

Break it Down- by Tok Mostert

There is no doubt that seeing a well trained dog doing everything right is a pure delight to owner/handler or observer, not to mention a judge. The seamless way they cut up a field missing no ground, the sudden stop and lock up on point, the flush on command, the stop, the marking of the fallen bird, the glance for permission to retrieve, the retrieve and the delivery all flowing like a gentle mountain stream over smooth rock. Pure dog poetry in motion!

What few understand is how exactly you get a dog to that level. Many fail due to their lack of experience, the experienced fail due to their lack of adapting. There is nothing more heartbreaking to watch than a handler train one dog after another in the same way, and making the same mistakes, dog after dog. For the novice it is a minefield of advice and methods, some good some totally disastrous!! Some novices will seek advice from the old dog hands, other will shun all help.

I have my own way of training a dog, most of it is old school, some of it is purely my way of doing things, I still do things wrong, but I learn from that pretty quickly when I fail my dog. Yes, I fail my dog, not the dog fails me. If I have not trained or exposed my dog to certain things, I am failing my dog, but that is another topic.



Getting back to watching a dog do everything right. To get to that level a good handler/trainer would have broken down every single step in the opening scenario and then he would have

also compartmentalized the individual steps into single separate training sessions. Don't get it?

The retrieve can be broken down as follows:

1. Dog sitting steady by your side
 2. Dog looks at you when you whisper his name or click your tongue
 3. Dog takes dummy, or bird, from your hand on command, does not chew or play
 4. Dog stays sitting as you walk away, does not drop the bird or dummy
 5. Dog comes straight in when called, still holding the dummy
 - 5.1 Dog does not keep circling you with dummy or bird
 - 5.2 Dog does not drop the bird/dummy at your feet
 - 5.3 Dog sits calmly with dummy in his mouth until you give him the deliver command
 6. Dog holds steady on a cast, waits for command
 7. Dog does not lift on the cast
 8. Dog marks cast
 9. Dog does not move when you walk and pick up dummy or bird
 10. Dog does not move when you place multiple dummies out
 11. Dog does not switch dummies/birds when they are placed together

This gives you a general outline of how small the different steps can be broken down into. It is the same for every single thing you train. The point, the flush, the way the dog works a field, everything. I have said times before, sit down and decide what signals you will use, whistle, hand or verbal, train them into yourself long before you try and teach them to the dog, this is crucial!

Do not be in a hurry to weave this all together into your invisible leash. Once the dog can 100% of the time complete

these micro exercises you can start putting 2 together, then 3 and so on. This is the only way to forge a unbreakable invisible leash. Few dogs fall apart during trials, most of them fall apart under high volume high pressure shoots and hunts, this is exactly the time you can least afford it or correct it.

Many people wait for the season to open so they can let their dogs run on field and find birds, this is foolish when you can train so many other aspects before the field season opens.

Keep it fun, keep it focused!

Are you interested in gundogs? [Check out the Gundog Research Project!](#)

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There is no off season, just time off- by Tok Mostert

Spring is drawing ever closer and our field season has pretty much closed down. It has been a long hard season for Flake, many hours, many miles and many birds. Off days where non existing: we always had a trial or a hunt going on, that was in between the training.

A season like we had takes its toll on a dog, mentally and physically. No matter how well conditioned the dog may be at the start of a season, he is likely to lose weight during the peak of the season. Just like losing weight, a dog will also lose some discipline, it cannot be helped, or prevented,

unless you cut way back on hunting time. As said before, an over disciplined dog does not hunt well, neither does a dog without any discipline. No matter at what level you start at, discipline levels will deteriorate during a field season. Prolonged periods of time that the dog spends away from you naturally make the dog rely more on himself, this is normal and part of the learning curve for a dog, but it also brings complications. Spotting it is pretty easy if you had a baseline for discipline when the season started. Tell tale signs are the need to repeat commands, the dog taking a extra second to respond to the whistle, or ignoring commands completely.

Fixing the issues that came up during the season cannot be done effectively without resting the dog and taking a step back from hunting or trials. Most of us cannot afford to do this without missing out on many opportunities to hunt with the dog. All we can do is try and limit the amount we lose during the season. What compounds things even more is that there is no real off season. Once our field trials end, along with hunting, our water training and tests start, so does our tracking tests. It is common that a dog does well during the first year and progressively slides away the year after if attention is not paid to the issues that came up. How do we fix this? The short answer is to go back to basics, some will have to go way back and others may start in the middle, how do we know this, a simple but extensive way of judging where your dog is at, is to do a "end of season" evaluation. A simple series of "tests" with increasing levels of difficulty to establish a baseline from which to start and to highlight the areas that need more focused training.



Tok & Flake!

How do you establish a baseline

1. Control the environment, leash, no leash, fenced area, unfenced area, no distractions, many distractions.
2. Here is the only place and time you DO want the dog to fail.
3. Keep it simple, heal, sit, stay, come and stop. Increase the time or distance or both gradually until the dog becomes uneasy, that is your limit.
4. Balls, caps, dummies can be used to distract or entice the dog into breaking, do not let them retrieve anything, you are not evaluating that part of their work now.
5. Use other people and or dogs to distract your dog, see how your dog keeps contact with you.
6. This is not the time to correct the dog, this is a evaluation.
7. Make notes of the problem areas, there will be more than one.
8. You will have picked up bad habits too, focus on yourself and see what habits you need to break.
9. If you have to, break up the evaluation over several days, but focus on every aspect you can.
10. Be prepared to be disappointed.

Personally I will be taking a break from any type of training but discipline as soon as our season is completely over. I have estimated that I will need 2 weeks of intensive obedience training before I will see a noticeable difference in

sharpness, that is for both the dog and myself. It will take at least 6 to 8 weeks before I will have Flake back to her pre season level of obedience. This is with training at least 45 to 60 minutes per day on obedience only, dogs don't make mistakes when they are fresh, they make them when they are tired, mentally.

Be confident, be firm and never forget that you and the dog should enjoy what you are doing.

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Too much of a gundog – by Tok Mostert

As I walked through the door of the large gunshop, the familiar aroma of gun oil mixed with freshly ground coffee filled my sense of smell. The well stocked bookshelves drew my attention and I headed to the dog training section, maybe hoping to find a quick fix to training a better gundog. With a pile of books under my arms, I settled in the plush leather couch to learn a thing or two, I did learnt something, but not what I wanted.

The generic layout is one thing, but every chapter in every book that covers selecting a puppy may as well have been plagiarism, it is way too one dimensional and generic. Pages and pages of breeders and breeds, what dog does what and how to select your puppy. You can speak to several top trainers

and breeders and you will get a diverse opinion on how to select a pup, almost everyone has their own way of picking a dog from a litter. The basics is and always will be, reputable breeder and pure bloodlines. That is a good baseline start, but I have seen untypical dogs that do not adhere to the breed standard hunt circles around the show pony dogs, the same for breed royalty.



Flake

There is no guarantee that even with the best breeder and the best litter, you will get what you want in a dog, besides the dogs personality there is one essential thing that is going to determine whether the dog turns out to be what you expected, YOU!

As a ex Professional Hunter I'll tell you we used the term over gunned when a client arrived with a large caliber rifle that he could not shoot well, it happens more often than I like, but too much gun is a bad thing, just like too much dog is. The very first consideration anyone should have when selecting a breed or puppy should be their ability or level of experience with training a dog. Hard dogs will find every single weakness you have and exploit it to the fullest! Many, many handlers eventually turn to the e-collar for help out of despair, they should have made it easy on themselves and

picked a dog that could suit their ability. I fully understand the wish, need or desire to have a huge, hard working and strong male dog, but can you handle his stubborn manner and contain and channel his exuberance? Anyone that has ever trained two dogs from the same litter, knows that the two individuals need individual training methods and adjustments.

Take a long hard look at yourself and acknowledge your ability and skills, then select a puppy to suite your ability. A first time owner that knows nothing about training dogs is far better off with a mild mannered dog than a wild spirited dog. Nothing wrong with either, as long as they match your ability.

Too much dog for your ability will simply frustrate and infuriate you, along with making you negative. It is also the reason why some handlers only train what the dog is good at, a sure way of wasting the dogs potential and true ability. Running too much dog that does not listen or obey you, is far worse than running a mild dog that follows your commands and responds to your instructions. You are also more likely to succeed on field and retrieving with the mild dog, blood tracking being the exception were the hard dog may be better.

Personally I believe even a average breeder can deliver a top dog, it all depends on the handler and trainer. My method may not be conventional or rational, but it works for me. Choose wisely, train smartly and hunt well!

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On Italians training, hunting and trialing abroad

Italy won the European Cup for British Pointing Breeds (Grande Quete), the European Championship for English Setters and the European Championship for English Pointers (other results are still pending at the moment). Everybody is happy, but many rumours started and the social media went crazy. I read every sort of rumors, polemics, attacks and accuses, which I do not want to spread further, but two topics deserve a deeper analysis, especially the second one. People complain about dogs whose nationality changes to make them able to enter the competition. Right? Wrong? I think this is a grey area. Italy has a huge number of dogs whose natural qualities make them suitable to these high level competitions. There are dozens, or more likely hundreds, of Italian English Setters and English Pointers that, potentially, could do very well. No other country can claim the same but... Some dogs have been seen and campaigned more than others because there are big fishes and small fishes. If you are a sardine, forced to swim among tuna, you will soon realize you cannot afford the trendiest trainer, nor the amazingly expensive travels all over Europe to stay on the top the circuit. Your dog will not have the same opportunities of a "richer" dog, you are perfectly aware he is unlikely to be asked to represent Italy. Maybe it is a good dog but, to compete at certain levels, being good is only part of the package.

So, let's imagine you gave up any hope to compete in the European Cup but, let's say, Transilvania proposes you a place in its team, would you accept? And if you, Mr. Sardine, accept, are we entitled to persecute you? I don't think so and, let's be honest, what would any of us do, if offered such an opportunity? What would I do? I do not know, but I might say yes to a country I feel connected to (I am not very

patriotic, I know...), whereas I would probably decline the offer if it were coming from a country I don't know anything about, nor I speak the language. This said, I do not think I have any rights to be judgmental about other people choices.

The second, more important, topic I am going to discuss still relates to foreign countries, but in another way. When I published the article on [training problems in Italy](#) and on the [scarcity of game at Italian trials](#), someone suggested me writing something on Italians going abroad for hunting, training and trialing. Well, the truth is that, as far as small game, Italy is in a bad place. These animals are poorly, if ever, managed, and if you want to hunt or train your dog, going abroad can be a good choice. Can you train a dog in Italy? Of course you can, but it is going to be way harder, and your risk to pay in fines the same amount you will spend for a nice training holiday abroad. There is nothing wrong in going abroad to offer a dog more opportunity. If you have the time and you can afford it, why not? Serbia, nowadays is very popular, but before Serbia, Italian hunters and trainers had colonized other countries. I am not concerned about going abroad, I am perplexed about being dependent on "abroad".

Many important Italian field trias (with CAC valid for the Italian Championship) are now run in Serbia. If you ask why, you hear different answers and some, the most convincing ones, pertains grounds, game and laws/local realities. Let's start from grounds. Giacomo Lugari (an Italian famous hunter and video maker) , answering a post on Facebook remembered the European Cup run in 1999 in Tollara, Piedmont, Northern Italy. So the grounds... we have some suitable ones! I think so, but what about the game? The answer, this time , sadly is a no. I have never been to Serbia, but many, many Italians routinely go there and come back with happy tales about grey partridge. You cannot imagine how many partridges are there! You cannot believe! This is what they tell me and, yes I can believe them. I know what happens with grouse in the UK and I know

that good wildlife management can produce tremendous results. Proper wildlife management is demanding, time consuming, costly and forces farmers, hunters, wildlife experts, gamekeepers and politicians to work together. Something must be sacrificed and people must learn to negotiate good meeting points, this is difficult but not impossible.



Someone justify Italy stating that Serbian agricultural techniques are 50 years older than ours and that this is a good thing for greys. Probably but... If we truly are 50 years ahead, we should be able to use our more advanced knowledge to recreate an habitat that might suit greys. I refuse to believe this cannot be done: do you remember Renaissance? Italy gave birth to Leonardo da Vinci and other geniuses and now, their descendents, cannot successfully manage four birds?

And what about the money? In Serbia up to 500 dogs run in a day. Each entry costs 30 euros, multiply them for 500 and subtract something for "expenses". Accessing training grounds costs about 100 euros a day (regardless of the number of dogs you have with you), so remember about these money as well. I am a terrible accountant, but I came to the conclusion that Serbian grey partridge are producing quite an income. The Serbians have been smart in recognizing this and I think that grey partridge are improving the lives of those living there. There are the training grounds money, the field trials entries, people staying in hotels, people dining in restaurants... The Serbians are doing the right thing, and the Italians? What shall we do, besides thanking them for the

opportunities they provide us? I think that maybe we shall get inspired and consider the grey partridge an excellent business partner: some more determined people would resuscitate dinosaurs for similar amounts of money!

The laws, adds someone else, we have more bureaucracy and more rules than Serbia. We have animal right activist and an outdated law on wildlife management and hunting. This law must be changed , says someone else, but in Italy is hard to be proactive, each time you try, obstacles get thrown in the way. This is true, but is this enough to give up the hope in a better countryside, for better fieldsports? I truly don't know.

Do you click with your dog? – by Tok Mostert

Just in case folks think I have forgotten about training dogs□

Do you click with your dog?

It normally took years for trends to reach African shores, that was until Africa discovered the worldwide web. Information and training techniques spread like wildfires over a sun-dried African savannah, for good or for bad these techniques were spread like the gospel and seen as the miraculous training method. This, unfortunately, does not only apply to Africa, but to many parts of the world.

To break it down, you need to have a comprehensive understanding of how a dog's mind works.

A dog understands his name by repetitive training and positive reinforcements. A dog understands commands several ways, you

can force it like with force fetch training (negative – positive response training) working on a leash is something I consider force training too, although a more positive less negative form of training. You can also use condition training like with a clicker and treats. Then there is the method I believe in, as taught by Jeppe Stridh, the 95% positive reinforcements /praise and 5% correction method, using the red light- green light principles. Although during the initial training phase it would be more correct to say it is a combination of the order of the principles. Right at the start of the training, the very beginning, treats may be used to teach a sit command to a puppy, but it is also the only phase they may get used in. This initial treat is more a bonding exercise, than a treat training exercises as you are replacing the bitch in the feeding cycle.

I could have titled this article *How to confuse your dog and frustrate yourself* because this is exactly what we are doing blending training methods and techniques. The secret, that is no secret at all when training a dog, is and always will be consistency. Besides the verbal and whistle commands a dog responds to tone and body language (as well as hand signals) of the handler too. Keeping everything consistent is what turns a good dog into a better one. Why do I not use the clicker method? Read for yourself and decide.

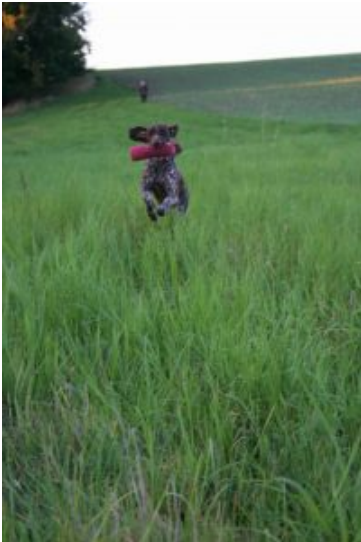
It is my belief and opinion that a dog that works for respect and affection (praise) within a pack type environment will in the end outclass and outlast any dog trained by clicker and or treats. If you use a clicker and treats, the only reward your dog receives is the treat and limited freedom. My preferred method rewards the dog with unlimited freedom, praise and a understanding of where it fits into the pack, it also teaches the dog respect. Besides all of the above, it builds confidence and trust in both the dog and the handler while forging a stronger bond between them. Contrary to what people believe my hunting dog is not kept in a kennel and then cut

loose every now and again. My dog lives with me, on the couch, on the bed, in the car, but I can at anytime give my dog a command when I no longer wish for him to be on the bed or couch and he will comply!

You do not need skills to train with a clicker, neither do you need confidence or ability. You are solely relying on the clicker and treats to train the dog. With limited skill and ability, you are no leader to your dog, you are a treat dispenser! When a dog lives in the wild, there are no treats to teach him, there is a pecking order within the pack environment to which every dog adheres or gets rebuked by one of the pack members. It is a simple and common language that dogs have developed over hundreds of years, why change what the dog understands?

It is common knowledge that the level of control/discipline during trial competitions have decreased over the past 40 plus years, the reason has nothing to do with the ability of the dogs but rests solely with the trainers who either train using "new" methods or prescribes to the philosophy that wilder dogs hunt better. A multidiscipline hunting dog needs a multidimensional training method using consistent commands and corrections executed at exactly the right moment.

A good trainer, or handler, will plan every single detail of his training sessions down to the finest details. He will know exactly which commands to use, when to apply more correction or when to give more encouragement. He will have a confident body posture and language, he will anticipate an error by the dog and correct it at exactly the right time. His tone will be steady and simple without repeating commands or physically touching the dog. There will be no confusing, or contradictory, commands given. The dog will clearly understand what is expected from him during these sessions. If you lack the confidence and ability seek help, training in front of the mirror by yourself is a good start, so is writing down your commands and memorizing them.



Flake

Many clicker trainers find themselves frustrated and confused once they have to work a dog in a uncontrolled environment. Dogs that run after rabbits and chase cats are common. Dogs that do not socialize well with other dogs and people are not uncommon either. Once the dog reaches a distance away from its handler where the clicker is no longer effective, it is pure chaos. Making it even worse is that now the handler tries to “speak” to the dog using other methods with disastrous results. You cannot speak Afrikaans to a Chinese dog and expect it to understand you! Why start training with the clicker if you know it will not be effective once the dog reaches a certain distance from you, why go and teach a whole new language to the dog if you could have used one language right from the start?

Working a dog out to 300-400 meters takes more than skill. The invisible lead that runs between dog and handler is woven from skill, ability, respect, praise, trust and glued together by the bond of interaction forged by hours and years of work. I have unfortunately seen more dogs getting trained with e-collars after clicker training. I will be humble and say this, if a dog is happy and you can control his three basic instincts (to hunt, to mate, to fight) when the dog is off leash then no matter what method you have used, you have succeeded.

Next article [here](#).

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Name Training by Tok Mostert

I have seen many people train dogs yet I have seen very few people name train their dogs. I had a interesting conversation with Flake's breeder yesterday on this particular subject.

Sure your dog knows it's name, but do you use it consistently before every command? I know I do.

"Flake – Out"

"Flake – Sit"

" Flake – Stay"

" Flake – YES, YES"

Sounds pretty simple and for the most part name training a dog could be seen as pretty useless, but for those of us who train multiple dogs and run with bracemates, name training may just give you the edge over someone else.

For instance when your dog is backing another dog on point and they are very close together. Calling your dog back or in with a whistle, may also cause a problem with the dog on point, but if you name train and give the appropriate command you could very easily pull your dog out from the position or even stop him from advancing with the dog on point when their command comes.

Handling several dogs at the same time, has unlimited possibilities and problems, but if your dogs understand that they can only act once their name is called, it makes things easier.

I have seen too many dogs that get confused when they are run together with a brace mate and their brace mate gets a stern command, often your dog will react to this and the moment it does that, it's not hunting and there lies a problem. Use it don't use it, but be prepared to pay the price.

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A Time to Reflect (on Training) by Tok Mostert

I am busy packing for a long holiday, Louise, my companion, says she is actually taking me away so that Flake can get some rest. There is truth in that, sometimes we get caught up in pushing so hard and trying to get to the next level with our gundogs that we forget to have fun, so should your dog. What few of us realize is that the "next level" holds more problems, more challenging training situations and that often we made a mistake in our initial training and that we now have to go back and fix that before we can move on.

If you are serious about your hunting or trial dog, you will always strive for perfection, but you will also know that perfection has many faces. What may be perfect for you, may

not be perfect for a judge or for other handlers. True perfection does not exist, it is only the strive for perfection that is true. Flake is lying in front of the fire right now, oblivious to what I may think, write or feel, content in just letting go of the days training. I guess I should learn from her and do the same, I wish I could. As the glow of the fireplace dances over her speckled body, so the season dances through my mind.

1. She has developed incredibly over the last 6 months when it comes to fieldwork.
2. She has not had a break in 16 months, maybe one or two days certain weeks, sometimes only a day a month.
3. If I don't do my part she will never get further, just like those flames of the fireplace dwindle down and die if I don't keep adding wood.
4. Her hunting season is over, it may have not been perfect, but she has made me proud.
5. She is not better than other dogs, she has just had better opportunities and I need to keep giving her those.
6. I need to pay attention to the early signals of a problem developing, it is easier to prevent a problem from becoming a habit, than it is to break a habit.
7. Going back to basics often builds a better dog.
8. You have to hit the dogs "reset" button at some stage, take a break leave all training and let the dog



be a dog.

As I said above, our season is over until I get back from

Africa, she is getting a break and some time to “reset”. I get time to ponder our season and to break down everything I see as a potential problem or a real problem I picked up during our season together. Some are very small, some are very big, but they all get the same amount of attention and focus.

Some may be happy with a HPR dog that picks up ducks all over the place, I want a dog that picks up a specific duck among the many on the ground, especially the winged ones I select even if there are several. I want a HPR dog that can keep it cool under the guns no matter how many shots go off and how many birds are dropping around her.

I want a dog that takes a straight line into the water on a blind retrieve, in virgin water I want the dog to do this carefully, but straight without hesitation.

I want a dog that follows commands on a blind retrieve, but that can work the thick stuff by himself when I can't help anymore.

I want a dog that does not only focus on the flock of birds he just flushed on command, but also understands to look for the bird that I am shooting at, to make the retrieve easier for him.

I want a dog that can work late season birds and pin them so hard that they don't breath.

Will I get all of this done? Maybe not but it does not stop me from trying or training. It may take longer, It may take new training methods, I can't say for sure. What I can say is that I will be breaking it all down in my head long before I start training and as always, I will start with the basics all over again.

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Gun Proofing your Dog by Tok Mostert

Introducing a dog to gunfire is and will remain a critical element in his training. Many good dogs have been ruined by a wrong use of gunfire and some develop problems later that are not easy to solve. Having a gun shy dog is frustrating and leads down a long path of re-training and sometimes a dog that cannot be hunted at all. The dog becomes so frightened by gunfire that when he does scent a bird he will avoid pointing, as this will lead to a shot or even more shots being fired.

I have a somewhat different approach to training my dogs, gundog or lapdog all receive the same training. Once the puppy has developed a bond with me and has settled in well in our home, but most of all, trusts me I start "Boom Proofing" him. Even though our lap dogs have never been around gunfire, they react the same way (or do not react at all) to loud noises or fireworks, exactly like a gundog. As said above, the puppy must trust you and understand that you offer protection and support, both mentally and physically. I start by "scaring" them a little by dropping a magazine flat on the floor, it should make a slapping sound, not a overly loud banging sound. I do this when the puppy least expects this, a surprise if you will. The natural reaction is for them to scare, run or hide, sometimes both. Here two things are extremely important, your response and the timing of your response. I respond immediately, the puppy has no time to figure out what made the noise, I immediately give both verbal and physical support to the dog. *"Come girl, oh there you are, what a good girl"*. I also offer my physical support by kneeling down and opening my arms to the dog, inviting him to me while giving verbal support. 99% of the time the dog responds by coming to me

immediately, I then heap praise on the dog. As said before, be overly friendly! This is a negative-positive training technique. Always, always respond the same way, immediately, positively and friendly!

Eventually you will have to move up to heavier books! I go around slapping the outside of cupboards ,doors and any flat surfaces too. My response and the dogs always stays the same, eventually they come straight into me at the slap or bang sound, this is what I am aiming for. I do not stop there however, someday I may sneak up behind them and grab a leg or tail (I never hold onto the part I grab, it is a light touch) once again my response is the same, immediate, positive and friendly. Eventually the dog will respond positively immediately, even as you start your response, this is what I aim for. Do not overdo this, every other day or twice a week, once a day, is enough! I still do this and my dogs are between 1 and 7 years old.

Now please understand that to you it may sound like I am terrorizing my dogs, far from it, the incorrect reaction by the trainer is what would be categorized as terrorizing the dog.

Keep in mind we expose dogs to many "surprise" noises, doors slammed, cars backfired, plates and glasses breaking, fireworks etc there are thousands of examples.

A dog that is not accustomed, nor trained, for this often has a hard time when things go wrong. Dogs hang or impale themselves on fences, run through glass doors or run in front of cars every year with the fireworks, my dogs either look for birds or lie sleeping through it. As said before in another article, break down your training, a dog should be able to retrieve before you introduce gunfire like training with the retrieving training. I start with a cast and clap of the hands, move on to a cast and blank pistol (plastic revolver with very low charge caps). When you start with the blank pistol it is a good idea to have another person doing the cast and the shooting, Shoot 10-12 meters away from the dog, keep

the dog steady and offer a lot of verbal support. If the dog shows discomfort at the shot, move further away with the blank pistol, if it does not bother the dog, move closer. Do this for every type of “gunfire” you introduce,. 22,9mm and shotgun should be started at least 20-25 meters away from the dog, further is better. Increase the caliber progressively, do not go from blank pistol to gauge 12 shotgun directly!



Blank pistol first

Read the dog, if he is uncomfortable offer more verbal, or physical support, if you do the blank pistol training right, the dog will already know that following the shot comes a retrieve, which you made a fun thing during the retrieving trainings, that is if you followed my advice. Once you get to the shotgun with the cast and shoot, your dog should be steady to the shot and cast, never let the dog break at the shot, never. Go back a step without the shot to get the dog steady again.

As said clearly before, hunting amplifies any little problems the dog has 1000 times. Get it right in training and you will

have less disappointments during hunting (problems always come up during hunting).

Keep in mind that any negative inputs from you after the shot is going to affect the dog, you may not even realise you are being negative! It only takes three of such sessions to turn a dog gun shy, always, always end on a positive note when training, go back a step if you have to! Remember to have fun when training, the dog must enjoy what he is doing, and his desire to please you must be greater than his fear to fail.

It is so easy to get caught up in getting one thing right that you forget it is only a small piece of a incredible dog you are building, see the bigger picture!

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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 though 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.