

Mind the Wind by Tok Mostert

So... you think running a good field dog is all about the dog, maybe, but a good handler will be able to interpret the conditions and “assist” the dog to have the best possible chance of finding birds.

Temperature, moisture content, humidity and wind all play a part in the scenting conditions and that is something all dog handlers should keep in mind, if they want to consistently hit birds on the field. Often handlers will say, the wind just did not work for us or the birds were holding tight and the dog could not find them. Even a great dog will have days in which the wind plays havoc with their scenting ability, often it leads to flushes.

Learn to read the wind and maybe you and your dog will be hitting birds when others do not.

I was running Flake on a huge field with a stone edge, or wall, forming the left border of the field. The wind was also blowing from left to right that day and it was pumping. We were about 20 minutes into her run when I sent her right onto the wall, as in tight against it. Sure enough within 30 meters she locked up solid on point. She could scent the bird (pheasant) but could not locate it exactly. All the signs were there for a solid point, front foot up, tail dead steady and swollen the first 10cm, head at the right height for the terrain, but there was a very , very slight left to right movement of the head. I gave her the advance command and sure enough she put the bird onto its wings. The bird was no more than a meter ahead of her, yet it was hard to place. This set my mind to thinking of how the airflow over the stone wall affected her scenting ability. Not only that ,but how does the wind affect bird scent in general with obstacles, trees and other obstructions in the way?



Any wind?

On the internet, you can find diagrams (google wind flow and select images as search option – we can't reproduce them for copyright reasons) that show airflow around/over obstacles, this clears up a few things I wanted to know. Turbulent air behind the obstacles will make it hard for a dog to place a bird 100%. The air that compresses around or over a obstacle creates a narrower band of scent that is also faster than the ambient wind. Certain obstacles will create pockets of no airflow behind them at certain wind speeds, imagine a bird holding tight behind a tree and there is virtually no air to carry its scent to the dog, even tough there is a good breeze going.

Good retriever trainers will tell you that sometimes the hardest retrieve for a dog is in a depression of a field, it is almost airless in those pockets. Now... just imagine how close your dog needs to be to find scent in such a situation!

Maybe a great dog will have this figured out by itself in time, I am going to help my dog by paying more attention to this.

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.](#)

Next article [here](#).

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

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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.

We are Losing Legendary Methods 1 – by T. Mostert

Brief intro: here at Dogs & Country we are often looking to publish good articles, articles dog people can benefit from. I (Rossella) was therefore very happy when Tok Mostert, from Sweden, accepted to share his writings with us and our readers. At the moment, unfortunately, I do not have time to translate them in Italian, but if anyone wants to help out with the translation, I'd be happy to share that as well ☺

Part 1: We are losing legendary methods

Two years ago I came into the hunting dogs world, I knew nothing, I could not make a dog sit or stay, much less retrieve, track or hunt birds. Sure I tried and watched videos and read as much as I could, but it is not the same. I saw a man handle a dog in the field one day, and I understood that I needed help. Needed may be the wrong word, craved is more in line with what I felt.



Flake in Sweden...

You ask opinions on trainers and you get maybe 10 different opinions on every trainer, good, bad, asshole you name it, for everyone that had a good thing to say, there was 10 others with bad things to say. Screw it, I thought, I will find the right help by simply looking at whose dog I see doing what I want my dog to do and ask who help to train him or her. I did not ask for opinions anymore, I set a goal and found a trainer that suited this goal. When I wanted my dog to have discipline, I went to a man called Jeppe Stridh. Almost two years later, I still go to him, because a dog is never finished, you evolve, the dog evolves, you want to test the limits and see how far the dog will go, and most of the time it is the handler that holds the dog back by not challenging him more. This and reinforcing the old commands again and again is a never ending journey, get use to it and enjoy it.

A few things I remember, sure I forgot many:

1. *Train the owner to train the dog, much harder than it sounds.*
2. *Learn how to read your dog.*
3. *95% Praise, 5% Correction, always time the correction perfectly.*
4. *Make sure you understand the commands before you try teaching the dog, otherwise keep your mouth shut.*
5. *A collar and a leash are restraints, they can only control a dog by your side. Respect and trust are what makes an invisible leash that stretches as far as your voice, or whistle, carries.*

6. *Do not train with a attitude, dogs do not respond well to assholes (yeah, I heard that a lot).*
7. *If your dog keeps making the same mistake you are doing something wrong, not the dog.*
8. *If you are always doing something wrong, get help.*
9. *Different dogs need different touches while training.*
10. *No matter how good is the trainer you are working with, if you do not put in the effort yourself, you are wasting your time and a good dog!*

I can write a hundred more points to ponder, but that's not the point.



Flake goes to school

Men like Jeppe are few and far in between and we are not taking the opportunities to listen and learn from them. They are the here and now Legends of the dog world that we need to learn from, so all that knowledge will not disappear one day. Not to make us better, but to keep future generations at the top of the game. Yes, dog training evolves and people keep reinventing the wheel, but in the end its results that count and he is one of the Legends who's methodology always works if applied right.

Books, DvD's and video clips are great, but they lack the

essential personal touch that a true Legend brings to training a dog. One Legend's method may not fit you or your dog, but there is always one who's method will.

The most common comments I hear from judges these days is that dogs lack discipline. This is where I started with Flake and thus Part 1, Part 2 will cover retrieving and [tracking](#) with a Legend that flies under the radar.

Harkila Jerva: Field Test

A Siberian wind is blowing. Well I am not that sure it is Siberian but, it is blowing from East and it is very cold. Foreigners imagine Italy to enjoy a wonderful warm and sunny weather all year round. It is a hoax! I bet those involved in tourism spread this rumour, I can assure you that here in Northern Italy we often have very cold winters! What the cold wind is trying to tell me, however, is that the time has come to stop testing my Jerva suit. Those who follow the blog, already know that I was given an outdoor shooting/hunting suit made by [Harkila](#) to test it. I already described the suit's technical features and aesthetic details, you can read about them [here](#), I will now tell you how I tested it and what I think. The suit came in mid October, and I wore it for one month, almost daily. As I work (and study) from home, I do not have to follow a specific dress code and, therefore, in autumn and winter, I go around dressed like... a gamekeeper. Living in the suburbs, I have easy access to the countryside and my dog gets daily walks and training sessions in the fields, this means I have to wear clothes suitable to mud, wind, rain and fog. Once I return home I forget to get changed and I continue the day with the same clothes. This means I might go to the supermarket or to the post office wearing green and brown

country attire, and this also mean I have to look pretty in those clothes. Looking like a gamekeeper is ok, looking like a Canadian lumberjack is not, and the line separating these two is really thin. While wearing my Jerva suit around none seemed to notice me too much which means the clothes were looking nice on me. A friend owning a small boutique saw the jacket, wanted to try it on and asked me about it, about its brand and so on: this clearly defines the Jerva Jacket as stylish!



Well tailored

But let's go on with the actual test in the field, starting from the [jacket](#). The jacket is very comfortable and the stretch panels allow hunters and shooters to move freely. You can mount your shotgun quickly, without feeling restrained by the sleeves, and you can also sit, lie down and stretch as much as you need to climb in and out of ditches. These same features are enjoyable during dog training: let's say you have to grab the dog quickly... well, you can! I wore the suit during country walks, training, shooting and field trials, in different weathers. When the sun was really high, the jacket proved to be too warm but, on ordinary days (temperatures ranging from 8°C to 15°C) it proved to be perfect for active hunters. What about wind and rain? I will give grade it A+ for wind and B for rain. The Jerva and its zips kept the wind at bay and proved capable of dealing with light rain. It was fine for short walks in the rain, or for light rain and fog, but I

do not think it can cope with heavy rains and/or hours spent under the rain. Burrs and briars? The jacket does not pick up burrs, which is a very good thing, but I would not use it to go into very thick bushes. I entered some to follow the dog working on pheasants but, I would not recommend the it for heavy duty tasks, like handling hounds during boar hunting.

Woodcock hunting? It might do, and I would surely recommend it for deer/boar stalking, being the cloth extremely silent. I love its pockets, while not making you look bulky, they are capable of containing many many things, I swear!



Pockets

Overall opinion? Would I suggest purchasing the Jerva jacket and, if so, why and for which purposes? The Jerva jacket is comfortable and practical, yet stylish and feminine: women who go hunting and shooting know that it is hard to find all these features fused together in one garment. So, if you mind the look and the quality, you should consider the Jerva. You can wear it in Spring/Autumn, when temperatures are agreeable, but weather can change quickly, ignoring what the forecast said. This jacket is perfect for dog training, field trials, country walks looking for mushrooms and unicorns and for shooting/hunting/stalking, provided you do not practice these activities in extreme environments and weathers. If you want to be outside in cold weather, [Harkila Kana](#) will be perfect

for you.

Let's now talk about the trousers: I have already described them and, people reacted to them in the same way they reacted to the jacket so, as far as the look, they are Italian approved. Right before receiving them, I purchased a pair of trekking trousers at LIDL. I admit the only reason I bought them was the colour, as they are the same colour as heather but, anyway, my emotional purchase allowed me to compare them with something of far better quality. Harkila's Jerva, in fact, costs about 10 times the LIDL trousers and there is a reason for it. While LIDL trousers have a great price-quality ratio, the Harkila's cost more, but offer more. Which are the main differences? Material, shape (the way they fit) and, again, noise. Most synthetic waterproof and water resistant fabrics are, indeed, noisy: you move, they swish alerting any preys. Jerva trousers, instead, do not swish and, while being light, offer a reasonable amount of protection: I could feel the nettles wearing the LIDL ones while it did not happen with the Harkila's. As for being waterproof, I think they are both water resistant but, as said about the jacket, I would not recommend these garments in heavy rain. While not waterproof, however, the Jerva dry extremely quickly: I had to face some tall and wet grass during a trial. I was wearing wellies but, being short, the trousers came in contact with grass and could not handle that much water but, despite we had no wind and had only a mild sun, they dried in less than half an hour.



Stretch panels

Last but not least... how do the trousers look once worn? I am posting a couple of pictures for you to see by yourself, they are a little big for me but, nevertheless they look fine. Like the jacket, they have some stretch panels which allow you to move freely and jump from one place to another. You can walk in them, run in them and climb on steep hills. They are comfortable, but they do not make you look like an housewife in pyjamas, smart ladies know this is definitely a good point! It is easy to keep the Jerva suit clean by letting the mud dry and then brush it away. For now, I machine washed the trousers without detergent, not to spoil their water resistance, but looking forward to wearing the suit again in the spring, I plan to buy a specific detergent for Goretex and other

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On steadiness (... and obedience!)

As soon as Briony became steady to flush I, full of pride, posted some videos on Facebook. The road that brought us to steadiness was a long one, I was extremely happy to have

reached what, months early, seemed to be unattainable. Briony was originally purchased to be my personal shooting dog and indeed she became a good one. She knew how to locate birds, point, be steady on point and retrieve the killed ones but, like all the Italian shooters, I did not even think to make her steady to wing and shot. I simply did not care and she spent years "chasing" after the bird was produced, until I realized she was good enough to run in field trials.

The videos uploaded slowly but, minutes after they became visible to the public, I began receiving several private messages. Those messages, in the weeks and months ahead, became questions asked face to face. People wanted to know if I used an e-collar, or if I shoot her in the butt, a very popular method suggested by many (in)famous trainers. My answer was that steadiness derived from obedience, an answer puzzled most of the listeners. They could not believe that the tools I used were a lead, a check cord and a whistle, and the few humans who did believe me asked me to make miracles: a woman sort of wanted me to make is HPR steady overnight using the internet!



I do not have superpowers, but maybe my mentor does, as a matter of fact he is widely known as the “Shaman”, or as “White Feather”. White Feather (from here on WF) has been knowing me for a very long time: I was one of his students at the three months class (!!!) to become a certificate stalker (deer, roe buck, fallow deer, boar...) and he taught me during the course I attended to become a certified biometric data collector (we measure and establish the age of stalked and hunted game). He saw me and interacted with me several times during trials, gatherings, conferences and so... yet, before accepting to “train” me, he wanted to meet me again and look at me under a different light. Our first formal meeting happened over a cup of espresso, we were seated at table by the street, Briony was on lead and a cat passed by: I prevented any possible reactions and he appreciated that, a training session was scheduled for the following day.

I have to admit I was a little worried, the man was Elena Villa’s (that woman won all she could win with GSPs, in Italy

and abroad) mentor, he was a well known retired gamekeeper and he had owned, trained, judged and handled hundreds of dogs and shoot over them, in Italy, Germany, Austria and several Eastern European countries. But, most of all, he, himself, probably had the most amazing mentor Italy gave birth to. Born at the end of 1800, Giacomo Griziotti (in my city there are a street and a college dorm in his name) is still deemed to be one of the best judges, handlers, trainers and writers involved with pointing breeds. His first and only book, despite being expensive and hard to find, is still regarded as the Bible, no wonder I was both excited and worried! WF wanted to test me and Briony, if we had passed the test he would have trained us for free, but we had to be perceived to be a good cause.



After another espresso (we both like coffee), we moved to the training ground and I had my first shocking lesson on the meaning of “obedience”. I opened the car and Briony’s cage to let her out. WF quickly made us clear that she could not leave the cage, nor the car without his permission. During the

following months, his permission became “my permission”; she had to learn to sit and stay if I had to cross a ditch and then come later, if and when called. While all my friends were enjoying their shooting season, me and Briony were practicing sit/stay/come/drop to whistle daily, whatever the weather and the place. We trained in the countryside, in the city, in the shops, with or without stimuli. It was hard and even depressing: I spent months studying fish inspection for my veterinary degree and practicing sit/stay/drop!



But then it came the day. Not only Briony was dropping to whistle, she was also steady to game and she had become an obedient and reliable dog (and I passed my fish inspection exam as well). Trials came next and all the hard and boring work brought to fruition, but this is another story. At the moment I am still incredulous and proud to be part to such a long standing gundog training tradition.