

# Some collars are better than others

I am, I must admit, a picky person who tends to research things before purchasing them but, when I find something I like, I tend to stick with it. When I decided to buy a definitive collar for Briony, I ended up at [Maxizoo](#) (a supermarket for pets) and I opted for a flat [Hurtta](#) collar. I liked the colour (red) and the softness (neoprene). I did not want a leather collar, as I like to wash my collars sometimes, a soft, synthetic one was just perfect. Besides liking its softness and its design, I quickly realized this collar could offer more. It was, indeed, a cross between a standard flat collar and a choke collar. You could not really choke the dog, but the fact the it could get tighter is extremely useful as this forbids the collar from slipping away. This should never happen, but it can indeed happen to dogs with narrow heads, wearing standard collars: if the dog bounces backwards for any reasons, he can quickly get out of the collar. Those owning sighthounds, infact, tend to purchase specific “sighthounds collars”, or to rely on half choke collars that naturally get tighter around the dog’s neck. The old Hurtta flat collar, however, is way more wearable than the standard half-choke collar and does not look bad as sighthounds collars often do on other breeds: it does not hang from the dog’s neck and can therefore be left on the dog without any risks. In a few words, it is small, ergonomic and handy. I think this collar has a lot of Pros and just a few **Cons**: colour fades quickly and price is a bit high, if compared to similar model but, its other talents make it worth a purchase. The problem is... that Hurtta does not longer produces them. I e-mailed the company and they, unfortunately, confirmed this.

I therefore had to find another collar like this and, to be

honest, I still haven't found any, but I found a very nice lady from Germany who did its best to copy this model. She was the only person (I contacted a few) accepting to try to recreate a model without having it in her hands. Barbara Schoenen, of the Etsy shop "[The Present for You](#)" gave me ample choice and I could literally design my own collar. I could pick the cloth I wanted and she even ordered a specific red neoprene that would match nicely with the pattern I choose. This lady tried very hard to make the perfect collar and whereas it is not perfect yet (but she is working on improving it), she gave me a high quality product. The collar is sturdy and safe and can be ordered with a plastic (lighter) buckle or with a sturdier metal buckle, perfect for bigger dogs. Mine is made of cotton and neoprene. The cotton cloth is high quality but it is quite "smooth" and the intermediate hooks tend to move a bit. A rougher cloth would probably be better at keeping them in place but, again, mine is just a minor complain. These collars cost a bit more than those you can find in shops, but their prices are extremely reasonable and having your own, unique, handmade collar, has no price. Shipping fees are reasonable as well and the collars come nicely packed, perfect to be gifted to someone, or to yourself! So as a **Pros** we have: fully customizable; artisan willing to do what you ask; excellent quality and great quality price/ratio. As a **Cons** I'd say that some things might be slightly improved; metal buckle is very sturdy but makes the collar too heavy for a setter (but it is perfect for a Labrador, GSP, GWP...; price is higher than the standard collar in shops (but not much higher than the Hurttta); a bit of waiting to get it made.

Before closing the article I would like to mention a third option, the Hunter standard collar named [Hunter Neoprene Vario Plus](#). I saw one in a shop and bought it while waiting for Barbara's collar to come. Why did I buy it? Quality/price ratio is great, this collar was around 10 euros or less and it is nicely made, using nylon and neoprene and adding a few more

euros you can get a matching lead available in different length. It comes in a few nice colours and you can easily find it online or in shops. So... which are the **Cons**? Intermediate “hooks” slide as well and, most of all, the collar, despite looking like the Hurtta one, is indeed a standard flat collar and it can slip away if your dog has a narrow head... It happened to me. It could be an excellent and affordable option if you have a large headed dog, not the best option with a narrow head.

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## A few more words on gun shyness

The [previous article](#) on gun shyness triggered many reactions.

This had pretty much been forecasted, but I hoped to find a larger number of open minded people. In the end, however, I must admit hearing that you, owner, can be deemed responsible for your own dog gun shyness is not pleasant. Modern ethology is not being kind here, and it is much easier to blame the genes, the bitch, the stud or the breeder. Acknowledging the role of environment, upbringing and training is tough, it can make us feel guilty.

What did the readers say? I was told stuff like *“I never introduced the pup to noises, but when the first day of the shooting season came, I brought him with me and shot a whole covey of partridge on his head and nothing happened! The dog is fine! Socialization and all that stuff, bullshit.”* If these people had carefully read the first article, they would have realized I wrote that sometimes people are very lucky, and a dog can survive such intense experience, without any prior training. Is luck often that blind? Not really, what most

likely happens is that the dog has been exposed to noise and other stimuli, the owner is simply not aware of this. Maybe the pups grew up by the house, or on a farm, where he learnt to recognize the tractor, the lawn mower and other sounds, maybe they were born during a stormy summer and learnt not to fear thunders. Dogs living near humans are generally exposed to noise and this could prevent gun shyness.

It is now time to discuss the second objection "*In the past dogs were not socialized, nor exposed to noise, yet, they were normal*". This is a false myth. Let's think about the past: about one century ago, almost all the hunting dogs used to belong to rich people. These people had professional staff taking care of the dogs, it is highly unlikely that these dogs were poorly socialized. What about ordinary people? At a certain moment in history, people with lower incomes started to become interested in hunting dogs. These people were mainly farmers and, usually, had some mixed breed dogs who could work like a hound, a spaniel or a terrier (their contemporary equivalent would be the lurcher). These dogs used to live on the farm, close to their owner, to other humans and to human made noises.

In Italy, lower and middle class hunters began being involved with purebred hunting dogs after WWII, more vigorously from the sixties. At the time, the idea of breeding dogs as a business had not yet been developed and most of the litters were homemade and raised by amateurs. It could be the rich man with his staff or the plain hunter, sharing the burden of raising a litter with his wife and children: dogs and humans, whatever the wealth, used to live close to each other.

Things changed later, as soon as people realized that breeding and selling dogs could become a profitable business. Dogs began to be seen as "livestock" and raised as you would raise a farm animal. Separate living quarters with kennels were built and sometimes multiple litters were raised simultaneously. Pups are nowadays sometimes raised at a

distance from human made noises and sometimes experience less interactions with humans. Commercial kennels, however, are not the only ones to blame, hunters have changed as well. Some hunters now live in the city, they do not want to share their apartment with muddy dogs and send them to live “in the countryside” (locked in kennels) paying someone local human being to go feed and clean them. Some hunters have a detached house in the suburbs, but pups destroy gardens so they end up in a kennel far from the house. Hunters return home late from work, they are tired and they do not feel like interacting with their new pup, even if he has a great pedigree and was paid a lot of money.

If the pup would not be such a thoroughbred but just a farm mutt, things could maybe be easier for him. Some modern purebreds are not that different from thoroughbred horses and are equally nervous and sensitive. We selected these dogs taking speed and reactivity in great account, well... they can now be highly reactive even when we would prefer them not to be. Times and contexts have changed, why people refuse to acknowledge this? I think we should pay more attention to the dogs' needs and remember that the dog is “man best friend”. We should put the pup first and do our best to make him grow into a happy and fearless adult. We should no longer bring a gun shy pup back to the breeder asking for a replacement or a refund, we should, in a few words, be responsible of our actions.

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project](#)!

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# Does a gun-shyness gene exist?

I wrote about this on several occasions and, usually, I do not like re-writing about things I already wrote about but, last week, reading an online forum, I realized that gun-shyness is still a mystery.

People buy dogs, mate dogs, collect dogs but never “waste” time trying to educate themselves about dogs or, more simply, trying to switch their brains on. I am not sure whether you are familiar with Patrick Pageat, he is a French veterinarian and animal behaviourist who wrote the book “L’homme et le Chien” (The Man and the Dog), he writes: *“How can a gun-shyness gene exist? How could nature have foreseen gun powder and shotguns?”*

## Le mythe du gène de la peur du fusil

On trouve dans de nombreux ouvrages la description du gène de la peur du coup de fusil ou encore du gène de la peur du bâton, etc. Le gène de la peur du fusil pose cependant un énorme problème théorique qui est celui de l'extrême prévoyance de la nature qui a bien sûr imaginé qu'un jour l'homme inventerait la poudre et le fusil ! On imagine assez difficilement l'ADN préfigurant l'existence des armes à feu... ou alors on entre dans le domaine de la théologie et non plus de la biologie. Ce qui est moins drôle, c'est que des chiens ont été euthanasiés parce que considérés comme porteurs d'un gène qui les rendrait inaptes et donc impropres à la reproduction.

Aujourd'hui, il existe, dans le cadre des épreuves de qualification pour les chiens de défense, ce qu'on appelle le TAN, le test d'aptitude naturelle – notons qu'« aptitude naturelle » sous-entend que c'est inné. Lors de ce TAN, les chiens subissent une épreuve de réaction au tir du pistolet à amorce. Si le chien a peur, c'est *gravissime*, et le chien est considéré comme très mauvais. Or il faut savoir que le TAN a été créé par des gens qui sont eux-mêmes éleveurs et qui vous expliquent froidement que, si un chien a une mauvaise note, c'est qu'il a été mal préparé pour son test. Ce qui est pour le moins étonnant car soit il s'agit effectivement d'aptitudes naturelles et le chien est comme il

est, soit c'est un examen qu'on fait passer au chien après apprentissage et il s'agit donc d'un acquis, ce qui signifie purement et simplement que le gène de la peur du coup de fusil ne peut pas exister.

Obviously, nature could not have predicted shotguns, but some dogs are indeed gun-shy, why? Are they faulty? I hate seeing dogs labelled as "faulty", their behaviour can be explained through a more refined explanation. These dogs are not "faulty": did you know, for instance, that some dogs are more sensitive than others? This has been demonstrated in humans as well, some people are more sensitive to noise, light and so on and this has been proved scientifically. So, yes, some dogs might be more sensitive than others. Is this genetic? I think so and, in my experience, I found gun-shy dogs in some breeds more than in others. These dogs, and more generalizing these breeds, were also more difficult to rehabilitate. Generally speaking, again, these dogs were quite reactive, fast and somehow nervous and... sensitive! It is selection, it is how we want dogs to be: let's try to compare an English Setter (or a Border Collie) and a Neapolitan Mastiff: they are not exactly the same thing.

We should not, however, talk about fear, analyzing sensitivity would be much more appropriate. Are there dogs who are more sensitive to noise? Yes, but being sensitive to something, does not mean being fearful of something. Yet, some dogs are afraid of gunshots, but fear came after sensitivity and was triggered by something external to them. What do most of the fearful dogs have in common? Could environmental factors play a role? Most of the gun-shy dogs I met (in about 20 years spent around gundogs), had indeed something in common: they all had been poorly socialized.

I am not going to write about puppy socialization in this article, but I am going to point that, sometimes, hunters, as well as dog breeders, do not pay enough attention to this fundamental process. The "average" hunting dog is born in the countryside and grows up in a kennel, an environment which tends to be rather silent and lacks of natural stimuli. These quiet, rural settings do not fully prepare the pup for his future life.

Furthermore, once adopted by the new owner, the pup continues living in a similar environment and tends to be left there until he turns 7 or 8 months old. Only a few hunters start training pups early, as they fear they would get “ruined”. Once deemed old enough, the pups are put in the car (so far they had generally been in the car only to go to a veterinarian) and are taken somewhere to be tested on a bird (that is going to be shot), generally on a quail, or, even worse, to a shooting party.



Having had no exposure to gunshots, two things might happen: 1) the dog has a very strong temperament (and his owner is very lucky!) and he does not mind the noise or 2) we witness a disaster and the dog becomes gun-shy. Unfortunately, these things happen and... frequently! I did not invent anything and, sadly, I have seen this happen more than once and I can tell you about people who keep repeating these same mistakes. There are people who end up owning only gun-shy dogs: each pup they purchase will turn in a gun-shy adult. Some of them realized this and now only purchase adult dogs. Some other people, on the other hand, had never owned a gun-shy dog despite having purchased all their dogs as puppies, from different sources..

Let me tell a short story: M. Smith purchased a high quality puppy and raised her in the kennel. Once she turned 7 months old, he introduced her to birds and gunshots with the fore mentioned techniques and she became gun-shy. During the

following YEARS she overcame, more or less, her gun-shyness but her breeder donated a second pup, a sister to the previous one, to Mr. Smith, as a replacement. Mr. Smith, after committing the same mistakes for many years, had the chance to meet some properly socialized puppies and decides raise her differently. The new pup grows up experiencing noises and living different experiences: she is not gun-shy and she is much much bolder than her older sister.

PS. Don't forget to take a look at the [Gundog Research Project](#)!

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## **We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 4) – 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 (Fieldwork 4) – By T. Mostert**

### **Hunting your Dog, the Best Experience**

Flake kept on improving to the stage where we shot several birds over her, placed birds and wild birds. The single biggest mistake you can make with placing birds, is making the game it too easy. The dog should work, work hard for each and every bird, some days I placed no birds or only ran her once other dogs have cleared a field. When you do place birds, place them towards the end and the middle of the field. As said before, if you only place birds on the edges or drainage

ditches etc the dog learns to run straight up and down or straight towards these places. It takes many, many, birds to build a bird dog, but there is a thing as too many birds too.

The problem with pen raised and placed birds is that they do not act like wild birds, they do not entirely smell like wild birds either. We say they smell more poop than bird, the bird poop often sticks to their feet. That too can create a problem where the dog associates the poop smell with birds and often a empty point is where there is a concentration of bird poop. You absolutely have to train on wild birds or birds that were released much earlier in the season.



## Flake

During these training sessions Sten pointed out how I can read the dog, and what I should look for, some of the things are such small changes in the dog that I would never have noticed them if he did not bring my attention to them. Learn to read your dog's body language and you will only benefit from it. It was this that helped me see a problem coming with Flake's advance (roading) and flush before it became a habit. Time, attention and the right type of birds make a great bird dog.

Some days Flake will still struggle with running birds or figuring out what is fresh bird scent and what is just scent left behind, especially in areas that are close to where pen birds are raised in volumes. She still needs to learn how to pin running birds or cut them off, she needs to adapt to how the wind flows over and around obstacles and barriers and how to use this. I am not overly concerned about this, it will

fall in place with experience and exposure.

### **Points to ponder:**

1. *The 3 P's: a pointing dog can be stationary only while pissing, pooing or pointing.*
2. *Stay calm when your dog point, do not rush him.*
3. *Praise the dog only if you are 100% sure there is a bird.*
4. *Do not allow your dog to steal a point, it becomes a habit.*
5. *Give your young dog a fresh warm bird to smell and hold, he will remember the scent.*
6. *Only you can decide when to shoot for your dog, too soon.*
7. *A warm bird is harder for a young dog to pickup, some will even point them, encourage the dog, don't force it!*
8. *There is such a thing as too many birds, especially over a short time.*
9. *There is such a thing as the wrong type of birds, placement is important.*
10. *Just because the dog points one type of bird does not mean he will point another kind, teach him!*



I dreamt of Africa...

Heat and exhaustion play havoc with a pointing dogs ability to find birds. Keep the dog hydrated, do not run them for more than 15 minutes in the heat (calculate the resting time

multiplying the run time for three, eg: 10 minute run = 30 minute break). If you train and see the dog losing speed and focus, break and leash the dog.

**Through all of this you should be having fun and so should your dog. Being a Professional Hunter, I have been fortunate enough to have hunted many places and many species over many countries. *I can honestly say that hunting over my own HPR rates in the top 3 of all the hunts I have ever had the fortune to guide or complete by myself, right up there with dangerous game hunting thrill wise.***

This concludes my ramblings and encouragements for now. There are many other factors you need to take into consideration when running your dog on field, hunting or competing. Like a good general you need to train and plan before you go into battle, mentally and physically you and your dog need to be ready.

Go find a Legend and train with them. Best of luck to all of you.

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## **Ten years ago, a nice dinner by Angelo Cammi**

English abstract

[To read full article in Italian click here.](#)

***Angelo Cammi is a well respected British Pointing dogs judge and an English Setter lover. He is president of the Piacenza Chapter of the Italian Setter Society (SIS Piacenza).***

This article was given to all those who were present at the Piacenza English Setter Specialty trial on wild birds (selvaggina natural), last summer. It is a very important article as it points out what happened, and what did not happen, during the last 10 years. Cammi wrote the article in Italian and intended it to be read by Italians but, we have to remember that people from all over Europe are interested in Italian English Setters. It is therefore important that they could receive valuable information as well. I am not going to translate the whole article (you can use google translate), but I (Rossella) am going to summarize the first part and then translate the last paragraphs.

The first part of the article is about a dinner. Some setter people are eating a pizza and discussing relevant topics for the breed, it was the year 2006. The issues discussed were: 1) Zone Doc; 2) Derby (and a Derby for females); 3) Grey Partridge; 4) Training Grounds. Note for foreigners:

- The Zone Doc were/are ENCI approved field trial grounds. The plan was to have special trialing grounds on which birds were absolutely wild and natural. Among the first selected areas there were natural preserves, parks and so...
- The Derby is a trial mimicking grand quete and reserved to dogs who: 1) are under 3 years old,; 2) were born in Italy and 3) had never been trialed before. The Derby is run solo.
- Grey Partridge... well... these birds seemed/seem to be sort of extinct in nature but, being valuable birds for dog trialing, Italians dream/wish/hope to have them back.
- Training grounds: they do not exists but for some B and C selected areas, which are extremely small and limited. To train a dog you basically have to act like a poacher for most part of the year. Why? We do not know and the question was/is... how can this change?

These were the topics discussed over dinner by Cammi and his

fellow settermen... what happened 10 years later? This is the second part of the article:

- The plan to set up Zone D0C did not work. All trialing grounds now are Zone D0C and more and more grounds became D0C, including private estates (in which birds are not always wild and natural). Why?
- Derby for females? We currently do not have any.
- Training grounds? Nothing has changed.



Hammer owned by Del Borghi

### **CAMMI'S THOUGHTS (full translation)**

Anything else to consider? Yes, many things. At the Derby 2016 we had 170 entries and 4 awards (about 2%). Yes, what matters is genetic selection, breeding... but year after year we have less and less awards. Of course we have many working champions, many famous trailers but? Something is obviously not working even when we celebrate dogs winning "important" (so defined) competitions, competitions that are, indeed,

spectacular but concreteness is a different thing and working standards and trial rules are focused on it. Basically the technically acclaimed "selective breeding" is giving birth to specimen that are getting more and more different to a real pointing dog. The judge's evaluations we read say: ***"Performance suitable to the kind of trial, typical gallop, does not meet birds. Excellent gallop, asked to run a second round bumps into birds"***. An endless number of evaluations look like this one so? What are we selecting for?

#### **CAMMI's COMMENTS (full translation)**

Some ideas and some declaration are born randomly (and with some self-reference) especially when they are apt to find populist consensus but nothing comes after, at least not yet.

I do not want to be polemic, polemics do not bring anything and do not help. I want to understand and the thirst for knowledge is always young and strong.

#### **CAMMI'S CONCLUSION (full translation)**

*I thank those who chose to go hunting/shooting with an English Setter. They preserve the pointing breeds's authenticity. Congratulation and please always remember avidity, intelligence and conformation, this will preserve the English Setter!*

***Angelo Cammi, Piacenza (Italy), April 2016***