

# Dare fiducia a uno spirito libero

Questo articolo nasce dalla passeggiata in campagna di stamattina, le mie camminate in campagna sono sempre buona fonte di ispirazione!

Oggi ho pensato che, quando esci con un setter inglese, tutti i tuoi sensi devono essere attivi al fine di localizzare il cane che, come la razza comanda, appare e scompare. Lo puoi sentire quando è dietro agli alberi, o quando sta uscendo da un cespuglio; lo puoi vedere quando corre libero su terreni aperti. A volte, quando si rotola in "qualcosa", ne puoi perfino sentire l'odore. No, non puoi sentirne il sapore, né toccarlo ma, negli anni, hai sicuramente sviluppato un sesto senso capace di dirti dove si trova il cane, cosa sta facendo e da che parte lo vedrai ritornare.

Mentre tenevo le antenne accese, ho incontrato un uomo con una golden retriever. Gli trotterellava accanto, mansueta, tenendo in bocca un grosso ceppo. Mi chiedo se sarei felice con un cane simile o se, al contrario, mi annoierebbe. Poi, quando Briony correva a tutta velocità in una risaia, abbiamo incontrato un *runner* con un cane corso e con un cane primitivo, più grande di uno shiba e più piccolo di un akita. È rimasto impressionato dal richiamo ma, ancora di più, dalla velocità e dall'ampiezza di cerca. I cani da ferma inglesi, fatta eccezione per il gordon – ogni tanto, sono i cani da ferma più estremi. È difficile per un proprietario di cani da compagnia riuscire a capirli. Restano perplessi quando il proprietario di un setter (o di un pointer) rifiuta di sguinzagliare il cane su un piccolo appezzamento di terreno circondato da strade, spiegando che è troppo piccolo e quindi non sicuro.

Non riescono a capire che quegli spazi sono piccoli: lasciate

libero un pastore tedesco o un border collie, saranno sempre attenti, pronti ad obbedire agli ordini, nascono per questo; un dobermann o un rottweiler terranno sempre d'occhio il proprietario, perché il loro istinto gli chiede di proteggerli. Con un setter inglese le cose vanno diversamente: il regalo migliore che possiate fare a un setter è la libertà. Certo, a loro piace anche russare su superfici morbide, gli piace mangiare bene ma, se vuoi davvero far felice il tuo setter... lascialo libero! Il suo muso simpatico diventerà un felice muso simpatico e lui inizierà ad esplorare. Un setter inglese libero non starà a preoccuparsi del padrone. Sono cani che guardano Discovery Channel, sanno benissimo che noi possiamo cavarcela da soli mentre loro sono impegnati a esplorare il mondo, trovare selvatici... ci sono un sacco di cose interessanti in campagna! Dare libertà a un setter inglese è un po' come portare un maiale in un ristorante *all you can eat*, o regalare a una donna la carta di credito di qualcun altro! Così tanto entusiasmo mette a dura prova il controllo!

Un setter inglese libero può prestarvi più attenzione se portate un fucile: i cani usati a caccia sanno fare gioco di squadra e la maggior parte di loro è felice di andare a recuperare un selvatico abbattuto. È così che la maggior parte dei cacciatori controlla il proprio setter. Le cose diventano più complicare se non avete armi con voi: il setter (o il pointer), non trae beneficio dalla vostra presenza... ed è questa la parte che mi piace di più! Perché qui entrano in gioco la relazione, l'addestramento e la fiducia RECIPROCA.

**Relazione:** *beh, è elementare, devi avere una relazione con il tuo cane! Lui deve avere fiducia in te (fiducia reciproca, vedi sotto), perché sa che non limiterai la sua libertà, per lo meno non troppo. Lui tornerà da te, o eseguirà i tuoi ordini, e poi sarà di nuovo libero.*

**Addestramento:** *l'importanza dell'addestramento non deve mai essere sottostimata. Insegnare a uno spirito libero un*

*richiamo efficace non è facile. Ma sono la prova vivente che l'essere umano modello base può farcela.*

**Fiducia:** *sta alla base di tutto. È quello che ti permette di lasciare libero il tuo cane sapendo che tornerà. Devi davvero credere al tuo setter: alcune persone vanno in panico quando vedono quanto forte e lontano questi cani possano andare. Ma se davvero vuoi bene a "qualcuno", e specialmente se "qualcuno" vive per la libertà... lascialo libero!*

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## Trusting a Free Spirit

*This article stems from this morning walk. My walks in the countryside are always a good source of inspiration.*

Today I realized that, when you are "walking" an English Setter, all your senses have to be well alert in order to locate the dog who, as the breed demands, appears and disappears from your sight. You can hear him when is behind the trees, or coming out from a bush; you can see him when he is running free on a open ground. You can sometimes even smell him when he rolls into "something" and, no, you cannot taste nor touch him but, along the years, you have surely developed a sixth sense which tells you where the dog is, what is he doing and from which direction he is going to return.

While keeping all my antennae alert, I met a man with a golden retriever. She was meekly trotting by him carrying a huge log in her mouth. I am wondering whether I would be happy with such a dog or, if, on the contrary, I will be bored. As Briony was running at a full speed in a rice paddy, we met a runner trying to "Canicross" with a Cane Corso (a huge molosser) and another primitive dog, something bigger than a Shiba and smaller than an Akita. He was impressed with the recall, but

most of all, he was astonished by her speed and deep castings. British pointing dogs, with the exception of Gordon Setters – sometimes, are the most extreme of the pointing dogs: they can hardly be understood by the average pet dog owner. They often look puzzled when the setter (or pointer) owner refuses to let their dog free on a tiny patch of ground surrounded by roads, explaining it is too small, it would not be safe.

They cannot understand how small those places are: an unleashed German Shepherd or a Border Collie would always be alert, ready to obey an order; a Dobermann or a Rottweiler would always keep an eye on their owner, because they feel the need to protect them. With an English Setter, things are different: the best gift you can give to a working English Setter is freedom. Yes, they enjoy snoring on soft surfaces, they like good food but, if you want your Setter to be truly happy... Let him free! His cute face will become a cute happy face and he will start exploring. A free English Setter would not worry much about his owner. They perfectly know we can take care of ourselves when they are busy exploring the world, finding birds and so on... These guys watch Discovery Channel! The countryside has so much to offer! Giving freedom to an English Setter is like taking a pig to an “all you can eat” restaurant, or gifting a woman with somebody else credit card! So much excitement clashes with control!

A free ranging setter may pay more attention to you if you are carrying a shotgun: dogs actively used for rough shooting understand teamwork, and most of them are very happy to pick up and retrieve a fallen bird. This is how most of the Italian hunters “control” their setters. Things get more complicated when you do not carry any weapons: the setter (or the pointer) does not get any benefits from your presence and... This is the part I love the most! Because here relationship, training and MUTUAL trust enter the picture.

***Relationship:*** well... *Relationship, you need to have a relationship with your dog! No amount of training can make a*

*dog can back to you if he does not want to. He shall trust you (mutual trust, see below) because he knows you are not going to affect his freedom, at least not that much. He will return to you, or follow your directions, and then he will be free again.*

**Training:** *the importance of training shall never be underestimated. Teaching a free spirited dog a reliable recall is not easy! But I am the living proof that the plain, basic, human being can do this.*

**Trust:** *it is the key. It what allows you to let your dog free, being certain he will come back to you. You really have to trust your Setter: some people panic when they see how far and how fast these dogs can go. But you really love “something”, especially something /somebody that thrives on freedom... let him free!*

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## **We are Losing Legendary Methods (Waterwork)– by T. Mostert**

*Tok Mostert, a Professional Hunter from South Africa, now living in Sweden, is sharing his writings on dog training with us. [You can start reading them from Part 1 here.](#)*

### **We are Losing Legendary Methods (Waterwork)– by T. Mostert**

There are a few issues with water retrieves that you do not have with land retrieves. Some dogs enter water easily, others need a little encouragement and then some need a push. When to push will depend on where the dog is mentally, too soon and

you may install a permanent fear of water in the dog. As stated before, the dog should enjoy training and you should make it a fun but structured experience. I want my dog steady and sitting by my side when I start him out, he should be as calm as possible. Arne always said it is a bad idea to cast and control the dog when you start, get a friend or your spouse, to do the casting. Make sure the dog can see the dummy or bird being cast and has a clear line of sight to the dummy or bird. The person making the cast should make bird or duck sounds before the cast to get the dog's attention. The handler should focus on the dog only, make very sure the dog does not even lift during the cast, he should stay still.

Check that the dog follows the and cast, marks the dummy. Arne always started with a shallow cast, the dog would not need to swim more than 10 meters. This does not mean the dog only has to go 10 meters in the water, from the edge of the water the bottom should slope gently until the dog needs to swim the last 10 meters. If possible it works very well with a passage through reeds to get the dog straight out and straight in, always use the terrain to the dogs advantage to make the succeed. Arne taught me that once the dog is a meter away from the dummy, or bird, and it is clear that they will take it, give a quick yes, yes command, it works and I stick to it. Give the dog lots of encouragement on the way in to you, use the same bent at the knees method I described for land retrieves.

As the dog improves, increase the distance he has to swim, train in rivers with current and lakes where the dog cannot see the other side, expose the dog to multiple areas and entries.



Use a friend or your spouse...

Blind retrieves require a dog with skill and ability. It also requires a handler and a trainer that know what they are doing. The dog needs to have unwavering trust in what you are telling them to do, you cannot make a mistake, the dog will lose trust in you! There is no stop signal in water, the dog's eyes cannot be on you all the time, so you better be sure when you give a verbal, whistle or physical command that the dog understands what you want. Do not start blind retrieves if you cannot get the dog to do the following, I say again do not start unless:

1. *Your dog is comfortable spending time in the water and is confident in the water.*
2. *Your dog can cross multiple types of surfaces under the water. Some areas will require a dog to wade from deep water to shallow water and back to deep water, mud and vegetation present problems for some dogs.*
3. *Your dog can take a straight line out into the water and keep it.*
4. *Your dog understands directional change commands and the out or back command.*
5. *Your dog understands the search command.*
6. *Your dog will not try and switch dummies or birds when there are multiple ones.*

As Arne would tell me a hundred times, break it down. Entry, out, direction, search and delivery.  
I have had judges stunned when Flake comes back with a

completely dry bird, she is just comfortable in the water and does not panic when she has to stay out there. A few things to keep in mind.

### **Entrance into the water:**

- 1. It is a careless dog that charges into the water, flying entries look great, but a dog that has never entered a body of water or is working virgin water and flies in is going to get hurt sometimes.*
- 2. It is a careless owner that does not check the point of entry before he sends the dog out.*
- 3. The dog should always, always take your line and go straight out. Do not let the dog look for another entry once you gave the out command. They lose the line and mark if they do, which makes it harder on them and you to adjust their new line to the old one.*

### **Out:**

- 1. Give the dog some indication that they are heading in the right direction.*
- 2. Current will make the dog drift, keep it in mind.*

### **Direction:**

- 1. Your timing has to be perfect, especially if the dog has to go over an obstacle, cross a island and re-enter the water on the other side.*
- 2. Remember the dog is not watching you, give the direction change command and once the dog looks back follow it up with a physical signal, you can even move your whole body in the direction you want the dog to go.*
- 3. Use the wind, if you change direction with the bird lying upwind chances are greater for the dog to find it.*

### **Search:**

- 1. Once the dog is in or close to the reeds, grass, rocks etc where the bird is placed, I give the search command. Close to me is within 3-5 meters.*
- 2. Give the dog time to locate the bird, resist the urge to*



*direct the dog.*

### **Delivery:**

I do not want Flake to shake herself dry before delivery, neither do I want her to drop the bird.

Stand as close to the water edge as the judge would allow, Stay calm and positive, do not reach or grab for the bird, but be fast enough so the dog can shake itself dry if it wants to after delivery.



Tok & Flake

I have left out certain crucial bits of advice, like how to get a dog into the water, teaching it to swim and be calm and also the way to train a dog to take a straight entry on the blind retrieve.

It is simply because I believe you need a trainer to assist you here, so find a Legend and get going.

This concludes what I wish to share on retrieving. Before I start what is considered by many the Elite section of HPR's I want to take a step back to obedience and discipline, because there is a correlation between obedience and field that needs to be clarified.

[To read about obedience and discipline click here.](#)