

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Fieldwork 3) – 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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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.



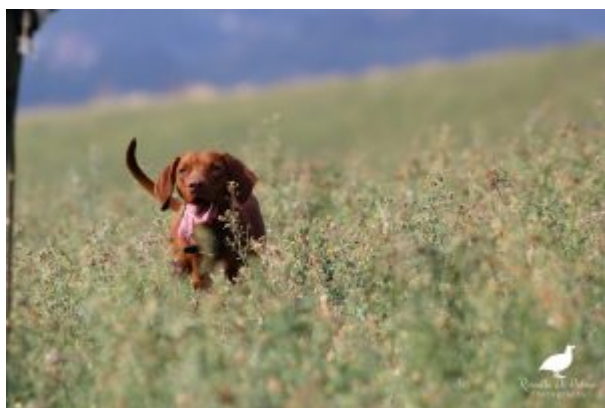
Tok & Flake

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...](#)

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

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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.



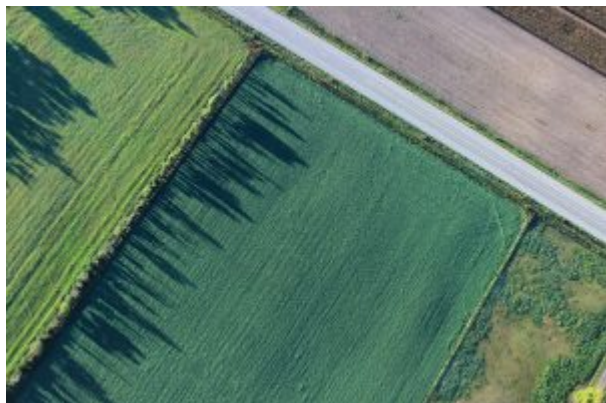
If someone helps you...

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 50x100 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
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.](#)

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Obedience and Discipline) – By T. Mostert

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We are Losing Legendary Methods (Obedience and Discipline) – By T. Mostert

This is purely my opinion, what I believe and have experienced, there are many other opinions and beliefs when it comes to training obedience. Clickers, treats, positive conditioning, e-collars, positive – negative training, in the end there are as many methods as there are dog breeds. Everyone sells their method as the gospel, as the only way to train a dog. Then you have the other side of the coin where trainers believe the dog should be as raw as possible, sticking close to his instinct and breeding as possible, with little human interference.

Now I can tell you that the best bird finding dog I have ever seen is a English Pointer that had non existing obedience, the only time the dog would stand still was when pointing, he was wild!

Blood trackers do not care if the dog pulls or pushes, as long as he is tracking and finding game, no recall or stop signals are needed because the dog is restrained all the time.

Unfortunately, if you have a HPR dog and you will use it in all the disciplines he was bred for, you cannot afford to have little, or no obedience. You may get away with it competing in young dog classes, but you will never, I repeat, never make it to the top 10% of elite dogs without proper obedience. To be at the top of every discipline consistently, you need a dog to listen and obey commands. To have a dog hunt in areas with main roads and rail tracks, you need obedience; to ensure your dog does not go after game you may not hunt, you need obedience and discipline. In short if nothing else to keep

your dog from getting hurt or killed you need ob



As said before, I spent many, many, hours with Jeppe Stridh and I believe in his methods. My own conclusions run parallel to his training and the 95% – 5% rule (praise- correction ratio) is what I stick to, in all my training, not just obedience. As Jeppe clearly states, dogs see a red or green light, there is no amber warning light for them, it is yes or no, keep it simple. A leash is a restraint, when you start training a leash is a great tool but, unless the dog learns that you are a mental and physical leash right out to beyond where the dog can see, you will never have full control. Your " presence" needs to extend to the limit of where you are willing to let the dog go, this is also the limit at where you should work the dog! If you cannot control the dog at 20 meters off leash why, why try and control it at 300 meters? You are simply allowing the dog to say fuck you!

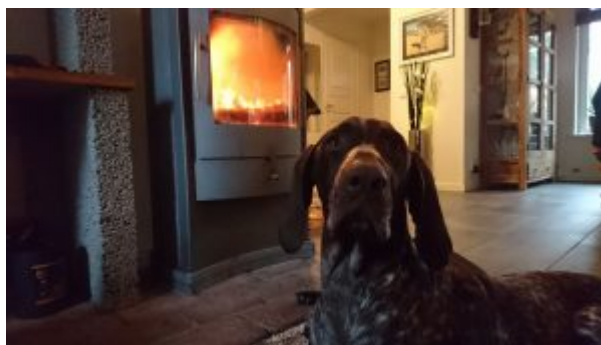
Mistakes, or inappropriate behaviour, shall be corrected immediately and swiftly, is everything. Do not hang over the dog or extend the corrections, it places more pressure on them and has more negative effect than correction attributes. Also once the correction is done, give the dog space, take a step sideways away from the dog. He will close that gap up by himself, which is exactly what you want! Always, always be friendly with the dog right after any corrections, always!

I have a problem and I have had it for a while, I am working

on it and I try to keep it in mind everyday. I want to keep touching Flake to reassure her and calm her down, it is wrong. Your voice ,attitude and general body language should be enough to do all of these things, save the touching and stroking for when you are not training (you are always training, I know).

Flake was a unsure puppy and needed more encouragement than most other dogs. Lucky we got over that quickly, but the touching habit has not been broken by me. A dog is low, or insecure, when his tail is tucked, ears and whole demeanor are low, won't look you in the eyes, keeps exposing his stomach to you and follows behind you. Then you need to be extremely careful and give him all the support you can. Opposed to that, is the strong bullhead dog that needs progressively harder correction until they toe the line.

It is all a balance, fine adjustments in voice, movements and commands both positive and negative should be made all the time, until you find what is best for you and your dog. Repeated useless corrections are only going to make things harder for both you and the dog. When the dog does something right, praise him immediately and excessively, once he understands, tone the praise down bit by bit until a simple click of the your tongue is all the praise the dog needs, I don't even do that anymore a simple nod, and silent good dog is all she needs to acknowledge me and know that she did well.



I get asked how often I train discipline and obedience My answer is always the same ,I don not train it I live it, it never stops. Feed the dog, sit, stay, okay you can eat now.

Door open dog still waits for a command to indicate it's okay to go out, finished outside door still open, dog sits and waits for my command to say she can come in. Open her crate in the back of the car, she waits for a command to get in, same for when she gets out. It is a never ending process. Why? The dog keeps evolving, new experiences, new places, new faces and hormones as they age, but they need to understand the same rules always apply.

Now for a crucial part that relates directly to field work and obedience. It is a contradiction, but a vital part of turning a well trained HPR into a bird machine! You cannot have a good field dog if you have too much discipline! The two do not go hand in hand! It is no use having a remote operated dog that will only do what you tell it to do on a field, for a dog to find birds it has to rely on its senses and experience, not on the handler. Here and only here do you need to back off on the obedience! Your dog needs freedom to make the correct choices and gain experience.

Example 1:

Trainer and dog arrive at a field test. Dog has no leash from the moment he gets let out of the vehicle. Trainer and dog follow after the pairs being released, dog is never more than a arm length away from the trainer, never. Time comes for the pair to run their beat on the field. Dog is released/sent out to work the field, runs left 50 meters, switches, runs right 50 meters switches, goes out 30 meters, cuts back to pass a meter from the trainer. This continues for 5 minutes, until the dog is maybe 70 meters deep and 50 meters wide, dog stops looks back at the trainer and waits for a command. Same scenario plays out the whole 15 minute beat, often accompanied by the trainer blowing on the whistle every minute. This dog is focused on getting it right, it is getting it all wrong!

Example 2:

Trainer arrives at a field test, gets out of the vehicle with a leash, is forcing the door open, but also blocking it at the same time until he can slip the leash on the dog. From there he is a weight being dragged after the dog until he and his dog have a beat to run. Leash off dog runs up down, left right finds a hare and 4 hours later the retainer still has not managed to get hold of the dog. This despite blowing himself blue in the face for at least 2 hours on a whistle that has never worked on the dog.

They may be two extreme examples, but they are real examples of both too much and too little obedience and both end the same way, no birds no score.

There is so much more I want to write on this topic, but it is better to find a Legend and train with him.

While testing dogs may be hard, hunting with them is going to multiply any lack of or excess of obedience. No matter how much of a simulation you do while training, it is nothing compared to the real thing. I have picked up more mistakes under high pressure hunting situations than I ever will simply training, if your HPR is just going to do the circuit of trails you have it easy. If however you are going to use the true potential of the dog and take yourself and your HPR to the limit of your and their abilities, make sure you have a solid foundation in obedience and discipline. *You cannot let go something you never had, you can only let something go if you have it, simple rule for obedience and discipline.*

[More on fieldwork here.](#)

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 freedom, 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

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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

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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 par 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.

[Click here if you want to read about waterwork.](#)

We are Losing Legendary Methods (Retrieves)– 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.](#)

Part 2: We are Losing Legendary Methods (Retrieves) – by T. Mostert

Arne played a major role in training Flake for water retrieves, but before a dog can retrieve in water, he has to be able to do this perfectly on land! So, let's take a step back. Too many folks have opinions on which method is the best, *force fetch* or the *natural fetch* training method. Dogs react to movement: you throw a ball and the dog wants to chase, or catch, or fetch it (that's why hare and rabbit are so hard to proof against), movement is a trigger, it is a natural thing for them. To me it breaks down to what works for a particular dog and I use a hybrid system between natural retrieve and a forced fetch.

Both, or a mix of the systems, however, are useless if you cannot have your dog off leash sitting by your side without moving to a cast, or a false cast (I use false casts to steady a dog). One thing to keep in mind is that with a force fetch the dog will retrieve everything you tell him to retrieve, whereas a natural retriever will, at some point, refuse to take a retrieve, especially to pick up predatory animals.



Casting Flake

Flake would sit on command and I would start with a wooden dummy wrapped in a towel in front of her, sometimes getting her a bit excited, or worked up. Some dogs need encouragement, others need to be held firm. On command I would give her the dummy in her mouth and tell her to stand steady. To release the dummy, I would simply say thank you and take it. Sounds pretty easy doesn't it? Well, it's not, I just skipped over hours of frustration and swearing (silent swearing). Make up your own mind on what works for you and stick to it. Once she takes the dummy there is no chewing or playing, this is not an option. A lot of praise (95% praise -5% correction rule) and stroking her under the chin while she holds the dummy. Some folks say never pat the head, as it encourages them to bite into the dummy, hard mouth dogs do not need any encouragement, but I can't say yes or no, because I have not had a hard mouth dog.

Start slow, 3-4 seconds is a good hold for a young dog and work your way up to a time that suites you, I get bored after a minute. If Flake helds for a minute, I would start walking her on leash with the dummy in her mouth, only a few steps at first, then stop, sit and *thank you*. I did not let her drop the dummy into my hand, they tend to do that when your hand goes to the dummy. Only after I say *thank you*, she must release. I also took time to falsely take the dummy away without a *thank you*, to make sure she understood the whole process.

A few reminders:

1. *Have fun training, if it is work for you or the dog, you are doing it wrong.*
2. *Never end a training session with a failure, go back a step until the dog gets it right and finish there.*
3. *A dogs mind gets tired before the body does, keep sessions short but focused.*
4. *Dogs do not speak human language, but "fuck you" is "fuck you" even in dog language, do not ever let a dog say fuck you and leave it there, you will fail again and again.*
5. *Sometimes you need to take a step back to go forward.*
6. *If you get it right all the time, you are not doing it right.*
7. *Even a bad trainer can teach you something, even if it is only the difference between good and bad. Take what you need from a training session and leave what you do not appreciate.*
8. *A good dog will make a bad trainer look good, a good trainer will make a bad dog look good.*
9. *It is never about the quantity of time, it is about the quality of the time.*
10. *Protect your dog from dogs that have no discipline, it builds trust.*

Final few words, a HPR dog does play games that are not some form of training. I smoke, and every time I went out of the house to light up Flake would follow.



Thanking Flake

I would send her out in the garden tell her to sit and throw a tennis ball at her to catch, simple innocent game? Wrong! The next time I sent her out in the field to search for a retrieve she sat down and waited for me to cast that bloody ball! Took me three weeks to break that habit I created.

Think, think, think, structure everything and plan it, then stand in front of the mirror and repeat it, if it still makes sense teach the dog. This brings me back to Legends like Arne, get help we are all blind to our own mistakes, even if we see mistakes done by other handlers or dogs!

[To read the second part of the article click here.](#)

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 □

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.

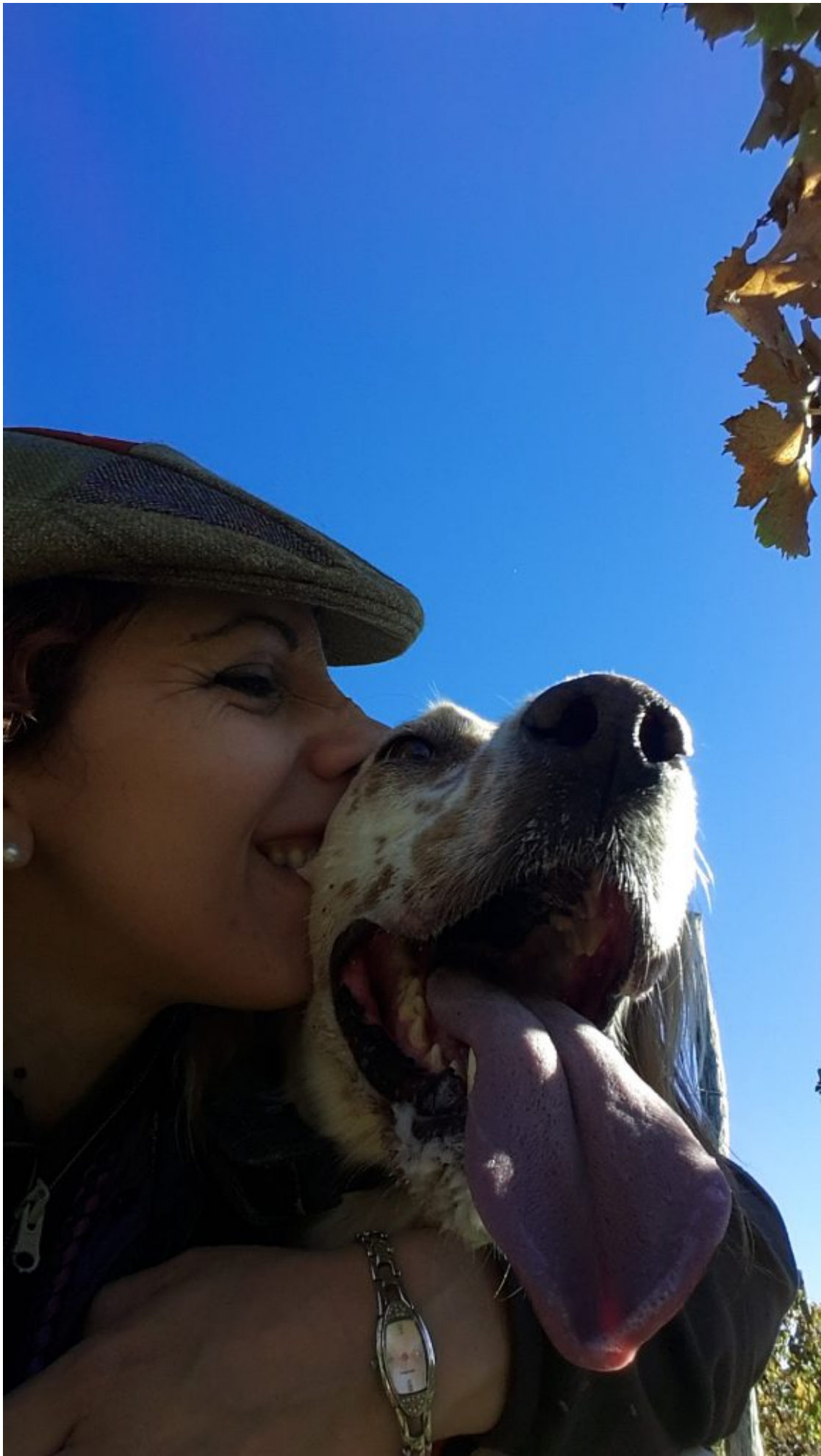
The most common comments I hear from judges these days is that dogs lack discipline. This is where I started with Flake and thus Part 1, Part 2 will cover retrieving and [tracking](#) with a Legend that flies under the radar.

Save room for dessert

I like not-so-sweet desserts, and I always save room for them but, in this case, Briony, who came last, was the dessert.

This shooting season, for me, this year is quite quiet... With the exception of today, I had only one proper shooting day, the opening of the shooting season. Then nothing but for two micro-walks in the countryside carrying a shotgun, alone, no boar hunting yet. I really enjoy shooting, but this year it seems to be impossible to keep up with everything. I continue training Briony, attend some trials, work and prepare demanding university exams, sadly is really hard to find any free time to go shooting. Furthermore, nobody wants to come

shooting with me, I must be an awful person! No, let's put jokes aside, the problem is that Briony is steady to flush and fairly obedient, while the average Italian pointing dog is not steady and is usually... well... WILD! It would not be fair to pretend her to be obedient and steady when other dogs are encouraged to misbehave .

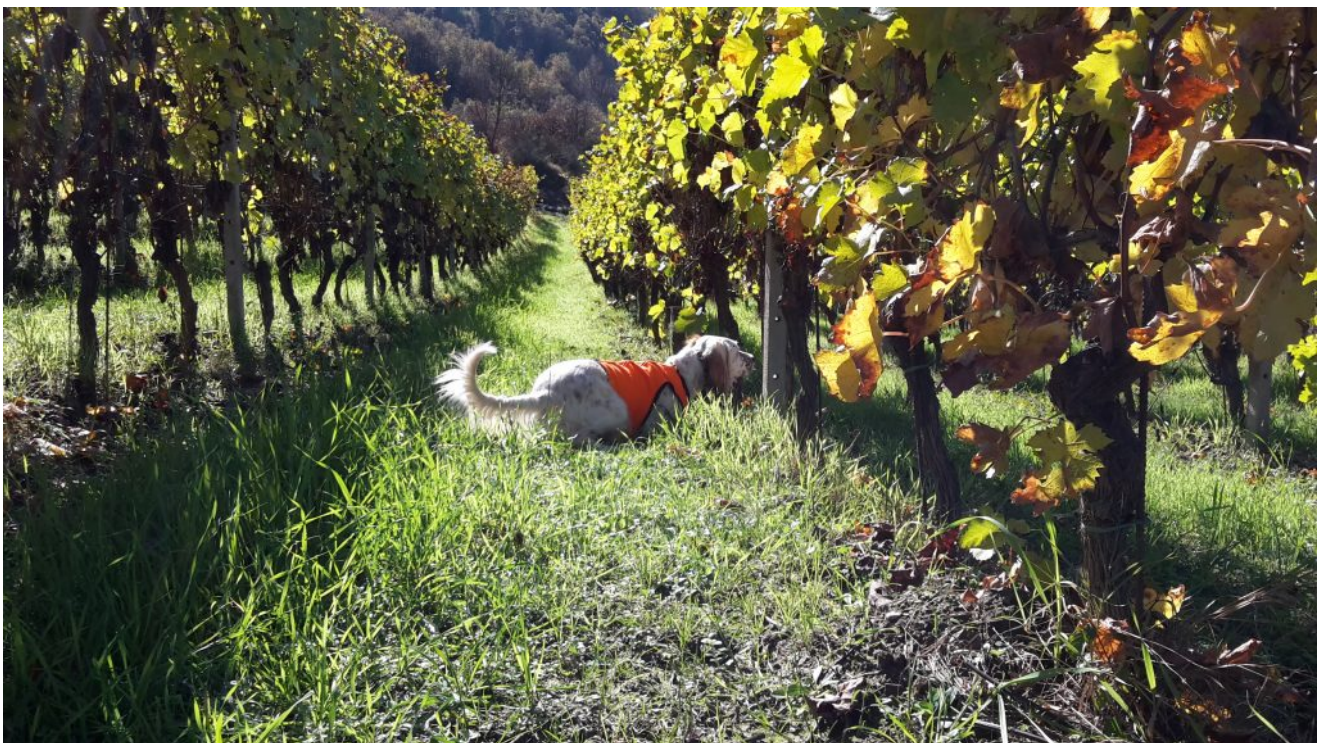


Biting the dessert!

Yesterday night I was commenting a Facebook post by my friend Andrea Vaccari (he has a [nice blog](#) on the Bracco Italiano, if you are interested in the breed). Andrea is a good hunter and a reasonably good trainer: he was complaining because almost all of the Italian hunters, who shoot over pointing dogs, feel the need to have a GPS tracking collar and/or a beeper to locate their furry friend. I agree with Andrea, this is nonsense and often equals to a lack of sportsmanship. People throw dogs out cars, let them run like wild horses and then go looking for them using some high tech device. Some people are really proud of having dogs who hunt (obviously for themselves) one mile ahead of their handler. I found this rather stupid and sometimes even annoying as beepers are extremely loud and can be heard from afar. Also, how can you test important qualities such as trainability, cooperation and connection to the handler? I am not attacking GPS and beepers because I do not like them: technology can be useful but it should not be used as an excuse to avoid training a dog.

When you say something against beepers and GPS collars, people get quite defensive and claim that they have purchased these devices for "safety". Yes, it is true, a GPS collar can be useful if a dog gets lost or something happens, but we are talking about pointing dogs, not about hounds. A pointing dog should hunt close and visible enough to be useful to the gun, which means you have to train the dog to hunt at a reasonable distance from you. If you keep the dog at the proper distance, you can see him and see what happens around him, you do not need a GPS tracking collar. Furthermore, a GPS tracking collar cannot save the dog if the dog is too far: last spring a young setter drowned in a river. He was wearing a GPS collar and the owner witnessed the whole tragedy through the device, he was one mile away from the dog. I think GPS collars give you a false illusion of safety: people think that knowing the dog's location they can save him in case of need, what they do not

consider is that they can be too far. This false illusion, in my opinion, indirectly encourages owners to give more and more freedom to dogs, in the false hope to bag one more bird, and yes birds are scarce here. I was also told that a GPS tracking collar is almost compulsory if you have a German pointing dog because they like chasing deer, people cannot not believe that you can drop a properly trained Deutsch Drahthaar when a deer is present. If you hunt woodcock, however, the beeper is even better – they claim- as you can locate the dog without checking the GPS screen constantly and... Brown dogs cannot be seen in the wood! What about a high visibility orange vest? It is cheaper and it does not make noise.



When I first got involved with pointing dogs, I used to train with Deutsch Drahthaars (German Wirehaired Pointers), these dogs were trained for German Hunting Tests and obedience was incredibly important. I used to admire these dogs (I have a soft spot for these rugged hunters) and their people, I never thought any English Setters could learn the same things. In 2015, instead, I went to England and I saw some English Setters behaving like the Germans I knew, what an awakening! I can candidly admit that for me there is a BE (Before England)

and a AE (After England) era, as my views on dog handling and training radically changed. I eventually came to the conclusion that there are two pointing dog training methods:

- ***The Italian Method: aka let the dog run and do whatever he likes and... chase him;***
- ***The German (but also British, Scandinavian...) Method: aka the dog has to do what you ask him to do, no matter what.***



As a consequence, I now feel a “**little**” out of place and none of my friends has a dog who can go shooting with Briony. The last time she went shooting with other dogs was last year, I was invited to a nice estate and I brought her: huge mistake. Dogs were running all over the place, no obedience, no steadiness nothing AND... guess what, a group of incredibly disappointed dog owners. They could not get close to the birds in time to shoot, birds were flying out of the estate and taking the dogs away with them. It was terrible, Briony was doing well but, being the only dog still around she became an easy target, all that was happening was our fault! Exhausted, I took her back the car and began picking blackthorns, shooters then calmed down, came to me and sincerely apologized. I went back to the grounds, but left Briony in the car, it was the wisest thing to do. This year... I got invited

to the same place again, by some of the same people. They are good friends, I like them and I did not want to disappoint them in any way: we have been shooting together for years and, when Briony was younger, it was thanks to the birds they paid for that she gained experience. I really owe them much, but I did not want to find myself in unpleasant situation again. I kindly accepted the invitation, but I told them I was not going to run Briony. They offered to give me ground for myself, but I refused, I told them I was happy to be their guest and I would have enjoyed their dogs. Briony was going have a run at the end of the shooting day, alone.



When I reached the lunch hut at 9 AM, they had already left so the gamekeeper told me where to go. A pack of SIX English Setters was running all over the hill: I could quickly locate everybody. Two men were on this side of the hill, and two more on the other side. Two shooters were following two (randomly chosen) dogs and the other two were following the remaining three. The sixth dog had disappeared. I joined the first two shooters that passed by me, their setters were wearing a GPS collar because, I was told, they tended to roam. The men disappeared as soon as they came, the two white dogs told them

it was time to move to a different place. The gamekeeper gave up and remained with me for a while: the missing white dog was running wild in a different part of the estate. An "important" client was shooting there, and other keepers were busy trying to catch the white wild dog, I bet he was having a lot of fun. The other friends eventually passed by with their three setters, I followed them for about three hours. The dogs were nice but they worked like a pack. Vento is the leader and the other ones, humans included, follow. These dogs could find birds, point them, honour each other's points and retrieve killed birds, but this game had no rules. Dogs were not steady and did not make a good use of the ground, I could see no logic behind their running but, most of all, they did not mind the owner. Yes, they waited for him as they wanted to retrieve the birds and they knew the birds had to be shot first but, after the bird had fallen and being grabbed in their mouths, they would quickly forget any humans.



Keeping an eye...

By the end of the morning, 18 birds (pheasants and grey partridges) were bagged but, we had gone up and down the hill and in and out of woods and briars walking at least twice on the same ground. Some grey partridge mini-coveys were also flying back and forth, teasing us. When my friends announced they were going back to the car, I went to mine and let Briony have a well deserved run, this is what happened. As soon as we left the car she pointed, she waited for me and then roaded towards the bird, a grey flew from afar, she did not see her but I stopped her. I then told her to go ahead with the action and she did it again, another grey which flew into the bushes. Briony was steady and we could perform the same action again, on a third bird. I then let her "play" again with the greys (now more hidden by briars) until bushes began to thicken to let me keep an eye on her. In less than 20 minutes, I could have bagged about three or four birds, without running back and forth like a comet, without a GPS and without a beeper. I then moved to a more open ground and let her run left and right, practicing some obedience. More greys, undisturbed by my non-chasing dog – were in a wood below us but she had already done what she was supposed to do, and confirmed me that my sacrifices had been definitely worth! I was very happy!!!



When, over lunch, I told people what happened and why I handled the dog in the way I did, they were happy for me and impressed at the same time. Some asked how I trained her, I simply told everybody that it was just hard work and that everybody could do the same. They vaguely agreed, but underlined they had no time to undertake such an intensive training program, Fishing ad hare then became the main topic until...they saw Briony again in the parking lot. She was on lead and she did not do anything special but for behaving nicely and remaining seated if told to do so. There were other unknown shooters around and many of them came to see the "trained" dog: according to some I am very "lucky" to own such a dog. Of course I have been lucky to find her when she was a plumpy puppy but, what came later was not just luck. Luck played an important role because I had a chance to have my British eye opening experience; had a chance to ask questions and get answers; had a chance to have wonderful mentors, but I was also open enough to discard an old system of beliefs and start working hard following a new scheme.

Ps. If I could make it, you can do it! Peace, love and happy training! I am in a happy/hippie mood tonight!



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 GWP's 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.