

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 with us. [You can start reading them from Part 1 here.](#)

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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.



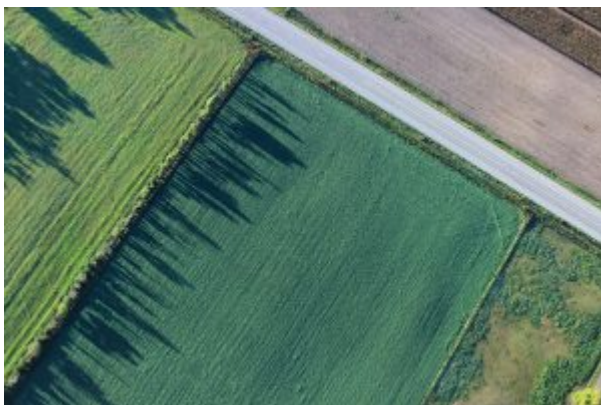
If someone helps you...

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.

When dog training meets pragmatism

There are instances in which you need someone reliable and pragmatic by your side. It is not only soldiers on battlefields who need mates full of practical sense and decisiveness, dog people need them as well. Some dog people, especially those with red hair who get lost in training philosophies and follow shamans, need these people more than others.

After religiously following [White Feather](#) for more than six months, Briony decided that it was time for a change, she wanted less discipline and more freedom, I could hardly find the balance. WF training grounds, furthermore, were no longer available as the alfalfa and other crops were growing quickly. No other suitable training ground was available: spring was coming with its crops which were going to make impossible to run a dog anywhere. My only option was to go to some private areas, called Zone B or Zone C, in which dogs are allowed to run all year round, there I went. My first training sessions were short, I wanted to play on the safe side, until one morning, C. showed up accusing me to train at a “snail speed”.

I first met C. in **1999**, I just had to say goodbye to Massachusetts for good, my former dog had died and I decided it was time to treat myself with an English Setter. After all I had wanted one since I was a 10 years old child. Given my unhealthy tendency to save the world and rescue those in need, I had absolutely no interest in a puppy: I wanted a rescue and

I got one. I fell for a sweet and gentle orange belton male who reciprocated my feelings immediately and with too much enthusiasm: after eight hours in my house he had already developed a severe form of separation anxiety. I knew he had been poorly socialized, kept kenneled for three years and then trained (aka abused) by a professional trainer. I knew he had all the reasons to behave like he did but...living with him was hell! I follow the manual: undertook a behavioral therapy; enrolled him in an obedience class; started him as a search & rescue dog and even gave him antidepressants, improvements, however, were small and slow. His breeder, happy to know the dog had been safely re-homed, gave me his pedigree and I realized Socks was meant to be a working dog, he even had a great ancestry. He was my first "gundog" but, my previous experience with other breeds told me that, MAYBE, letting him do the job he was born for, could have helped him to overcome all his fears.



Socks at 13 years old retrieving a pheasant

At the time, however, I had no idea of how an English Setter

was supposed to work; of how I should have handled him and of what I needed to teach him. I read books, which is what I do when I need to learn something, but I wanted to meet someone who could provide a face-to-face support. Given Socks' behavioural problems, I could not board him at a professional trainer's kennel and... professional trainers boarding their pupils seemed to be the only people training English Setters. I tried to ask some shooters for advice, but none seemed to take seriously a young and inexperienced woman with a rescued ES. Women with English Setters in Italy are still very rare in 2016, imagine how the situation could have been in 1999: it was, and still is, a male dominated and male oriented world! Opportunities, however, often show up when you least expect them and, Monica, a woman training GWPs in sunny Tuscany, phoned to tell me she had the "men" for me, and that they were located just a few miles away from my house. To make the long story short, Monica contacted [two famous drahthaar](#) (GWPs) handlers and trainers and convinced them to help me. One of them could not offer any support at the time (he did later), while the other one was brave enough to accept to work with us.



For about two months, I trained at least twice a week with C., who was already a quite successful trainer and handler in Italy and in Germany. We worked mainly on recall, but he taught me some very basic things I would have never imagined at the time, such as how to use the whistle and how to keep the dog focused on me by changing directions. Socks improved, and I later continued to work him by myself and for himself: I knew he was not going to become a great shooting dog, I simply wanted him to enjoy life and become more sure of himself. I think I last trained him with C. on quails in 2004, I then moved to work with other setters on the hills and we never had other chances to train together, We always kept in touch though and in the years, I sent him some “clients” who, together with other dogs he worked with, gave him the opportunity to become one of the most successful HPRs trainers I know.

C. is now a well known “pro”, specialized in training GWPs for German Hunting Tests (VJP/HZP/VGP) and personal rough shooting dogs, I was not surprised to meet him on the training ground

dealing with a GSP who used to eat and swallow quails. I watched his pupil running, and saw she retrieving the quail correctly after the shoot, so I asked the gamekeeper if C. had already solved the problem. “

“No... The dog never eats the quail in his presence, just with the owner. It should be a matter of body language and stance, look at him... But he needs the dog to make the mistake to correct her... He is the best trainer working on my ground”.

I kept watching and nothing happened on that day, until it came my turn to run the dog. *“Let her go”* – yelled someone behind my back *“- but when you whistle be firm, and yell at her if needed. The key to freedom is control”*, easier said than done! That was just the preface.



Let her go...

When C. Found out I was training Briony for grouse trials, he started to behave as if he wanted to be part of the project. We kept meeting on the training ground by chance but, each

time we met, he had some good advice for me. He never tried to train Briony in my place, nor to ditch the [Shaman](#) methods, he simply intervened, firmly and pragmatically, to speed up my training and to teach me to be more sure of myself and of my training. I think he somehow trained me: he was the person who forced me to remove the check cord and the same one who encouraged me to forget quails and start testing steadiness using partridges and pheasants. He also encouraged me to trust the dog more and to run her on other grounds to see how she would react to different birds in different places. He watched all my moves and all my handling, corrected my mistakes and created new, more advanced (that was smart!), settings in which to test Briony. He minimized my concerns on rabbits and even lent me an expensive bird launcher. Well to be honest he lent that but... recommended me several times to switch it off after each use and... not to loose it (as if it were small!). So, well, thank you C. for being one of those experienced and helpful people who made grouse trials possible for me and Briony.

On steadiness (... and obedience!)

As soon as Briony became steady to flush I, full of pride, posted some videos on Facebook. The road that brought us to steadiness was a long one, I was extremely happy to have reached what, months early, seemed to be unattainable. Briony was originally purchased to be my personal shooting dog and indeed she became a good one. She knew how to locate birds, point, be steady on point and retrieve the killed ones but, like all the Italian shooters, I did not even think to make her steady to wing and shot. I simply did not care and she

spent years “chasing” after the bird was produced, until I realized she was good enough to run in field trials.

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



I do not have superpowers, but maybe my mentor does, as a matter of fact he is widely known as the “Shaman”, or as “White Feather”. White Feather (from here on WF) has been knowing me for a very long time: I was one of his students at

the three months class (!!!) to become a certificate stalker (deer, roe buck, fallow deer, boar...) and he taught me during the course I attended to become a certified biometric data collector (we measure and establish the age of stalked and hunted game). He saw me and interacted with me several times during trials, gatherings, conferences and so... yet, before accepting to "train" me, he wanted to meet me again and look at me under a different light. Our first formal meeting happened over a cup of espresso, we were seated at table by the street, Briony was on lead and a cat passed by: I prevented any possible reactions and he appreciated that, a training session was scheduled for the following day.

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



After another espresso (we both like coffee), we moved to the training ground and I had my first shocking lesson on the meaning of “obedience”. I opened the car and Briony’s cage to let her out. WF quickly made us clear that she could not leave the cage, nor the car without his permission. During the following months, his permission became “my permission”; she had to learn to sit and stay if I had to cross a ditch and then come later, if and when called. While all my friends were enjoying their shooting season, me and Briony were practicing sit/stay/come/drop to whistle daily, whatever the weather and the place. We trained in the countryside, in the city, in the shops, with or without stimuli. It was hard and even depressing: I spent months studying fish inspection for my veterinary degree and practicing sit/stay/drop!



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

Addestrati il cane – Train your dog

“E’ di rado vantaggioso che un cane abbia più di un istruttore. Può darsi che i metodi di insegnamento siano gli stessi ma potrebbero esserci differenze nella voce o nei modi

che potrebbero confondere in qualche maniera l'allievo rallentandone i progressi. Quindi, se decidete di addestrare il vostro cane, fatelo per conto vostro senza lasciare che nessuno possa interferire.” W. H. Hutchinson Dog Breaking 1865

CHAPTER II.

INITIATORY LESSONS WITHIN DOORS. SHOOTING PONIES.

14. One Instructor better than two.—15. Age at which Education commences.—Indoor breaking for hours, better than Outdoor for weeks.—16. To obey all necessary Words of Command and all Signals before shown Game.—17. Unreasonableness of not always giving Initiatory Lessons—leads to Punishment—thence to Blinking.—18. Dog to be your constant Companion, not another's.—19, 21, 22. Instruct when alone with him. Initiatory Lessons in his Whistle—in "Dead"—"Toho"—"On."—20. All Commands and Whistling to be given in a low Tone.—23 to 26. Lessons in "Drop"—Head between fore-legs—Setters crouch more than Pointers.—24. Slovenly to employ right arm both for "Drop" and "Toho."—27. Lessons in "Down-charge"—taught at Pigeon-match—rewards taken from Hand.—28. Cavalry Horses fed at discharge of Pistol—same plan pursued with Dogs.—29. Dog unusually timid to be coupled to another.—30. Lessons at Feeding Time, with Check-cords.—31. Obedience of Hounds contrasted with that of most Pointers and Setters.—32. Shooting Ponies—how broken in.—33. Horse's rushing at his Fences cured—Pony anchored.

14. It is seldom of any advantage to a dog to have more than one instructor. The methods of teaching may be the same; but there will be a difference in the tone of voice and in the manner that will more or less puzzle the learner, and retard rather than advance his education. If, therefore, you resolve to break in your dog, do it entirely yourself: let no one interfere with you.

15. As a general rule, let his education begin when he is about six or seven months old * (although I allow

* But from his very infancy you ought not to have allowed him to be disobedient. You should have made him know—which he will do nearly intuitively—that a whip can punish him, though he ought never to have suffered from it. I have heard of pups only

four months old being made quite *au fait* to the preliminary drill here recommended. This early exercise of their intelligence and observation must have benefited them. The questionable point is the unnecessary consumption of the instructor's time.

Non c'è molto da aggiungere al testo. Hutchinson ha ragione anche se, viste le condizioni attuali, forse è un filo estremo. Quanti di noi sanno addestrare da sé il proprio cane da caccia? Non parlo di "allenare" o meglio portare il cane a correre in campagna sperando che faccia due ferme, parlo di addestramento completo. Se non sono capace di fare una cosa, devo farmi aiutare da qualcuno più esperto di me e qui entra in gioco un'eventuale seconda figura che può confondere il cane. Togliamo pure il può e diciamo che lo confonde, per questo motivo la figura a cui ci appoggiamo deve essere intesa come colui che ci traghetta verso conoscenze che dobbiamo apprendere al fine di addestrare da soli il nostro cane.

L'esperto deve essere una figura di riferimento più per noi che per il cane, non una persona a cui delegare il lavoro sporco, né uno sventurato a cui affidare la rimessa in sesto di un cane indisciplinato. Io la vedo così, poi le cose vanno diversamente, ma questo è un altro discorso...

Se non lo avete ancora fatto, date un'occhiata al [Gundog Research Project](#).