

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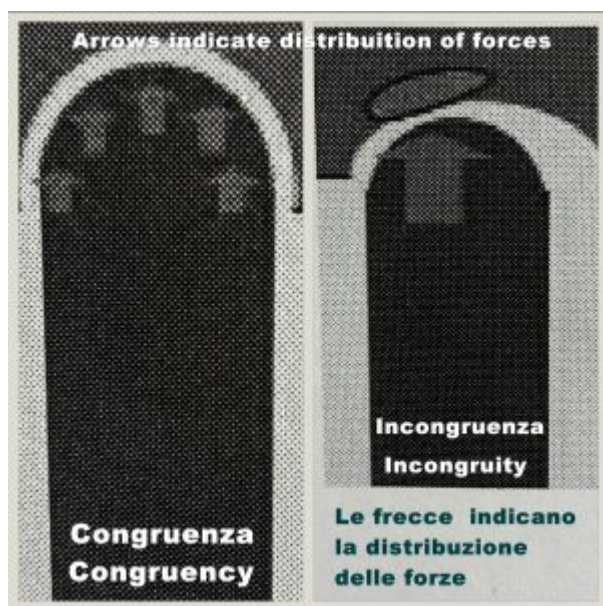
Tok Mostert, a Professional Hunter from South Africa, now living in Sweden, is sharing his writings on dog training with us. [You can start reading them from Part 1 here.](#)

Displasia dell'anca (biomeccanica)

Sulla displasia dell'anca è stato scritto di tutto ma, studiando patologia chirurgica veterinaria, ogni tanto mi imbatto in cose che, probabilmente, non sono ancora note ad appassionati ed allevatori. Qualche giorno fa ho pubblicato un

post su Facebook che riguardava la biomeccanica di questa articolazione e il post ha suscitato parecchio interesse, pertanto, ne parlerò anche qui in maniera più approfondita.

Un'articolazione, qualsiasi articolazione, per lavorare bene deve essere correttamente costruita: le superfici articolari devono essere congruenti, in caso di incongruenza, infatti, alcune parti dell'articolazione, dovranno sopportare più peso di altre.



Ci sono studi scientifici che hanno dimostrato che il massimo peso supportabile dalla cartilagine è di 1kg/mm^2 . Prieur, un veterinario, nel 1980 ha pubblicato una ricerca molto interessante e tutt'ora valida: [Coxarthrosis in the Dog Part I: Normal and Abnormal Biomechanics of the Hip Joint W. D. PRIEUR, D.V.M. 1980](#)).

Se prendiamo come esempio un cane di 30kg, la superficie articolare dell'anca sarà di 220 millimetri quadrati. In tabella vedete cosa succede se la superficie articolare viene ridotta: abbiamo maggior peso per mm quadrato.

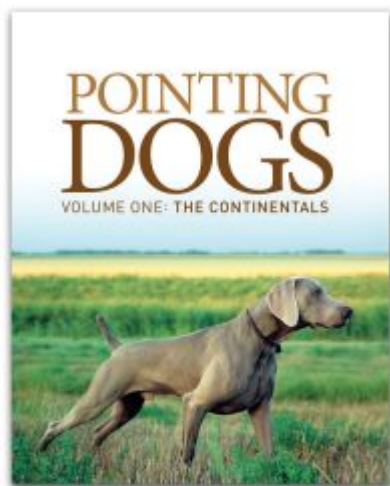
stato stimato che la temperatura può raggiungere anche i 70 gradi Celsius mentre il cane (artrosico) corre.

Ps. La salute è fondamentale per il benessere del cane, se possiedi un cane da caccia con cui partecipi a prove di lavoro (o con cui vai semplicemente a caccia), dai un'occhiata al [Gundog Project](#) (Progetto di ricerca sul cane da caccia e da prove) e compila il [questionario](#)!

Premi

Ci stiamo adoperando per raccogliere alcuni premi da sorteggiare tra chi ha partecipato al [sondaggio](#).

Per ora Craig Koshyk, dal Canada, della [Dog Willing Publications](#) ci ha donato uno dei suoi libri [books](#) (Pointing Dogs, Volume 1, The Continentals). Valore di mercato 99 dollari.



Josh Wiggins, dal Texas ci ha donato un guinzaglio con collare incorporato [Texas Leash and Collar](#)

Luca Zaninoni, di [Sanguemiele Design](#), offre un buono per una

maglietta a scelta tra quelle presenti sul suo [sito](#).

Io offro un portafischietto intrecciato a mano, colori a vostra scelta (massimo due), del valore di circa 15 euro e un [servizio fotografico gratuito](#).

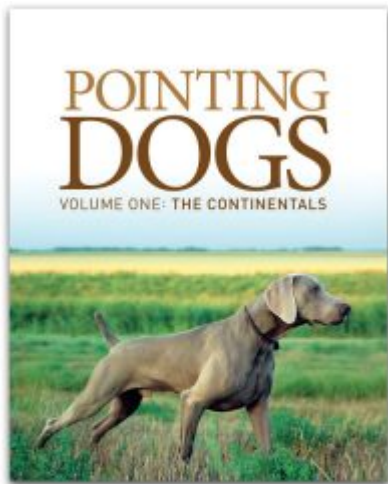


Vogliamo aggiungere altri regali per ringraziare quelli che hanno contribuito alla "[scienza](#)", quindi se volete offrirci qualcosa (beni o servizi) non esitate a contattarci!

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Ringraziamo:

Luca Zaninoni di [Sanguemiele Design](#) che ha creato il nostro logo e offre un coupon per una maglietta omaggio (date un'occhiata al suo sito e alla sua pagina [FB Page](#), ha cose molto belle).



Craig Koshyk della [Dog Willing Publications](#) che ci ha donato uno dei suoi [libri](#) (Pointing Dogs, Volume 1, The Continentals) affinché venga sorteggiato tra chi partecipa al sondaggio.

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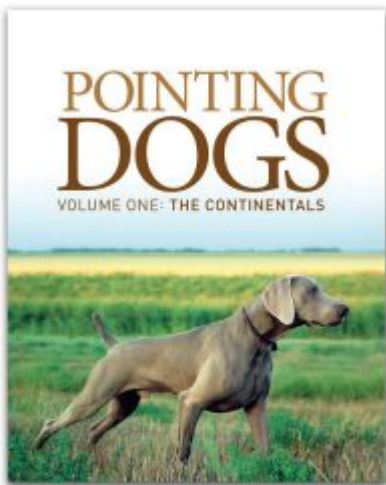
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The Gundog Project – The Sponsors

We would like to thank:

Luca Zaninoni of [Sanguemiele Design](#) who designed our logo (Check out his website and his [FB Page](#), he has great stuff).



Craig Koshyk of [Dog Willing Publications](#) who kindly donated one of his [books](#) (Pointing Dogs, Volume 1, The Continentals) to be drawn among those filling out the survey.

Josh Wiggins donating a [Texas Leash and Collar](#) to be drawn among those filling out the survey

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The Gundog Project

[In italiano qui](#)

The Gundog Research Project is a scientific research focusing on gundogs actively used for hunting and field trials. The project has been tailored on pointing dogs, but we are accepting contributions from spaniels and retrievers owners as well. The project stems from two elements: my love for gundogs and, on a more practical side, the need to write a research dissertation to graduate in Veterinary Medicine. Writing a dissertation is mandatory in Italy and, as it might require months of research, I opted to devote them to something I like, and from which animals and humans could benefit . Dogs have always played a huge role in my life, and certainly helped me to grow into a better person, this is how I am trying to give them something back.

Animal behaviour is intimately linked with animal welfare which, on its turn, is affected by animal management. Most of the animal welfare studies carried on so far, focus on farm animals. Furthermore, working dogs such as hunting and field trials dogs, cannot even be considered “pets”. They are canine athletes, they have their own peculiar needs and they are among the few dogs that can truly be considered working animals. As far as my tutors and I are aware, there is no scientific literature available on hunting and field trial dogs management and welfare: the studies we could find are centered on military, police and shelter dogs and on dogs for the blind. Feel free to [e-mail us](#) if you want to know more about the project scientific design and about the scientific literature behind it.

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If you are interested in supporting this project and help giving it more visibility (through magazines, websites or your club's activities), please do so or contact us. We appreciate and need your help!

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How to fill out the questionnaire

Unfortunately we need you to fill out a [questionnaire](#) for each dog and, unfortunately, we are also very interested in those of you who own and handle many dogs. The questionnaire was created ONLY for dogs used for shooting or competing in field trials (pointing dogs, spaniels and retrievers). These dogs must be purebred and have a pedigree. If your gundog is a pet, or a show dog, I am sorry but he cannot be included in our sample. The questionnaire might seem long at a first sight, but you can fill it out in a few minutes. We decided to have only a few compulsory questions, to make you feel at ease: you can skip the questions that do not apply to your situation, or that you do not feel comfortable about. Remember, however, that the questionnaire can be as anonymous as you like, and all your answers will be stored respecting the laws on personal privacy and will not be passed on to other people. The more details you will be giving us, though, the more you will help this research and my dissertation, I will therefore appreciate detailed and honest answers. Please specify the units of measure in open questions (year, months, hours...). An e-mail address, whereas not compulsory, is equally appreciated in case we need any clarifications concerning your answers. We also need an e-mail if you wish to be included in the drawn for the [prizes](#) we are giving away. For those who prefer working on a printed version of the questionnaire, a [pdf file](#) can be downloaded, printed, given to those who do not have any internet access and then [emailed](#) back to us.

If you wish to receive a feedback about the outcomes of this survey, please let us know: we will send you a report at the end of the project!

We will also be grateful if you could give visibility to the project by sharing or forwarding these pages, or the

questionnaire link, to anyone who could be interested or otherwise able to help us in this research.

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The team behind the project

Some of you already know me, but I am going to introduce myself again to make you feel at ease. My academic background is the following: I have a Laurea Specialistica (equivalent of an MA) in Foreign Languages and Literatures (British Literature) earned with a grade of 110/110 cum laude from the [University of Pavia](#) (Italy); a Certificate of Asian Studies earned with Distinction from [Mount Holyoke College](#) (Massachusetts, USA) and I am going to graduate in [Veterinary Medicine](#) from the University of Milan (Italy). I also attended the Italian Veterinary Acupuncture Society School and several extracurricular courses on dog behaviour, neuroscience, wildlife management, writing, photography and more.

Work & Hobbies: I started writing about dogs and hunting in 2002, became a professional journalist in 2005 and published two books on dogs. At the moment I am still freelancing for Italian and foreign magazines and my pieces can be read in

each issue of Sentieri di Caccia, Beccacce che Passione and Cinghiale che Passione. I have been active around dogs since my childhood, volunteered at a no-kill dog shelter for five years and got my first English Setter in 1999, my first shooting license came in 2004. Years have passed, but I still enjoy the countryside, training, trialing, rough shooting and anything gundogs related. I currently manage the blog [Dogs & Country](#)

My supervisors in this project are Professor [Silvana Mattiello](#) and Professor [Clara Palestini](#), one of the few veterinarians who obtained a diploma from the [European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine](#). Both teach and research at the [School of Veterinary Medicine](#), University of Milan (Italy).

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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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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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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](#).

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