We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 2) — By T. Mostert

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

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 2) - By T. Mostert

Depth and Width

There is nothing more gracious than a good dog gliding over a field at full speed, turning at the edges without cutting back and working a good distance from you without losing contact. Some fields cannot be run edge to edge, it just does not make for a huntable situation, just like some areas do not allow a HPR to run at speed, this happens normally where you have thick cover.

What is acceptable depth and width for a dog to run? It depends on whom you ask and on what terrain you are hunting. I participated in a field test not too long ago during which a dog found and pointed a pheasant for over 4 minutes. The point was maybe 300 meters ahead of the judge and shooter. Judge refused to walk up to the dog and have the pheasant flushed and shot, he said the dog was not hunting for him, it was too far out. I have my own opinion on this particular scenario, and I am sure many others will have too. Point is that what is



desired by one handler, is not what su A good dog will work as far as needed without losing contact with the handler completely, now that is another subjective phrase depending on whom you speak to. I do not mind loosing contact with my dog for 2-3

minutes when she is working high cover or thick cover, I know if she is gone longer she is probably on point. It is for the same reason I do not call her in when I cannot see her, I do not want to break off a possible opportunity. You cannot expect a dog to run the same way in a forest, as he would on a large open wheat stub field.

If your dog is not steady on point and cannot stand without flushing the bird by himself, then you probably do not want him to go to deep or too wide, because chances are he will flush the birds before you get there anyway. Do not confuse this with birds that flush by themselves without the dog moving. In short, depth and width should create a huntable situation for the dog and handler. Some dogs will start shallow and short, until the figure out there are no birds close and then start going wider and deeper.

As said before, here and only here is the time to let off on the discipline and obedience a bit. Give the dog some "freedom" and let them work. The dog needs to gain experience and confidence so he can rely on himself. There is no problem with a young dog that sticks close, as his confidence grows he will increase his range. A young dog that runs wild is another issue, here hiding from the dog to force him to keep contact is a good idea.



Flake

I have been extremely fortunate to have a Legend by the name of Sten Rönnerling who has helped me with Flake's training on field. Sten has trained multiple field trials champions in multiple breeds. He had several double and triple champion dogs, a fist full of 10/10 field scores and dogs that have placed high in pointing dogs World Championships. This easily qualifies him as a Legend. He has single handedly helped me turn Flake into a proper field dog that understands what is expected from her. His methods have been tried tested and proven, again and again. At way over 70 years old, he still runs his dogs daily and can still drop a bird from the sky with little effort. When it comes to field training he has a few chosen pieces of advice, one of his first phrases was this:

"The only time a dog should be standing still on a field is when he is pissing, pooing or pointing".

Young dogs will, at some stage, start pointing rats, mice, rabbits, hare etc. Although this is not what we want them to do, they are doing what comes naturally, finding game. Do not be too hard on the young dog if he does this, simply break the point as quickly as possible and send the dog in a different direction. Never, never assume it is not feathered game the dog is pointing, always presume it is feathered game until you learn how to read the dog and interpret the signals. Never, never praise the dog on point if you are not 100% sure it is in fact a bird they are pointing! This, as discussed before positively reinforces the dog, but if it is not a bird you are

reinforcing him to stand for game and possibly a empty spot where a bird was before, but has long since left (more on that later).

Dogs that stand and route around in one spot are a no, no be patient with a young dog that does this, but get them to move as soon as possible.

Don't run two dogs that want to play with each other on the field, run a experienced dog with a young dog, or run him alone. Different breeds run different ways and look different, Flake ran and hunted her own way when she ran with other dogs, until I ran her with a setter, for some reason she shadowed the setter. I ran her a few times more with the setter and she let go, running her own lines again. Expose your dogs to different breeds on the field. If your dog shows any aggression towards any other dog on the field, pull your dog out, it is a completely unacceptable behaviour.

This is a broad brush I have used to describe field width and depth, there is much more detail that goes into making a dog run well, including external factors like weather, bird density, lack of birds etc.

Find a Legend like Sten to help you, it is incredible what difference it makes.

The next part will cover how to work a dog on planted birds.

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 1) — By T. Mostert

Tok Mostert, a Professional Hunter from South Africa, now living in Sweden, is sharing his writings on dog training

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 1) - By T. Mostert

This is the single most rewarding discipline for a HPR owner or trainer. Often called the Formula 1 of the dog world, our little "machines" flying over a field, head high and then that sudden dead stop into a rock solid point. A good advance into a sit and the bird gets dropped from the sky, dog marks perfectly, retrieve is brilliant and at the end of the day you get a first prize!! Yeah, I dream too, because getting to this point takes more time and patience than any other disciplines. Many dogs run well, many dogs find birds, many dogs are steady on point, many dogs have a good advance and many still a good retrieve. Putting it all together in ONE DOG is where it gets very, very complicated! Field trials rules, criteria and regulations are different for HPR's in Scandinavia, Europe and the USA, but we all want our dogs to find birds, point them and be steady. I cannot speak for other test methods, I train for our field test and our criteria. Some of what I say will not be applicable to you and it will not make sense in why we do it the way we do it. I don't like 'kicking up birds" myself and I believe it is easier to have your dog stand still when you "kick up" birds than to stop a dog after sending him to put the bird on the wing, it does not mean I am right and others are wrong, to each his own. Train within your framework.



Flake

There are those that believe you give a young dog birds and when he shows potential you teach him to run a proper pattern. I did not do it that way, as said before I was new to this two years ago and I taught Flake to run a pattern long before I got her onto birds on a regular basis. The single biggest problem with my method with the result that Flake ran, she did not hunt, not her mistake, but mine. She was doing what I told her to do and taught her to do. In hindsight I will use a combination of birds and teaching a dog to run a pattern at the same time. A dog that gets "fed" to many birds too early will not run as hard as he should, he will think it is easy hitting birds, more on that later.

To make it more structured, I will start with how to teach a dog to run a pattern and how to correct and steer the dog. I do not start a dog on field training that is too young, joints, ligaments and so on can be permanently damaged! Do not run a too young dog with another young dog, start your dog alone.

Exhaustion is a real danger, low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) and dehydration will kill your dog, learn the signs and keep a close watch. Young dogs rely on their owners to take care of them. Do not train field if you cannot stop or recall your dog, those who are saying "screw you" right now have not seen a dog run over. If you do run them without a stop or recall in place, run them in a fenced area or a area that has no cars or trains for 5 kms. Finished preaching let's get to patterns.



If someone helps you...

To teach a dog to run a pattern is fairly easy, to teach a dog to run the desired pattern is harder, a dog that can adjust his pattern depending on terrain and prevalent weather conditions is a very smart dog.

I have seen many dogs on trails that are released, run straight ahead of the handler for 200 or 300 meters, then make a left or right turn head out 100-200 meters, turn left or right and head straight back to the handler before they start running a haywire pattern. I have seen dogs run the boundaries of a field only, educated dogs whose handlers trained too hard on the boundaries and not enough on the fields. There is nothing more funny for a young dog to go out and run freely, use that energy by training the dog to run a pattern. One method of doing this is by going to a field that is 50 meters wide and maybe 200 meters long. You can use larger fields, but your dog will run less pattern and you are trying to teach him to run a pattern. It works best with two people or, if you can run and keep running, you can try by yourself, I did a lot of that!

Let's say you have the 50×100 field and you have two people. Always start training with the wind in the dogs face. Start both people and the dog in the centre of the field, release the dog and both people move in opposite directions, each to one side of the field, right at the edge on each side. I like to take a few steps back after I reach my end and then I call the dog in, this teaches the dog to cover every edge, do not expect a young dog to do this every time by itself. Then I start walking forward on the edge of the field, the other person should be able to see when the dog reaches me after I called him in. They now call the dog to them, remember to keep walking forward! The person that does the call in should not call in too soon or too late, timing is everything. Continue calling in the dog from one person to the other while walking at a steady pace towards the end of the field, the dog will eventually turn by itself. Do not let the dog turn short on either side! Once they start getting tired, they tend to turn short, the person that has the dog closest to them when he turns short should call the dog back! Please, please do not forget to heap praise on the dog when he gets to your side! He is doing what you want him to do! Do not do this for more than 10 minutes with a young dog, take a 30 minute break or longer if you intend repeating the exercise. Do not push the dog too hard in the beginning of its training on field!



Doing the same exercise alone is possible, but harder, I ran from one side to the other with the Flake, she would beat me to the other side every time, I could turn short! I had one advantage with Flake when I started pattern training, she could

already take directions with hand signals (arms) and with the whistle. A judge once told me that a dog cannot read arm signals, he is wrong. Some dogs take to the pattern easy, some dogs take a little more time and some dogs just don't get taught right. A dog that enjoys your company will follow you, no matter how hard he runs, he will keep an eye on you every now and then, a young dog even more so. Use this, when the dog reaches a point where you are happy for him to turn, turn and walk in the opposite direction (always forward), make sure your back is to the dog, do not walk backwards! You do not need to be as fast as the dog, if he passes you keep walking in the same direction until the dog reaches your chosen turning point, turn and walk in the opposite direction.

To be continued with depth and width.

Trusting a Free Spirit

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

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

While keeping all my antennae alert, I met a man with a golden retriever. She was meekly trotting by him carrying a huge log in her mouth. I am wondering whether I would be happy with such a dog or, if, on the contrary, I will be bored. As Briony was running at a full speed in a rice paddy, we met a runner trying to "Canicross" with a Cane Corso (a huge molosser) and another primitive dog, something bigger than a Shiba and smaller than an Akita. He was impressed with the recall, but most of all, he was astonished by her speed and deep castings. British pointing dogs, with the exception of Gordon Setters — sometimes, are the most extreme of the pointing dogs: they can hardly be understood by the average pet dog owner. They often look puzzled when the setter (or pointer) owner refuses to let their dog free on a tiny patch of ground surrounded by roads, explaining it is too small, it would not be safe.

They cannot understand how small those places are: an unleashed German Shepherd or a Border Collie would always be alert, ready to obey an order; a Dobermann or a Rottweiler would always keep an eye on their owner, because they feel the need to protect them. With an English Setter, things are

different: the best gift you can give to a working English Setter is freedom. Yes, they enjoy snoring on soft surfaces, they like good food but, if you want your Setter to be truly happy... Let him free! His cute face will become a cute happy face and he will start exploring. A free English Setter would not worry much about his owner. They perfectly know we can take care of ourselves when they are busy exploring the world, finding birds and so on... These guys watch Discovery Channel! The countryside has so much to offer! Giving freedom to an English Setter is like taking a pig to an "all you can eat" restaurant, or gifting a woman with somebody else credit card! So much excitement clashes with control!

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

Relationship: well... Relationship, you need to have a relationship with your dog! No amount of training can make a dog can back to you if he does not want to. He shall trust you (mutual trust, see below) because he knows you are not going to affect his freedoom, at least not that much. He will return to you, of follow your directions, and then he will be free again.

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

Trust: it is the key. It what allows you to let your dog free, being certain he will come back to you. You really have to

trust your Setter: some people panic when they see how far and how fast these dogs can go. But you really love "something", especially something /somebody that thrives on freedom... let him free!

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Waterwork)— by T. Mostert

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

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Waterwork) - by T. Mostert

There are a few issues with water retrieves that you do not have with land retrieves. Some dogs enter water easily, others need a little encouragement and then some need a push. When to push will depend on where the dog is mentally, too soon and you may install a permanent fear of water in the dog. As stated before, the dog should enjoy training and you should make it a fun but structured experience. I want my dog steady and sitting by my side when I start him out, he should be as calm as possible. Arne always said it is a bad idea to cast and control the dog when you start, get a friend or your spouse, to do the casting. Make sure the dog can see the dummy or bird being cast and has a clear line of sight to the dummy or bird. The person making the cast should make bird or duck sounds before the cast to get the dog's attention. The handler should focus on the dog only, make very sure the dog does not even lift during the cast, he should stay still.

Check that the dog follows the and cast, marks the dummy. Arne

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

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



Use a friend or your spouse…

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

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

As Arne would tell me a hundred times, break it down. Entry, out, direction, search and delivery.

I have had judges stunned when Flake comes back with a completely dry bird, she is just comfortable in the water and does not panic when she has to stay out there. A few things to keep in mind.

Entrance into the water:

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

Out:

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

Direction:

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

Search:

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

Delivery:

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

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



Tok & Flake

I have left out certain crucial bits of advice, like how to

get a dog into the water, teaching it to swim and be calm and also the way to train a dog to take a straight entry on the blind retrieve.

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

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

To read about obedience and discipline click here.

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Retrieves 2)— by T. Mostert

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

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Retrieves 2)- by T. Mostert

A few more things I learned from Jeppe and Arne on training a dog to retrieve before I moved on to training for water work. Some dogs will try and move around you once they have retrieved the game (or the dummy), almost as if they want to circle around you, do not allow this. You can stop the dog from doing this by training against a fence, or with a natural barrier behind you, a corner fence works best for this. If you do not have a fence available, wait for the dog to come to you

and once he is 2-3 meters away from you, coming towards, take a quick side step in the direction the dog is drifting and give the sit command. You have to be quick and precise, otherwise he will keep drifting and still circle you. The same goes for a hard charging dog that likes to pass you and then turns back. The dog should come in to your left, sit and present the dummy or game. Lots of folks do not mind if the dog sits or stands with the delivery, I want my dog to be planted and steady. I also want to be able to stop my dog on the way in without her dropping the dummy or game, she should sit and wait for me to give her the come command, same goes for sending her out. Stop, sit and then I can send her left, right, back, or over a obstacle.



Flake and the fox

On a side note, I want my dog to present the dummy or game with his head up, with the dog looking at me and not at the ground! Some game will be too heavy for the dog to do this, but even ducks can be presented this way. Bo Nilsson (great retriever trainer) gave me this little tip. Once the dog is on the way back to you, bend down in a kneeling position, arms open and call the dog in, be friendly! As the dog reaches the 2-3 metres mark stand up quickly. This will not only make the dog lift his head, but also help him to sit.

Do not ever lean over a young dog, or tower over a young dog when you start training retrieving or holds! Doing so, you are applying pressure on the dog mentally, they hate it and it is one of the main reasons dogs drop dummies or game at their handlers feet, or just out of reach! Coming in should always, always, be a positive experience for the dog! have seen countless people scream and repeat the command for the dog to pick up a dummy or game they have dropped at the handlers feet, it is utterly useless and creates even more pressure and negative connection to retrieving. If Flake drops a dummy(or game) on the way in, or at my feet, she already knows she is wrong, I do not need to say anything, or repeat a command, what I do is take a step or three away from the dropped object and from her, immediately relieving the pressure on her. 100% of the time she will pick it up again and deliver it as it should be.

Keep in mind this is only training, hunting is a whole different thing where the excitement and pressure is multiplied 2000 folds. If you have never seen a dog simply coming apart on a duck hunt because there is 100's of shots going off and ducks raining down on and around the dog, you have not exposed the dog enough. More on that another time.

Points to ponder

- 1. Casting dummies in the beginning is a NO NO, sit the dog down, walk away place the dummy, walk back to the dog, give it a line and if you are sure it has the line give the retrieve command.
 - 2. Never start a young dog on a retrieve if they have not taken the line (= understood they are being casted in a straightforward line), start short, 5 meters.
 - 3. Do use a long lead when you start your young dog retrieving.
 - 4. Use clear and short commands. I have different ones for a simple pick-up and a long retrieve, I use the same command for back as for out.
 - 5. Always be positive when the dog is getting it right, to the point that you excite the dog! As you progress, tone it down. Dogs learn by positively reinforcing their behaviour!

- 6. Retrieving only on sight will become a problem if you do not challenge the dog to use its nose.
- 7. Bird dogs drift more than pure retrieving breeds, give them a bit more freedom.
- 8. Break every training session down, from the sit to the delivery, work on them as separate exercises.
- 9. Your dog will try and break and fetch the dummy without a command, if you are not fast enough to stop it, keep your mouth shut. Never stop a young dog going on to a retrieve unless you are 100% sure you can. Do praise the dog if it delivers the fetch correctly!

 10. You will laugh and you will cry, suck it up.

HPR breeds are not for everyone,



Flake and English Pointers

multiple disciplines, with contradictory commands and outcomes, phase many owners. I do not expect my dog to compete against a pure retriever when it comes to retrieving, but I train her with pure retrievers and she will be on pair with any average pure retriever any day I do not expect her to run like a English Pointer, but I run her with English Pointers and she may not go as wide and as deep, but she goes just as hard. HPR dogs are not the best at everything, but they are the best choice for everything. I cannot say this enough, you are investing time and effort into training a dog, make the wise choice and get a Old School Legend to help you!

No clickers, no treats just respect, discipline and loyalty.

We are Losing Legendary Methods 1 — by T. Mostert

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

Part 1: We are losing legendary methods

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



Flake in Sweden...

You ask opinions on trainers and you get maybe 10 different

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

A few things I remember, sure I forgot many:

- 1. Train the owner to train the dog, much harder than it sounds.
- 2. Learn how to read your dog.
- 3.95% Praise, 5% Correction, always time the correction perfectly.
- 4. Make sure you understand the commands before you try teaching the dog, otherwise keep your mouth shut.
- 5. A collar and a leash are restraints, they can only control a dog by your side. Respect and trust are what makes an invisible leash that stretches as far as your voice, or whistle, carries.
- 6. Do not train with a attitude, dogs do not respond well to assholes (yeah, I heard that a lot).
- 7. If your dog keeps making the same mistake you are doing something wrong, not the dog.
- 8. If you are always doing something wrong, get help.
- 9. Different dogs need different touches while training.
- 10. No matter how good is the trainer you are working with, if you do not put in the effort yourself, you are wasting your time and a good dog!

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



Flake goes to school

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

Books, DvD's and video clips are great, but they lack the essential personal touch that a true Legend brings to training a dog. One Legend's method may not fit you or your dog, but there is always one who's method will.

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