

Miracles happen at Sandrigham: Norfolk Trials

Almost three months later, I am finally here to write down what happened. On Sept 7th 2017, in fact, Briony won Novice Stake on Partridge at Sandrigham, organized by the Pointer Club of UK. Some might argue that, well, it's "just" a Novice Stake, but for me it is a great achievement. Briony is not my first English Setter, I got the first one, "Socks" (Slai di Riccagioia), in 1999, but he was a rescue and he came to me after having be discarded by a "pro" trainer and with a bag full of behavioural problems. In his own way, he was a smart dog, we managed to go hunting alone together (he did not want men with shotguns around him), but there was no way I could rehab completely and train him for trials. I had not enough skills, nor experience, and he would not have dealt well with formal training sessions. He, however, opened me new doors as we started training for rough shooting and I got a firearms and hunting license. I met people, got new friends and spent many years rough shooting over English Setters and other pointing breeds up and down the hills of the Northern Apennines. I, somehow, had the chance to watch- and shoot over- hundreds of dogs during those years, and it was an incredible experience. I also began attending trials and to work for canine and shooting magazines which lead me to meet breeders, judges and handlers...



Socks (Slai di Riccagioia)
my first ES

After his death, when I started looking for another setter, I had very clear ideas about what I wanted in my next dog, but not so clear ideas about where to find her! It took months, but I finally located my litter and my puppy, on a farm on the Swiss Alps, not too far from Sankt Moritz (posh dog!). I knew what I needed to know about Briony's dad, but mum was quite a surprise: she was beautiful, gentle and smart. She came with us heeling off lead to the small village's café and then sat quietly under the table. I loved that, as well the whole bloodline registered in the pedigree and the parents' health clearances. When I brought Briony home, people thought she was cute, but too expensive, and that I was going to "ruin" her, training her in my own way and socializing her too much. I just thought she was a terrible pup who did not like me at all. It took quite a while to become friends, probably she was just testing me to be sure she was in good hands!



Ansa del Simano, Briony's

mum



First day of 2017 hunting season

She was naughty, but smart, and she quickly developed in a good hunting companion. Sometimes she had a mind of her own and sometimes she was not the easiest dog to handle, but she surely did not lack of determination and bird sense. She was, and she still is, strong willed and sensitive at the same time. Thanks to friends, we had access to some private estates where she could meet much more birds that she could have met on more affordable – by me – public grounds. Other people introduced her to woodcock and, I still remember the day, with my surprise, she pointed her first snipe. During these hunting seasons, she learnt to work with other dogs and we worked a lot on backing and on remaining steady on point. I must admit I had good teachers, and that skilled hunters helped us to locate birds, but steadiness to wing was not required. Hunters here want the dogs to be steady on point, but after the bird flies, all they wish is to hit it, none cares anymore about the dog.

In the meantime, as she also grew prettier, I entered her at a dog show that took place nearby and, to my surprise, she was awarded a RCAC (RCC), so I decided to continue on this road. Briony, however, had other plans and after a stressful indoor show, she decided she wanted to end her career as a show dog. She had already a CAC in her pockets and I did not want her journey to end. I am not a show person, and I consider dog

shows boring, but I wanted to prove that a good looking working dog, from working (mountain hunting and mountain trials) bloodlines, could make it. So, we went together to take handling lessons with [Richard Hellman](#), a great handler and a great person. Briony seemed to enjoy the lessons and, in August 2015, she became a Show (full) Champion. I also think that having learnt to face the ring she somehow increased her self esteem.



Briony first dog show... RCAC

Field trials were next on my list, but there was a HUGE problem: I did not want to send her away for training, nor to hire a professional trainer as people normally do here. I wanted to train and handle Briony by myself, easier said than done in Italy where field trials are dominated by male professional handlers. But, thanks to an unexpected series of coincidences, in the summer of 2015 I ended up watching the Champion Stake for Pointers and Setters in Northern England and... [I had an awakening!](#) I saw some “ordinary people” handling their dogs to a very high standard and I saw very obedient setters! I was used to see very obedient Drahthaars (GWPs), but the average Italian Setter is usually quite a wild critter! I could not believe setters could be that obedient and, as naïve as it might sound, I was impressed.



Dorback Estate, Scotland,
training with gamekeeper
Brian

Briony herself was pretty wild at the time and her nickname was “Tigress” but, again, unexpectedly, a good mentor came to us. You can read more about Briony’s taming for field trials and about “White Feather” [clicking here](#) but, in a few words, I would describe her [training](#) a demanding task, it was equally rewarding though! It took a while to tame “Tigress”, but as soon as she decided to cooperate, she became impressively reliable and well behaved. This is how we ended up on the moor in the summer of 2016, and this is how my passion for British trials developed even further ([you can read more here](#)). [Our first experience with grouse](#) was not that bad: she always behaved and she kept improving but paid her inexperience with grouse during the English Trials and she paid my inexperience with trials in during the [Scottish – and the English- trials](#). She still needed some fine tunings but, overall, I could not complain. At the end of the circuit, I went home with no awards but determined to save money and to go back in 2017.



Haughton Hall, roading a hare :-)

But, when the time to go again on the moors was close to come, I had to withdraw all my entries as Briony anticipated her season. I wasn't happy, I was quite disappointed, no... honestly... I was quite upset, but there was not much else I could do. Some friends, however, tried to cheer me up advertising September trials on partridge. It is easier to get a run, they said, the atmosphere is very relaxed, they added and... we are going to run at Sandrigham Estate, on Queen Elizabeth II's grounds, they concluded. I must admit the last thing they mentioned was very tempting: it was thanks to such a good advertisement that I decided to bet on partridge trials in Norfolk. That was a brave bet, I shall admit, as I was perfectly aware they were going to be more difficult than grouse trials. While gathering information, I learn that: 1) during the first round, usually on stubble, dogs were going to be evaluated mainly for pace, style and ground treatment and that 2) "a few" hares were going to be present. Uh, I was forgetting the sugar beet! So well, while I was going to do my best to show up with a well behaved dog, going there to win was not surely written down in my agenda. I just wanted to be there, see people, get to know things better, learn more and feel part of a world I like.

Briony started the circuit well (we went to the 2nd round in 4 trials out of 9) and, even if, we could not find any birds on our paths, she was behaving well and respecting hare nicely (I do not have hare here, just rabbits and cats to train on). I was happy, we were learning more and enjoying the social side of September trials : I do not drink, but I was always at the pub! It was nice to see friends doing well and, especially after IGL Snettisham trials , when no awards were given, I was super happy to see Rhia (Tapper) and Sara (Chichester) receiving the Gun's Choice rosette. Trials proved to be as difficult as I expected: while there were plenty of hare,

feathered wildlife was scarce or, should I say, very smart and very professional at hiding. On Thursday, 7th of September, (Pointer Club trial at Sandrigham) I was number 13 AND the bye dog (quite a scary combination), but she did well in the first round, and well again in the second, so I knew I was going to get “something”, but I did not know what.

When the secretary announced that I had won First Prize, I could not believe it and indeed, the Vaux Silver Tankard, fell from my hands a couple of times! It was like living in a Disney movie and this article should have explained you why. She is the first dog I have ever trained for trials, and I trained her all by myself. Yes, many wonderful people helped me through the journey (in Italy and in the UK, and I am grateful to them all), but I have always been the one in charge. I am just a normal person with limited training opportunities coupled with a high degree of stubbornness and self discipline which surely helped. This is why everything that could sound normal to someone else, is so special to me, and yes, winning an award at Sandrigham confirms that Briony is a posh dog!



Me, Alan Goodship (Queen Elizabeth's dog trainer) and the fallen trophy

Ps. I promise I will also write on other dogs – and not just on mine – as there will be more articles on September trials, (all [partridge trials](#) results can be downloaded here) in the

meantime, if you have a chance, take a look at the [research project](#) I am working on for my Veterinary Medicine dissertation.

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

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!

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.](#)

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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 impos

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.

Let us train our dogs

I cannot stop wondering why, in Italy, shall be so difficult to train your pointing dog. You can train basic obedience everywhere (but none is really interested in teaching obedience here) and you can legally plant birds in specific places but, if you want to train on wild animals, things get incredibly complicated.

Let's start from planted birds: they can be released in some (not all) private estates during the hunting season (3rd week of September to Jan 31st – or until December 31st in some areas). When the hunting season is closed, you can still run you dog on *B training grounds* (these are no kill areas) and on *C training grounds* (killing is allowed here). To enter estates and B and C training areas, you usually have to pay a fee and pay for the birds you are training on. I am fine with that and *B areas* can also be quite wide, while *C areas* are usually no bigger than a “field” and overcrowded with people wanting to shoot something when the hunting season is closed. These areas, moreover, are quite rare and dogs are not stupid: they learn to recognize the place and know what is going to happen there so... they sometimes are not really very serious about finding birds, they act suspicious and so on. You cannot train

always in the same place, with the same people and with the same birds, is simply too artificial, dogs are smarter than we think.

Crystals are not diamonds, the same is true with wild birds and released birds. Released birds can help you a lot during training, they allow you to set up specific situations, but your dog needs to meet some truly wild birds, in wild, unpredictable settings. During the hunting season, again, you can go to estates and work on semi-wild birds or hope to find something on public/unkept grounds which makes up 99% of Italian hunting grounds. These grounds, unfortunately, due to poor wildlife management (& chronic poaching) are usually empty but maybe you can find the occasional woodcock, the snipe which got lost, or the smart pheasant that defeated many hunters. But, there is another problem here: you can train your dog on public grounds from late August to the opening of the hunting season, after the season opens.... Our laws say that you cannot longer train your dog, only hunt with him. This means you have to pay high taxes, get a hunting license and go around carrying a shotgun pretending to be out to kill, and not to train. I adhere to the law, again, but it does not make sense.

When the hunting seasons ends, you are no longer allowed to roam around with your dogs. Our law is clear: the ONLY dogs allowed to run off lead are hunting dogs, owned by a hunter (aka person who pays hundreds euros in taxes, year after year) and only from the end of August to the end of the hunting season. So, the fact I now let Briony run on an empty ground by my house, with nothing nesting there and almost no wildlife, makes me a poacher. How to make simple things



complicated!

If you want to find some useful game, you have to be bolder and become an advanced poacher entering protected areas like parks and the so called “red areas”. Are these rich in birds and other animals? It really depends, I do not think these places are well cared, in most instances they are not cared at all. Our politicians treats these areas as they were museums, forgetting they need to be taken care: a park is not a figurine you can place on your furniture, wildlife needs nurturing. So, while us, with our dogs, cannot legally set foot on these areas, families, bikers, joggers and often bikers, I was forgetting pet dogs! So, while gundogs are not allowed, because they disturb, scare and kill game, none notices Mrs Rossi off lead shepherd who had just retrieved a hare or taken down a roe buck, because he is not a “hunting dog”. Hunters have a bad reputation “because they kill animals” and anything associated to them becomes automatically negative and dangerous.

I do not like doing illegal things, and I am never successful at exploring protected areas: I shrink to gnome size and stay maybe 10 minutes, then go away while other loud people arrive with packs of kids and dogs. But, of course, my obedient/steady to flush/droppable on command dog... is the nuisance! Not being good at “poaching”, I do not have any interesting stories to tell, but I can tell you I witnessed some protected areas’ decline: less game, more garbage and more “un-respectful people”. Other trainers told me funny stories about being chased by police at 7 AM (such a waste of

public money!), or being forced to swim away from guards because they had a hunting dog off lead. There are people, city people usually, who clearly cannot grasp the difference between dog training and hunting. They skip the dog in the “gundog” word, they can see invisible shotguns and panic as soon as they see a hunting dog running free (other breeds are fine!). I was told about a man, quite a good handler indeed, who trains setters wearing football (soccer) shoes to run faster in case police get called.

I would like to make it clear that I, nor anybody who has a pointing dog under control, are damaging wildlife. Our dogs do not chase animals, we just need to find animals, then the game ends: none gets hurt and my dog is surely less disturbing than a group of loud cyclists. Most of us would be happy to pay a fee to be allowed to train where some wildlife exist and, I think, would also be happy to pass an exam to prove our dogs are under control. So if you see anyone suspicious with an off lead gundog, watch what they are doing and maybe go to talk with them, don't panic and don't generate further panic, please don't call the army!

About 15 years ago, it was possible, paying a small yearly fee, to train in a regional park. I used to go there, there were a few pheasants and the whole area was continuously patrolled by dog trainers coming from several parts of Northern Italy. As big as it was, you always ended up finding someone with another pointing dog and... feeling safe! Now, for some mysterious reasons, this is no longer possible and, again, game presence and place itself, dramatically declined. People who used to come here, now go training [abroad](#) and their money is no longer going to local restaurants, hotels and service stations, not a happy ending.

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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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.

Next article [here](#).

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.](#)

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!

Next article [here](#).

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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 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.

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

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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.

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 3) – By T. Mostert

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We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 3) – By T. Mostert

Planting Birds (... & backing)

In hindsight, I should have been able to read Flake better when she was younger. I was so focused on getting her to do what I wanted that I neglected to see the little signs she gave of her natural ability to find birds. I took many photos of her as a pup and now, when I go through them, I find several photos that show she was pointing, or was interested in a bird. Never be so focused on what you want your dog to do, that you forget what the dog can already do. If I had just made the effort to get some help she would be much, much further than she is today, not that I am not happy with where

she is today, she is a incredible little dog.

Feather training is one of those things you either believe in or you don't. It is no replacement for birds, but to teach a young dog to be steady and sit to the flush it does have its place. As said before, I made a mistake in teaching Flake to run a pattern simply for the sake of running, instead of giving her a reason to run a pattern. The very first field test I went to was a complete disaster, two days of running on fields and no one bird pointed and believe me she had the opportunity several times. I was basically stuck with a dog that would cut a field to shreds but did not know why she was doing it, running and hunting are not the same thing.



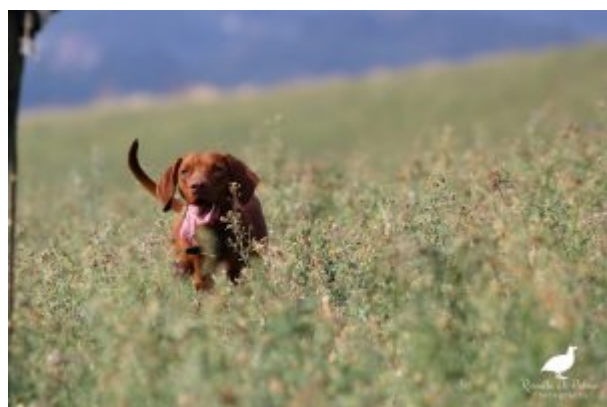
Tok & Flake

This is when I realized I needed some expert help and like we all should do, I looked for the best possible person to help me, a Legend. I also realized I needed my own birds and we built a enclosure and stocked it with some partridge. The first time I met Sten Rönnerling, he was out on a field, he was busy placing out partridge to train his dogs. I had heard of placing out birds, but I had never seen anyone do it. He was a friendly man and by his firm handshake I knew those where not the hands of a talker, he was a doer. Right off the bat he told me to tag along with Flake on a leash while his pointers were running in the field on placed birds. Sure enough his dog went into a solid point and Sten instructed me to bring Flake in, slowly behind the pointer so she could pick up the scent of the bird. I did not notice it, I could not read her yet, but Sten immediately said she has the scent when I was six meters from the pointer, he can read a dog! The

pointer flushed on command and they made quick work of dropping the bird from the sky, I gave Flake the sit instruction the moment the bird lifted.

This is how we carried on for several more birds, at one stage we even leashed the pointer while on point to try and slip Flake into his place, the bird flushed by itself and made our plan unsuccessful.

We did this on several occasions, I started using a longer leash so we could slip her in tight to the pointer, it did not take more than 5-10 of these placed birds before Flake understood what was happening. This was the point where Sten decided that she had had enough and that we would or could turn her into a point stealer if we would have continued slipping her on the pointer, that is experience. What we did now was to follow at a good distance and once the pointer took a solid point we would move on from maybe 150 meters and get Flake to see the side profile of the pointer while on point, the moment she would display backing or mirroring we would stop, some days this would be at even a 100 meters out from the pointer. I need to back-up a little here and make it clear, Flake had already pointed pheasants and grouse before I started with Sten, but this was infrequently and on some days she would simply run right over birds.



Back to Sten. It was the third time I went out to Sten when he decided it was time to place birds for Flake. We placed three partridge out on the field, they were spread pretty far apart, and we let her go. Sure enough, it did not take very long for her to go into a solid point on one of the birds. Here is

where placed birds are extremely valuable. I walked up to her slowly and told her to be steady when I was a few meters away, I kept saying steady, steady until I could lay my hand on her and say good girl, girl. Now is the time to heap praise on them, right there and then is the best opportunity to reinforce that what they are doing is what you want them to do! I then took a few steps back and to the side, called her name once and gave her the flush command, while doing this I also moved briskly forward. The bird took to the air and I whistled the sit command. It all fell into place perfectly. She managed to do the same on the other two birds we had placed out.

Two weeks later Sten had a couple of clients from the north of Sweden who came down to work their dogs on birds. He had placed out several birds and there some wild birds in the area too. I was just going to tag along with Flake on a leash to gain more experience. After about a hour the guests' dogs had not found one bird and Sten told me to let Flake off leash and let her run. It took no more than two minutes before she just stopped and went into a solid point. I waited for the guests to get into a suitable shooting formation and once they were in place, I gave Flake the flush command. Up went the bird, whistle, down sat Flake and boom, bird dropped from the sky. Flake had marked the bird and I sent her to retrieve it, good retrieve delivered into my hand. That right there was one of the proudest moments of my entire life! She was finally on her way to becoming a bird dog!

[Continues here...](#)