCES:

Your puppy will benefit greatly if you **expose him to a variety of situations** that he will encounter throughout his life, either while hunting or just during his daily routine. Therefore, when he is old enough (when his vaccinations are complete, about 3 months) you can begin to take him out into the big, wide world. Take him to friends' houses, to town, to parks, to shopping centers - anywhere to get him used to things and to get him used to the car. Some areas have puppy socialisation classes or ringcraft classes that are very good for getting him used to other dogs. If you can find them, gundog puppy training classes, either in a formal or informal group, are also good and will get him used to field conditions as well.

During your early training you should try to go to as many different areas as you can, partly to get the puppy used to the fact that he will not only train in one area and partly to get him used to different terrain and cover. Carry out his training sessions in different areas and get him to retrieve in a variety of conditions. The best time to do your retrieving lessons is at the start of a training session - you are far more likely to have success if your puppy is fresh, physically and mentally. For now, your retrieving lessons will be done separately from your hunting lessons. Your pup is likely to ignore a retrieve if he has been hunting and is excited about game, so don't cause a problem by expecting too much at this time and by mixing retrieving with hunting.

Introduction to water is important but will depend mainly on the time of year. Water introduction should be a pleasant and fun experience! If it is a warm time of year and day, your puppy will probably go into the water very easily, but if it is cold you will probably have to wait awhile. Sometimes the older puppy is more difficult to entice into the water so be patient. Wait until the weather and water is warm and **never** throw your puppy in the water and do not force him in if he is reluctant.

The best way to get the pup in is to go in yourself to give him an example or to let him play with other dogs in the water. If you or other dogs romp in the shallows with him and make it really fun, you shouldn't have any problems getting him in deeper and gradually swimming for short periods. If all fails and you cannot entice pup to swim or go into the water after a dummy, then try using a wing on a string. If it is warm weather and you continue to experience problems getting the pup in the water, you should ask an experienced trainer for help.

1. Lone Duck Outfitters - Water Introduction - Gun Dog Retriever Training - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2ibLfbG1E&t=93s>

2. Hundeschule Kompetenzzentrum - Introduction to Water with Wing on String - "Welpenfernkurs" Lektion 19 | Hundeschule U.B.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-s4raMVqEk>

HUNTING and SEARCHING:

You will give your puppy a chance to develop his **HUNTING** desire during some of these outings. By hunting desire, I mean the understanding by your pup that he is being sent out to search for scent, to range away from you to do so and the desire to do it enthusiastically. Your pup is effectively a nose on legs, but he needs to learn that he can use his nose and legs together to find scent and ultimately, birds. You need to find an area that is free of distractions (other dogs, lots of birds, other game) to begin with, but that has cover, some interesting smells and is large in area. You do not want a lot of distractions because you want your pup to concentrate on what he is doing and to also concentrate on you – not necessarily stay with you underfoot, but to understand that you are doing this together and that you, the boss, are the ticket to a good time. Stay away from areas that have a lot of birds that your dog can see and chase (the beach is a disaster at this time – if you do go there, keep your dog on a leash! Areas with lots of guinea fowl that can be seen are also very bad for a young dog).

When in the field on your normal free running walks with pup, give your puppy his release or hunting command and allow him to run about and explore, to find game and to experience the conditions he will be expected to work in. Don't over control your pup with a lot of commands, but on the other hand don't let him run absolutely wild ignoring you completely. Occasionally, whistle to get his attention and walk in another direction or call him in to you, but don't overdo it or you may distract him to the point of confusion about whether he should hunt or be with you.

These “hunting” sessions should be kept separate from your “obedience” lessons for a while – for now leave your puppy to concentrate mainly on hunting and give very few commands at first. You can start your session with a short obedience lesson, but when you send your dog to hunt, allow him the freedom to use his nose and explore. When you first start, do not over tire your pup. Keep the hunting sessions short at first, increasing the time out gradually. Remember, he is still young.

Encourage pup to hunt ahead of you or to the side of you as he wants at the moment. However, don't go to him or follow his lead – you want him to follow your general direction, not the other way around! As far as possible, try to keep your general direction into the wind or on a crosswind for most of the session. You need to change direction often and call his name or use the whistle when you do, move in a direction that you choose and stick to your direction. Keep on walking and do not stand around waiting for him. If pup does not follow, stand your ground and make him find you. If pup is still not with you after 10 minutes after your last direction switch and you cannot see him, then go back and look for him, but where possible (most of the time) you need to let pup find you and catch up with you - then praise him and make a fuss of him when he does catch up with you. Be very careful of pup training you to follow him, or having you stand around waiting for him (keep moving in your chosen direction, not your pup's) as the pup will learn that he is controlling things, not you, and he will take advantage of this and not learn his job, which is to **hunt for and with you** (not only for himself!).

Let pup hunt often in the field and encourage him to hunt enthusiastically, ranging and exploring and developing confidence. When pup is a bit stronger and bolder you may come across game birds or ground game (rabbit or buck) and your pup will probably chase upon the flush. At this stage, and unless you are really close to your pup, you are very unlikely to be able to stop him. So if this happens, simply ignore pup's chasing and change direction immediately when he begins his chase. Walk in the opposite direction to the direction he has taken on his chase and keep on walking - don't stand around waiting for him and **do not give any commands** (he will ignore these and learn he can disobey you). Do not scold him but call him once or twice as you move away from him and if he does not follow, make him find you and do not go back to find him (unless you think it's an emergency). Let him panic a little bit while he struggles to find you after chasing. When he does find you then praise him and make a fuss of him for finding you. **Do not punish him**, since he will only think he's being punished for coming back to you! Praise your dog when he reappears, no matter how irritated you may be! Give your pup water if he's thirsty and wait a minute or two for him to settle and then continue on in a direction away from where he was chasing.

If your pup finds game and points it, great! Praise him if you can while he is pointing and ignore it if he chases or rushes in and respond as in the previous paragraph when he chased. Do not try to use any command to keep him on point – he does not know such a command and you will only confuse or distract him.

Reassure him while he is on point – shut up if he moves or chases! If pup starts pointing barren scent, do not praise as he may think this is a good thing and start false pointing. If pup points or shows a lot of interest in rats and/or moles, just ignore him and keep walking.

If you find while hunting that pup is not keeping track of you – **HIDE**. This is a very good way to get your dog's attention on you and to teach him that he is responsible for keeping track of you. If you turn and call pup, carry on and don't repeat the command. If he does not follow and catch up eventually or in good time, find a bush and hide or if necessary, lie down, but make the pup hunt for you. (Keep an eye on him just to make sure he doesn't panic and run off at first, though). You need only do this a few times every few weeks (when you see him slacking off) for him to get the idea at this stage.

Change your direction often as you walk, occasionally calling him each time you change direction and using your turn signal. When you can see pup beginning to tire, you can use the opportunity to reinforce your "Come" commands, calling him to you a few times and rewarding him with a pat or water or tidbit.

Don't call your pup and put the lead on and go home every time you are in the field. Pup will begin to associate the recall command with getting put up and no more fun. To prevent this, recall pup occasionally during the session, pet him, praise him, give him water, slip the lead on and off, and then let him continue hunting. If you do this, pup won't think every time you call him you are going to put him up!

Try to find a variety of places to work your puppy. Different environments, terrain, vegetation, etc all of these contribute to developing a well-rounded, confident puppy that is happy to tackle all the different areas that he will encounter as a hunting dog.

POINTING

Often, the breeder of your pup will have played with a "wing on a string" to assess and see what your pup's pointing instinct is like. This is a fun game and can be a good exercise if done correctly and not overdone! Unfortunately, many owners keep on doing this and ultimately it can be counterproductive. It is not a scent point, but sight only. Nonetheless, there is a place for it, and it can be used to help "kickstart" the pointing instinct.

1. **Hundeschule Kompetenzzentrum - Pointing fur dummy on a pole and string - "Welpenfernkurs" Lektion 3 - Vorstehen | Hundeschule U.B**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8II1CyYI4gQ>

Once a bit of sight pointing has been done, it is best to move on to remote pigeon launchers, or some other means of pigeon planting that can be used to simulate a "wild" bird. The process of using launchers is detailed below in a **Guide at the end of this document** and in the video links below:

2. **Bhulisa Versatile Videos - Mara's First Time with Remote Pigeon Launchers!**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UIdWq2TRmU>

3. **Bhulisa Versatile Videos – Storm Pointing Pigeons in Remote Release Launchers!**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a78OvIGz06g>

4. **Mark Payton Gundogs - How To Train Your Bird Dog. A No-Stress Method To Bring Out The Dog's Natural Pointing Instinct.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2htfvi5csf4>

5. **Mark Payton Gundogs - Bird Work In Small Fields Or In A Neighborhood? (note: it's amazing what can be accomplished even in a small space!)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R229H32GEGU>

Remember to always use a checkcord when you are first working birds in launchers! This is extremely important to avoid any negative association (dog gets hit by the launcher) or is too close to the birds at first and gets a fright or, catches one setting you back in training. It also enables you to get the dog into the optimal position to scent the birds and point! It will enable you to control the entire process and get the best result possible.

As with all training, you need to do these pointing exercises in a few different areas so that the lessons are thoroughly understood and learnt.

INTRODUCTION TO SHOT should be carried out with the utmost caution. There are many opinions and methods about introducing your puppy to shot, but they all agree to tread carefully. **NEVER just fire a gun** to see if your puppy is gunshy! To do so is a sure way to create gun sensitivity or ruin the dog forever.

Follow any one of the manuals or books on introducing shot - they all work - but remember to do it gradually. It is easy to rush on thinking there isn't a problem, only to find out later that by not going through all the steps you have created a gun sensitive dog. This is curable, but with great difficulty and it is far easier to ensure it never happens in the first place.

At home or in your training areas, you can lay a little foundation by clapping your hands together loudly and letting pup retrieve. The use two (2) pieces of wood. Clap them together while your pup is running around and then throw one of his dummies. If he enjoys retrieving, he should begin to look forward to the “shot”. Once he shows that he is keen on this, you can clap them together when he is on the way to retrieve. Do this exercise occasionally until you are confident you have created a happy and excited response to the “shot”.

Other things you can do are to drop food bowls, bang doors, etc – really anything that makes a loud noise so that pup is accustomed to it and not concerned. You can also bring out your shotgun when you feed pup, and open and close it so that just the sight of it means food and is pleasant. This is not essential but is just one additional step to make things proceed smoothly later.

One method to introduce shot, and the one I use, is to work with another handler and an experienced dog: With your puppy at a distance (70 - 100 meters to start), let him watch other dogs retrieving with shot (he must be able to see the dummies!), then if he is keen and not at all worried, then let him retrieve too, with you throwing a dummy for him at each shot. Gradually move him closer to the gun and to the sound of the shot over a few days' time, until you and he are fairly close (about 20 meters) to the shot. He can then retrieve dummies thrown by the person holding and firing the gun; with you holding him at a distance and retrieving the dummy back to you. Gradually work your way closer to the gun, but not directly next to or under it. You still want to be careful. If this is done correctly, he should be looking forward to the shot, and the gun, rather than being subdued or afraid of it.

If at any time there is a negative reaction (slow to retrieve, returns to you, doesn't want to retrieve) stop immediately and get the help of an experienced trainer!

DRAGS

Many trainers lay food trails for their puppies and start drags very early on. I don't, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't! But when I do decide to start drags, I do it in a very systematic way that ensures the pup develops the understanding to follow the drag trail.

Often, you'll see people lay a drag, go get the dog and just put him on it with a retrieve command. Since it is short to begin with, the dog usually just hunts around and finds the item, not learning to use the drag trail. Maybe the dog will figure it out as you lay longer drags, but you don't want to get into a testing situation and find out that in fact, pup didn't really understand all that well! So do make the effort to start drags in such a manner that the dog succeeds and learns the right way.

How you bring the dog to the drag, how you send him, your body language, cues and even your equipment can make all the difference to the dog. So, be very consistent and use a specific routine every time you do drags with your dog.

Refer to the Drag Training notes attached at the end of this document.

Here are also links to video instructions for Drags:

1. **Bhulisa Versatile Videos - Beginner's Guide to Training for Drags – Part 1**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imv8oW9W9hw>
2. **Bhulisa Versatile Videos - Beginner's Guide to Training for Drags – Part 2 – Handling Tips**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p4pWnuRU_A

CONCLUSION:

If you have managed to successfully teach your puppy the given commands, especially the **SIT, DOWN, RECALL and COME** commands, developed his **retrieving** instincts and **delivery**, and **introduced him to the world, the field conditions, to hunting, to birds, game, to water and to shot**, then you will have done an admirable job and should have a young dog with the solid foundations for future successful training. You will have accomplished far more than it will seem like and will be pleasantly surprised at how easy much of the formal training to come will be. Even if you haven't managed all of it, you will have done the most important part, which is bonding with your puppy and developing his desire to please you - without which you and your puppy will never be able to progress.

Once you have reached this point in your training and the pup has reached 5 – 7 months of age, it is time to stop and decide what to do next. Do you continue on and start with more advanced training or not?

What you decide to do will probably depend on the nature of your puppy. With a really confident and bold pup that is inclined to want to do his own thing, it is a good idea to continue. With less confident individuals it may be better to proceed slower, letting them mature for a few months until they are ready for “serious” field training.

This can be a good time to begin your formal **HOLD** retrieve training, requiring precision work. If you have already started some gentle hold training, this will be an extension of that. Hold training helps to condition the pup to accept pressure – which is important for further training (*Please note that I do not recommend Force Training the retrieve to the novice handler. Most dogs do not need it, and most new handlers are more likely to mess it up than to have success with it. If in doubt, consult your local club or a trainer for Hold conditioning*). Once the Hold training is completed, retrieving exercises are a good way to continue working with the pup. Working on steadiness, more difficult retrieves, water, memory retrieves, drags and beginning blinds will give an opportunity to build the retrieve and give your pup exercise. This also instils greater steadiness and control.

Field work might be discontinued for a while if you have a pup that is a strong chaser and is not yet pointing. With such a pup you might need to concentrate more on instilling strong obedience. However, if your pup is starting to point and doesn't chase for long distances, by all means continue your field walks. Balance it with retrieving exercises.

By 8 months of age, most Versatile breeds are able to handle some pressure and benefit more by earlier training than later training. However, some are not, and if you have a pup that is extremely sensitive, or low drive, and you have decided to wait to do the more advanced hunting, pointing and control work, you should still continue with your obedience training in and around the house, at parks and areas that do not hold a lot of game, field walks, and also continue with your basic retrieving training.

Above all, remember to have fun and enjoy your pup!

Additional Useful Videos-

VIDEO SERIES: CLICKER / MARKER TRAINING and THE PLACE COMMAND

(A good starter series if you are using marker or clicker training and teaching some life skills – go through lessons 1 – 5)

Say it Once Training –

Lesson 1 of 30 days of Training – Starting with the Clicker/Marker, proceed through the first 5 videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLMsmjJqdmg>

VIDEO: LURING with FOOD and THE PLACEBOARD

ROBERT CABRAL - Teach Your Dog SIT DOWN STAND Basic Dog Training OBEDIENCE Positions (on a Placeboard)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKJIX0uRkkU&list=RDCMUCJDSFaLJsLt2vHEKp3JM4_g&index=16

VIDEOS: HEEL WORK with older puppy or dog:

1 – DogBoneHunter - Make Your Corrections Effective | S3 Ep: #8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1ex3XzIPLg>

2 – DogBoneHunter - Heel Training a Dog: Loose Leads! | S3 Ep: #9

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2ifW8L2shk>

SAMPLE Training Schedule

Training to be done every day, for very short periods, best done several times throughout the day at first and progressing to one or two short (5 minutes to begin with, 10 minutes later on) sessions a day. It is ok to skip a day, but not two or three days "training" if at all possible. Remember, all dogs are different, so all training will be slightly different!

First Week

- Get acquainted with your puppy.
- Teach **NAME, COME, SIT, NO, OK, FETCH, GIVE, SHORT WHISTLE FOR COME**
- Let puppy settle

Day 1 : Return with pup. Introduce and acclimatise to basket or crate. Feed evening meal using name. Briefly use **NO** if required. Play with pup, caress and enjoy!

Day 2 : Repeat and reinforce as per Day 1. Call pup often during day with **NAME** and **COME**, praise, play and caress pup. Use **NO** when required.

Day 3 : At each meal begin to call by **NAME** and **COME** with brief repeated hand tapping on knee. Introduce **SIT** command with tidbits often during the day and during meals.

Day 4 : Repeat and reinforce as per Day 3. Use **SIT** command at mealtimes, but make pup wait for **OK** command to eat: holding food bowl, **sit** pup and immediately put bowl down and say **ok**. Begin to extend the **sit** at meals by sitting pup, lowering bowl and immediately picking it up when he stands to eat. Keep doing this until you can lower the bowl all the way to the floor while he is sitting and then give release command "**ok**" to eat.

You can also introduce play retrieving with sock or dummy at any time as long as pup enjoys this, and provided that bad habits do not develop such as pup running around with the dummy too much, chewing, mouthing or playing unsupervised with dummy. Use **FETCH** and **GIVE** commands, but do not require steadiness. Use a hallway to get pup to come back to you if needed.

If possible, reinforce **NAME** and **COME** by calling several times during the day with praise and tidbits.

Day 5 : At each meal, call by **NAME** and with repeated **SHORT WHISTLE** Peeps "**COME**" command. In addition to the **SIT** command,

Continue brief **SIT** training at other times during day, using hand to gently push rump down when needed.

Pup should be starting to recognise name.

If possible, reinforce verbal commands with whistle commands during day.

Continue with play retrieving, restricting retrieves to no more than 2 or 3 every other day.

Day 6 : Repeat and reinforce as per Day 5. Introduce the **DOWN** command.

Day 7 : Two extra short sessions in addition to weekday routine – (1.) Try **NAME** and **SHORT WHISTLE**, with signal to **COME**. Try **COME** and **SHORT WHISTLE**. Try **SHORT WHISTLE** alone. (2.) Try **SIT** with **LONG WHISTLE**.

Continue with play retrieving, no more than 2 or 3 retrieves.

Second Week

- Continue with variations and reinforcement of Week One training.
- Give a **LONG WHISTLE** command for the Down. (If you have not started using a whistle, but verbal commands only, skip the whistle training and just continue with the verbal and hand commands. If using a whistle, remember to use it softly).

Third Week

- Continue with variations and reinforcement of Week Two training.
- Continue with meal routine.
- Introduce lead.
- **Take pup out.**

Day 1 : Meal routine, using whistle and hand commands and **OK** to release for feeding. Clap hands together while pup is eating. Increase the volume each time.

Introduce pup to lead. Put lead on briefly with praise and tidbits and increase the time spent with lead on. Repeat and reinforce any previous lessons that require it for variation.

Day 2 : Take the pup on an outing to a strange place, like a park, to friends or simply take for a drive. Mealtime routine.

Day 3 : While pup is sitting, put lead on and remove. Begin “heeling” the pup in house, slip lead on and walk a few steps using the **HEEL** command.

For variation repeat and reinforce any previous lessons that require it.

Day 4: Repeat and reinforce as per day 3.

Continue lead introduction and heeling. Slip lead on and walk a few more steps than the previous day. Once pup is becoming aware of the lead, **SIT** while still on the lead. Gradually increase distance you “heel” the pup without any distress to the pup .

Continue your mealtime routine and do your play retrieving

Day 5 : Take the pup on a fun outing.

Do mealtime routine.

Continue lead and heeling, working up to being able to heel pup around house, occasionally sitting pup.

Play retrieving. Begin to clap hands once loudly before you throw the dummy to accustom pup that a “bang/clap” will precede a retrieve. This helps them later with introducing shot.

Day 6 : Go outside with pup on lead. Do a few combinations of **HEEL, DOWN** and **SIT**. Take lead off and use **OK** command after lead is taken off and allow the pup to roam and play unhindered.

Mealtime routine.

Day 7 : Repeat and reinforce as per Day 6.

Begin play retrieving outside. After throwing dummy into open ground, throw dummy into some light cover.

Dummy should be upwind so pup can easily smell it. Clap hands once loudly before you throw the dummy to accustom pup that a “bang/clap” will precede a retrieve.

Fourth Week

- Continue mealtime routine as Week Three
- Continue to reinforce **COME**, with whistle and hand signals
- Continue to reinforce **DOWN**, but begin to introduce whistle signal with hand signal
- Continue play retrieving outside, keeping downwind of retrieves and keeping most retrieves in open sight of the puppy. Use **2 blocks of wood** and clap them together to simulate a “shot” before and/or during the throw of the dummy.
- If your puppy is ready, you can begin to restrain puppy briefly with your hand before **FETCH** command is given. With the really keen retriever, from now on, you will make the pup wait briefly before removing your hand and sending with the **FETCH** command.

- Go on walks outside, begin with lead on and **HEEL** with a couple of **DOWNs** and **SITs**. Take short walks with pup on lead in parks.
- Take pup to the field with lead on and **HEEL** very briefly, take lead off and **SIT**, then **OK** and allow pup to explore and hunt. These **walks in field with free running are the start of your pup's hunting routine** and should be no more than 15 minutes for now. Call pup a couple of times during the run and praise, then allow to continue. At end of pups run, call pup in, give water or tidbit, put lead on and return to car or continue home.

Fifth Week

- Continue mealtime routine, alternating hand, voice and whistle signals to **COME, DOWN** and **SIT**.
- Begin a bit more formal approach to training, with 5-minute sessions of heeling, sitting, coming and retrieving either in garden or in park/open field. Give pup retrieves in light cover, but always working into the wind so pup will use his nose and have a better opportunity of finding the dummy without help. If you find pup is not returning to you well with the retrieve, you can put pup on a long lead so that he has to return, or you can “bribe” him to return with food. **If pup drops dummy because of the food, do not use food, but rather just the long lead.**
- Go on a few walks in various areas with lead on, requiring pup to heel and to occasionally sit on hand and whistle signal when stopped
- Continue your **pup's hunting routine** with visits to the field allowing pup **lots** of free running often. Always start session with lead on, sit, ok and allow pup to go hunting, always end session by calling pup in and put lead on and return to car or home.
- If it is warm, you can **introduce pup to water and swimming.**

Sixth Week

- By now puppy should know commands **COME, SIT, DOWN, HEEL, OK, FETCH, GIVE** and should respond to voice, hand or whistle signal.
- **SIT/STAY** and **DOWN/STAY** for longer periods can be introduced in training sessions, which are now no longer than 10 minutes, including the retrieving lessons. Retrieves can be made longer and a bit more demanding and in different types of light cover and short, downwind retrieves can be started.
- **Continue walks and free running/hunting with the puppy.** Can begin to give pup a couple of retrieves before run, but no more than a couple and keep them upwind and short.
- Can start to **CAREFULLY introduce shot**, preferably with a starting pistol or cap gun. **Watch pup's response carefully, and only continue if no notice is taken.** A good way to introduce shot is to work with another handler and an experienced dog: With your puppy at a distance (70 - 100 meters to start), let him watch other dogs retrieving with shot (he must be able to see the dummies!), then if he is keen and not at all worried or cowed, then let him retrieve too, with you throwing a dummy for him at each shot. Gradually move him closer to the gun and to the sound of the shot over a few days' time, until you and he are fairly close (within 20 meters) to the shot. He can then retrieve dummies thrown by the person holding and firing the gun; with you holding him at a distance and retrieving the dummy back to you. Gradually work your way closer to the gun. If this is done correctly he should be looking forward to the shot, and the gun, rather than being subdued or afraid of it. **If at any time there is a negative reaction (slow to retrieve, returns to you, doesn't want to retrieve) stop immediately and get the help of an experienced trainer!**

Seventh Week

- Require pup to **SIT/STAY** and **DOWN/STAY** longer and begin to move further away during sessions. Always return to pup and praise.
- **If you have a pup that is a keen retriever** and you have been restraining him prior to sending him for the retrieve, you are ready to **STEADY** the pup to the retrieve. Begin to gently **steady** pup to the thrown dummy, telling pup to **SIT or STAY** and physically restrain him if necessary. Make him wait for a short time before sending, until he is waiting for incrementally longer periods. Once he has gotten the idea, either yourself or a helper will start to pick up the dummy, which is only thrown a short distance. Toward end of week you should be able to pick up the dummy yourself. Work towards being able to throw the dummy about 10 meters off to your right (so you can stop pup if necessary since he is on your left side) and pick the dummy up yourself, return to him and **praise a lot**. Pick up at least 1 out of every 3 or 4 dummies that you throw yourself (remember, this is to be done only if your pup is mature enough to take it and remains happy and confident through the steadying stage). From now on, this pup will always wait for the command to retrieve and will not be allowed to run in, chase or break to the thrown dummy!!
- **If you have a pup that is not such a keen retriever**, or that is very slow to mature or sensitive, you should wait to steady this pup and allow him the freedom to continue to run in and pick up his dummies with little or no restraint at all.
- Continue trips to the field and allow pup **free hunting** to develop his hunting drive and his contact in the field with you.
- If possible, introduce **POINTING** exercises with pigeons in remote release launchers.

Eighth Week

- Response to all **commands becoming increasingly better and crisp**.
- **The very keen, forward pup is now reasonably steady to thrown dummy and you are picking up 1 in 3 or 4 yourself. The less forward pup may still be running/chasing in to retrieve.** Both types of pups are retrieving from different types of cover and at increasing distances and beginning to use wind and give indications of how good a nose he has. If you are training/retrieving in a group it's a good idea to leave the lead on, make pup stay a few seconds after you have taken the lead off (if pup is steady) and then send him for the retrieve. That way he will not regress and to break under these more exciting and distracting circumstances. If the pup strains and pulls and it's obvious that he would be out retrieving if you didn't have the lead on, then you know that later you will have to concentrate more on the steadiness, picking up more of the thrown dummies yourself and allowing the pup to retrieve only a few on command. The less forward pup (sensitive or lacking retrieve drive) will still be allowed to run in most of the time or occasionally.
 - Trips to **town and parks** have gotten puppy **used to car, traffic, people and other dogs**.
 - Trips to the **field** have gotten puppy **used to cover, water, fences and other obstacles**.
 - **Pup should be starting to hunt enthusiastically and beginning to range out further.** Trips to the field may have resulted in game contact, which he may have flushed or pointed briefly. The young pup should not be chastised for chasing, but rather called back gently when possible and then signalled and made to move on in another direction away from the game that he chased. He should be responding to your hand signal and body to move in a different direction and be keeping in reasonable contact with you.
 - Pup may have started **POINTING** pigeons in launchers.
- If the pup has not progressed this far, spend this week concentrating on the areas you have missed or gotten behind in, but do not push the puppy beyond his capabilities. They are all individuals, and pups mature and learn at different rates. If there is a problem it probably lies with some training fault, so seek the advice of an experienced trainer.

Good luck with your Training! Trudi

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1 - Total Control: HALT!

(adapted by S Kohlmann, from C. Tabel: "Der Jagdgebrauchshund")

Editors Important Note: Please note that this training is only suitable for the older pup or dog that has not previously had any Down training (of which there are good examples in the videos previously given). Also note that the use of pinch, spike or e-collars is not allowed in SA under our Kennel Union rules! It must also be understood that using a crop in this training is similar to how it is used with a horse – it is more guidance than any physical pain and is not meant to hurt or harm the dog! The training steps indicated below are useful with some dogs and do illustrate the importance that is placed on teaching this command thoroughly!

“Leafing through an old American hunting book, published in 1904, I was surprised to find a training method for "Whoa" that is widely used in Germany, but apparently has been long forgotten in America. The article's author termed it "down charge!", and it is equivalent to the German "Halt!" (strangely enough, many Germans use the English command "Down!" instead of the German "Halt!").

In the following, I'd like to describe an old, proven way to control a hunting dog under any circumstance, teach it to point, improve his steadiness to wing and shot, and to stop any unwanted chase. Carl Tabel, one of Germany's most experienced and successful trainers of versatile hunting dogs considers "HALT!" the most important command, because the dog learns to obey its handler in any situation. Any rebellion against the handler is smothered immediately, and the dog will work with you, - not against you.

When commanded "HALT", the dog is in a crouching position, with its head between both outstretched front paws and his body tightly pressed to the ground. The dog remains motionless in this position until released. This position has many advantages over the standing position of a "whoa"ed (standing) dog: first, whatever caused your dog's attention to wander is out of view when he's flat on the ground; secondly, a dog that is flat on the ground can be safely shot over, and thirdly, the dog acknowledges the handlers dominance and control in a natural way (submissive posture!). This submissive feeling is probably the greatest advantage of the HALT training, and nothing can be more counterproductive in this discipline than lax, playful or inconsistent training. In order to exert total control over the dog, "HALT" has to be taught with greatest determination and persistence. Your dog must be convinced that nothing in its life is of greater importance than to tightly press its body to the ground when commanded "HALT". Tabel recommends six training steps, which facilitate the practical teaching of this useful command:

(1) HALT without painful force, but persistent guidance.

From a sitting position, the dogs front paws are pulled forward with one hand while the other hand pushes the dog down by the neck (and ~~pinch~~ collar) and the handler command "HALT". Raising of the dog's hind quarters is prevented by the left hand of the handler across the kidney area of the dog, which can exert a painful pressure and hence convince the dog to remain prone. After 30-40 sec in this position the dog is released ("Here") and praised. Repeat several times. Purpose of this step is to teach the dog that the proper "HALT" position is the only safe position, and all discomfort ceases immediately when this position is assumed.

(2) HALT and remaining prone.

Once our student stops to resist by trying to get up, we slowly reduce the pressure of our hands, but keep our hands in position to immediately push him down again. Repeat until the dog remains calm and prone when hands are taken off and, finally when the handler stands above the dog. When you can stand next to the dog for a minute without him trying to lift the head you are ready for the next step:

(3) "HALT", dog goes down immediately when commanded.

Start with the dog sitting at heel, leashed with ~~pinch~~ collar. Holding a short crop in your right hand and pull leash under your foot with left hand. While sharply commanding "HALT", raise right hand with crop above head (visual command) and jerk the dog down with the other. Any resistance or attempts to get up are to be reprimanded by quickly applying the crop. The dog must learn to lie down immediately, like a folding jackknife. Now we pay attention to the exact and proper position of the dog: straight, resting on both hind legs (not just one ham), front paws stretched out with brisket, throat and lower jaw tightly pressed to the ground between both front legs. All these "details" are of great importance and neglecting them will create greater problems later! We always use the visual command (one hand straight up above head) in connection with the audio-signal, the word "HALT" (or DOWN) and the single blast of the trilling whistle.

(4) "Halt", handler at distance.

After our dog goes reliably and immediately down when commanded, we can start moving away from him. Initially, we start walking around the dog, facing him and holding the crop over his body, ready to correct any disobedience. Every attempt to lift the head immediately causes a sharp slap with the crop and the command "HALT!". Slowly, we increase the radius of the circle around the dog, step over the dog or start introducing distractions (helper calls, throws dummy etc). At all these exercises the dog is leashed (check chord) and equipped with a ~~spike or pinch~~ collar. Should the dog get up while we are at a distance, let him feel the ~~spike~~ collar while bringing him back to the place he was supposed to lie down. When the dog is able to remain at least 5 min motionless in this position, we can move to the next step:

(5) HALT from a standing position of while moving.

If steps 1-4 have been properly followed, then the dog should go down immediately even when walking. If we detect any hesitation, stepping on the leash (and thus applying the ~~spike~~ collar) and the crop will make the point clear immediately.

(6) HALT from a distance and with distractions.

When the "jackknife- reflex" has become our dog's second nature and when he happily responds to the release, we can start teaching HALT from a distance. At this point, the dog should not consider "HALT" an uncomfortable burden, but rather a strong habit which is followed gladly and timely. To teach HALT from a distance, we let the dog sit, stand or walk 2-4 yards in front of us, of course on the check cord.

When the dog is not suspecting the command, we give visual and audio-signals and a short, sharp jerk on the check chord. After a few repetitions and the prompt and proper response of the dog, we then introduce distractions. Children chasing chickens, a tame rabbit, thrown dummies etc are suitable to reinforce the HALT reflex. Lastly, we take the dog into the field, where we polish his obedience in front of game, shooting, etc. Now you can use HALT when birds flush from a point, hence deterring the dog from breaking on wing or shot.

Consequently, he'll point more intensively and staunchly. Or, you may simply use it to slow down the overenthusiastic dog on a drag, blood track or while quartering. You have now the tool to master your dog in all situations, and his style and performance will greatly increase.

2 - Training with Pigeon Release Traps **(T Winter – 2016, updated 2025)**

Introduction

We train with pigeon release traps for many reasons. The main reason we use them is that most of us simply do not have ready access to wild birds! And you need birds to train a pointing dog – it is that simple.

Some are lucky enough to live on or near a farm or area on which they can run their dogs on wild birds 3 to 5 times a week. Most of us are not! So, the release traps are used as an interim training substitute. They do not take the place of wild birds, but they do offer us a way to bring to dog to a useful stage of development, one which makes the transition to wild birds much quicker and simpler.

In the early stages of our dog's development we use the release traps to trigger and build the pointing instinct. We are also building bird drive at the same time. Next, we can use the traps to help us convince the dog that holding point staunchly is much better than diving in and causing the bird to "go away". This is a very important point to make about the release traps:

they work because we use them in such a way that the pigeons behave just like wild birds! If the dog does not point, the bird flushes; if the dog crowds the bird or dives in, the bird goes away; if the dog holds his point, he gets praised by his owner, gets to keep the bird in his nose and proximity, and, he may well get a bird to retrieve – the ultimate reward for most dogs! At no point during this phase do we use any harsh or negative training to convince the dog to point or hold point – the traps and our control of the flush does it all; the birds teach the dog, just like they would in the wild.

Later in the dog's development, we can also use the traps to help with backing, and with teaching the dog to stop to flush. These aspects are not about pointing, but about the finer aspects of pointing dog performance. Because we can control the situation and the release of the birds, we are better able to set up training situations that may be hard to come by or control with wild birds. At this point, the traps work even better than wild birds for just those reasons.

To recap:

- **Release traps work best when they are used in such a way to make the pigeons behave just like wild birds. You control the flush, and your timing is all important!**
- **Release traps are used initially to trigger the dog's pointing instinct and build bird drive.**
- **Release traps are used to convince the dog to hold point longer and longer – without resorting to commands or any compulsion to hold point.**
- **Release traps are used later to teach the dog backing/honouring another dog on point.**
- **Finally, they are extremely useful in training the dog to stop/sit to flush.**

How to Plant/Place the Release Traps

Before using your launchers in the field, you may want to introduce the dog to the sight, sound and "flush" of the traps. This can be achieved by putting a dummy or ball in and launching it in full sight of the dog. Start at distance at first! Then bring the dog closer. This will help to minimize any reluctance or fright he might get when first encountering the hidden traps with pigeons in them.

Now you can begin to use them for pointing! But first, you need to think about how to set the traps out in the field or training areas you are using.

There should be enough cover that you can hide the traps. The dog should never be close enough to sight point the trap (remember, if he gets close you are going to flush the bird!), so you don't really need that much cover, but there must be enough. The dog must use his nose to find the trap, and as long as the traps can be reasonably well hidden, you'll be fine.

If cover is really at a minimum, you can use branches or grass or even hay to cover the traps. However, be aware that dogs are not stupid and if every trap with a pigeon in it is covered by a heap of grass, your dog will go straight to the heaps of grass and start pointing! Also, using flags or such to show you the position of the trap will also show you dog where it is. The only way to get around this is to place fake heaps of grass or flags or whatever so that, when it becomes necessary, the dog is forced to use his nose and not his eyes to find the traps with pigeons in them.

I use gloves to catch the pigeons, handle the traps, and to place the traps and put the pigeons in them. This minimizes the human scent, although there is always some no matter what you do!

Initially, you do not need many traps placed out. At first, two is enough to start with. Even one will work.

You will need to plant the traps in such a way that your dog does not merely track your foot scent to them. This can be difficult, but you should still try. You will be working your dog into the wind or on a crosswind at first, so bear in mind the wind direction at all times. Walk in a wide berth to the area you are going to plant the traps, then cut across into the area where you will place the first trap. At first it is a good idea to rub the pigeon on the ground in front of the trap, and perhaps pull out a bit of fluff so that there is scent on the cover and ground in front of the trap (many traps do not have good airflow, and we want the novice pup to be able to smell the bird easily). Put your pigeon in the trap – and remember, the pigeon should face away from the dog. That way it will tend to flush away from the dog instead of into the dog's face or across the dog – we do not want to make it easy for the dog to catch the bird! Then backtrack to the edge of the field or planting area and continue on to plant the second trap (if you are using two). Repeat the same procedure with the second trap and pigeon. Now move out of the area again and return to your starting point where you will start the dog from. It is difficult to describe without a diagram, but just remember to try not to walk in a direct line to the traps, do try to go in and out of the planting area to plant, and return on a different path outside of the planting area.

You should now have one or two pigeons planted in the traps in such a way that you will be working the dog predominantly into the wind or crosswind. The traps will also be well-hidden. If necessary, you will have marked the position of the traps – this is more important in the beginning stages, as you want to know where the traps are placed, particularly with the inexperienced dog!

Handling the Dog to the Trap

When first working your dog or pup on traps, it is important that you introduce them on a reasonable scenting day. That means you need some wind, but not too much that the scent is carried away completely.

Always have your dog or pup on a checkcord at first! Work into the wind for the most part, but when you get nearer to the trap try to cut across the wind. This will cause the dog to cross the

scent and smell the bird immediately – and after a few times of that the pup will usually point! If worked directly into the wind, the pup gets gradual scent of the bird and often keeps working in out of curiosity, not pointing as readily as he would if he encountered the strong scent all at once. So, bring the pup in on a crosswind. Under no circumstances should you let a pup get near enough to the trap at first to give it a fright or to strike it as it opens. Try not to let pup get closer than 5 meters.

Do not wait for the dog to point. When you can see that the pup has gotten scent, launch the pigeon. Say nothing when the pup encounters scent. Absolutely nothing. Everything must be between the dog and the bird at this point. Any time the pup encounters the scent of the pigeon, release the bird. Stay quiet and calm.

Be prepared for the pup to chase and keep enough tightness on the checkcord to get him under control but not enough slack that he hits the end and hurts or scares himself. Most dogs won't care at this point, but sensitive ones may get a fright and not want to get near a trap again. We want this to be a positive experience. Praise the dog a little after the first few bird contacts no matter what the response after the flush is, then carry on (the only exception to this is if the pup had a negative response – do not praise that, we don't want pup to think being fearful is a good thing! If you are dealing with a very sensitive pup or one that needs encouragement, you may even allow such a pup to chase the first few times).

After the first contact, work the pup on. If he wants to go and smell the trap let him. He has to work out in his mind what just happened, and usually the nose is the first thing he will want to use to do so. When he's smelled the trap and surroundings, send him on with your hunt command to the next trap.

After a few correct encounters with the traps the pup will start to point! Most of our pups are pointing by the 2nd or 3rd pigeon, and most dogs on average don't take more than 5 or 6 pigeons to point (provided they have not been worked incorrectly on the traps).

So now your pup is pointing. Holding the end of the checkcord, start work your way up to the pup. When you get close, swing out to the side – don't approach the dog from directly behind. If at any time pup moves at all – launch the pigeon. Keep your eyes on the pup, his body language will tell you when he is about to break in, eyes may get wider, head may drop or haunches may lower as he prepares to pounce. These things will tell you when to be ready to launch the bird. Again, say nothing when the dog moves and the bird is released.

What we are trying to teach the dog is that if he gets too close the bird will go away. This is exactly what would happen if he were hunting wild birds. Stop and point – the bird stays put. Move – the bird goes away. The pup will begin to point longer and longer.

At some point in this process, the pup will allow you to get all the way up to him. This is when you will want to praise the dog for holding still, holding point. Simply praise the dog, saying 'good boy' and perhaps running your hand lightly down his back. Be aware, however, some dogs do not like to be stroked while on point; others do; they are all individuals. Read your dog. If the dog moves at all, say nothing and launch the bird.

When pup is comfortable with this and is holding point, move away from pup and walk towards the bird. He will naturally break in – launch the bird. Continue to do this until pup will allow you to move in front while he is pointing. This is the time you may want to shoot a bird for the pup, or to throw a dead pigeon for him to retrieve. This helps to really make things black and white for

the pup!! Then he will really start to hold point longer and more intensely, and you can ask him to hold longer and start to make things a little harder for him.

Conclusion

Ok, you've learnt how to use the traps to trigger the pointing, and to get pup holding point long enough to allow you to get in front and shoot a bird for him. Pup is starting to point very staunchly and intensely and is also usually making strides in hunting and drive.

Now is usually the time to stop the pointing training and focus on the obedience or yard work if you have not already been doing so. Almost all of your training from here on will be dependent on your "Sit", "Come" and "Down" commands. Your pup now needs to learn these thoroughly and to learn that you are in control. He must also be doing retrieve work, if you expect him to retrieve.

Once your basic obedience or yard work is in place and has been transferred to the field, you can go back to the traps for backing/honouring practice, and for the stop/sit to flush training that you will eventually do to finish off your pups training. You can also use multiple traps to simulate coveys, a technique that will help in staunching your dog completely and also steadying him to flush.

But more about those things later.....

Please NOTE!

There is more than one way to skin a cat...so if you are unable to get a remote launcher, you can try a manual launcher – this is just the frame with a string attached to enable you to launch the bird when you want.

Alternatively, I saw a brilliant idea from a handler in Zimbabwe! You know the saying "necessity is the mother of invention"...well, that is so true. This handler used a plastic colander with a string attached to the middle of the base. Turned upside down, it keeps the pigeon in place and allows air flow through the holes. Voila! The "trap" is sprung by pulling the spring, thereby flipping the bowl up and over and allowing the pigeon to fly away. I'm sure there is even a way to add some lift to it – use your imagination and ingenuity!

Good luck with your training! Trudi

3 - Training the Perfect Retriever: Drags

Now it's time to move afield and get your dog into more realistic retrieving situations - after all, what's got a dummy to do with hunting? By Stephan Kolhman

DRAGS

Since you're most likely to be asked to perform a drag at the next test you and junior attend, drags are an important part of your training program. When we talk about drags, we envision the scent track made by a person dragging a bird or mammal (rabbit, fox or any other predator) on the ground for a few hundred yards.

Once set on this scent trail, the dog is supposed to follow the track, find the dragged animal and retrieve it promptly and properly to hand.

Of course, before we let junior tackle a 300 yard drag, we must gradually introduce him to this new subject. As in blood tracking, we use the long leash for this purpose to keep junior moving slowly and purposefully on the drag. By having control over the dog, we avoid any wild scent chase or free search, which is the ruin of all retriever-dom.

Probably the majority of unsatisfactory scores given in this subject at the Solms/AZP or VGP goes to dogs that run wild and free and only by luck or happenstance stumble upon the bird. They have never learned to calmly track in a concentrated manner, and in all likelihood they will fail tracking that winged quail or "nicked" rabbit - which still has plenty of speed and a bag full of tricks to elude the following dog.

Here's how I introduce dogs to follow a scent trail. We start afield with a dead pigeon or quail, a string for dragging and junior and his long leash. First, let's put the dog out of sight of the following preparation: take the bird into an open meadow and place a hat or any other marker (twig, flagging tape, etc) at the beginning of our first drag. We then scrape the soil a bit with our foot and pull some feathers from the bird. Both the wound in the topsoil and the feathers mark the beginning of the track for the dog. Now we walk with the wind in our back ca 30-50 yards in a straight line, dragging the bird on the ground behind us and return in a wide circle on the downwind side of the drag. *(it is best to mark your drag by dropping something along the way every couple of meters – that way you know if the dog is off the track and where to return to when that happens. I use empty red shot shells – Trudi). Place the bird (without the string attached) on the ground (make sure the dog cannot see the bird from a distance – Trudi),*

Now get junior out, put a collar on him *(start with a soft collar; you don't want the first experiences to be unpleasant – Trudi)*, snap a checkcord on, and take him at heel over to the start of the track. Make sure you approach the track exactly in the direction the drag is laid, so there will be no turn to make once you get started.

At the marked spot, you best make junior lie down with his nose right on top of the feathers. Let him absorb the smell, but make sure he stays put for about a minute or so *(if your dog has not been taught the "down", just make your dog sit – Trudi)*. Now you tell him "dead bird" (*"fetch", "bring" or whatever you use to retrieve – remember that it must be a Retrieve command and not a "seek" command that you would use to hunt up live birds!!!!- Trudi*) and point forward along the drag, keeping the rope good and tight to prevent him storming forward. As long as he moves

with his nose on the ground and on the drag, we let him move forward. At this point, we don't give him more than about a yard of rope, to prevent him from getting too far off the track. Of course, junior really doesn't know what to do yet, so he will probably pick up his head trying to sniff some airborne scent. At this point it is useful if you can make him lie down again on top of the scent track, but maybe pointing with your hand to the ground will do the trick too.

At any rate, you must make it clear that you are interested in that scent trail, and that you want him to follow it. If you're lucky, he won't need much convincing and gets to the bird quickly, but chances are that he will start getting excited, or strays off the drag. With the rope attached to the collar you can and should stop him from moving off the drag. He's only permitted to go on directly on the drag, all sideways movements are to be avoided.

After several drags, junior will have learned that the quickest way to find the bird is by following the drag directly with his nose low and in a controlled speed (maximally a trot!). Do not allow him to sniff the air, to jump or run on the drag or to veer sideways. Naturally, you must make sure he always stays in front of you, never circling back. If junior needs more encouragement, just command "dead bird, fetch!", which will bring back memories of duty and drill from our back yard training.

With some luck and lots of help from you, junior finally finds the bird. Make sure he quickly picks it up without undue excitement, chewing or delay, and then take him back to the start of the drag at a brisk pace. There you make him sit, hold the bird while you pet his head and talk to him softly. After the proper command to release the bird ("Giiiiive"), you praise junior and let him play. I always make sure that after releasing the bird, junior gets a chance to release some of the tension too, by throwing a bumper or otherwise putting up a bit of horseplay. *(until you have completed your retrieve training, don't worry too much about the delivery, just take the bird from the dog whether he is standing or sitting and keep it upbeat – Trudi)*

Of course, we don't do another drag that day, but from now on we do at least one per day (until the dog is going well on a 100 meter drag). After several drags, junior will have learned that the quickest way to find the bird is by following the drag directly with his nose low and in a controlled speed (maximally a trot!). Do not allow him to sniff the air, to jump or run on the drag or to veer sideways. Naturally, you must make sure he always stays in front of you, never circling back. If junior needs more encouragement, just command "dead bird, fetch!" which will bring back memories of duty and drill from our back yard training. Most importantly at this point, we make sure that junior always is on the long leash, always gets reprimanded for sloppy, unconcentrated work, and always finds a bird. We gradually increase the length of the drag to 100 yards, and then start putting some bends (never sharper than 90 degrees) into the track.

Now is the time to reduce some of the handler influences, by letting the leash drag while following the dog closely. Increasingly we let him get further ahead. There is always a brisk breeze of dominance and control blowing while we work drags, so junior is kept in the line of duty. In contrast to blood tracking, we "make" junior do drags, and he should have no uncertain feelings about our readiness to force him all the way, should he decide in favor of more pleasurable activities. Keep cool, calm and control!

Only after junior reliably follows the track without corrections we let him go without our company. In the beginning we stop about 50 yards before the end of the drag, then 75 yards and so forth until we only walk him ca 30 yards from the start. Every time we increase the length of the drag junior has to work without our direct influence we also shorten the rope dragging behind him. At the end (which can be only a couple of days before the test if necessary!) we no longer let him drag a rope at all, but loop it through the collar, holding both ends at the beginning of the

drag and then stopping at about 30 yards and letting one end go. The loose end will slip through the collar. *(Now you will do drag work only a couple of times per week and can start to increase the length of the drags, until the dog is working up to 300 yard drags reliably, with a couple of bends in the track. Once you are working longer drags, you will need to use a helper, otherwise the dog may follow your track all the way back to you, missing the bird along the way. Each time you increase the length of the drag, work the dog on the lead for a bit longer than you did on the shorter drags and gradually reduce the distance you go along with the dog. Also vary the cover in which you put the bird or rabbit at the end of the drag, so that eventually the dog has to go into cover at the end to find the bird and feels that you cannot see him – but be sure that you or your helper are able to see what he is doing so you can stop him should he try to bury or mess around with the bird when he thinks you are not watching! - Trudi)*

After many drags (which will take about a month) you should have junior trained enough that he will calmly follow a 300 yard track with 2 kinks in it, pick up a bird and carry it back to the starting point. We also make sure that the drag is laid by different people, so the dog will not always have the handler scent to follow.

The last step is to "test" junior if he really understood the message. We let a friend lay a 300 yard drag, ending directly under a tree, which the friend climbs, taking the bird with him. Send junior to retrieve, and - not able to find the bird at the end of the drag - he'll come back empty. Now is your time to leash him (remember: never punish an unleashed dog!) and to lay it on him, reprimanding him sharply for coming back without a bird. This must be a "memorable" experience for junior, one he's always thinking of should the tracking get difficult. Send him back out with as much authority you can muster, and signal your buddy in the tree to drop the bird. Bingo, junior finds and retrieves properly, and both of you engage in some happy time. This last step is very important, and it will make your dog search until "hell freezes over" before he comes back empty. Reliable? You betcha!

At the Solms/AZP/HZP, your drag will be laid by a judge. He will place a fresh animal at the end of both drags (you'll have to do a rabbit drag and a bird drag), and then hide with the dragged animal placed in front of him. If junior overshoots the animal at the end of the drag, no big deal, since he's allowed to pick up the animal at the judges feet. It pays to expose junior to the fact that there is always a bird or rabbit at the feet of the guy hiding in the bushes - it may save your tail at the test. At least, the pooch isn't gonna get scared by the judge (some of which may look quite strange indeed!) and he won't come flying home to Daddy without a bird.