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AUGUST 2018 | VOLUME 37 | NUMBER 4

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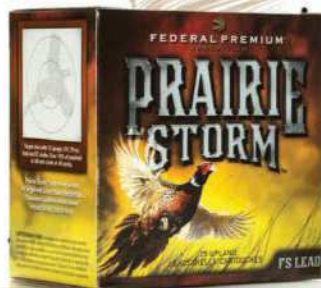
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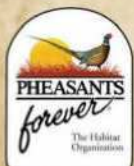
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# Welcome, Tom!

WITH THIS ISSUE we welcome Tom Dokken as our newest *GUN DOG* contributor; Tom is taking over the "Retrieve" column following the departure of Chad Mason. As Chad explained in his farewell column last

issue, a recent move to a larger city and a diminishing enthusiasm for writing about gun dogs and bird hunting indicated it was time to pass the baton, and we thank him for both his candor and his many years of outstanding service to the magazine.

Although this issue marks Tom's inaugural effort as a regular *GUN DOG* columnist, he is already well known to most of you as a trainer, seminar leader, author and the developer and marketer of the popular DeadFowl series of retrieving dummies. He's been featured in a number of articles by Tony Peterson over the years (most recently, "Dokken's Drone Drills" in our October 2017 issue) and he is also a regular contributor to *WILDFOWL*, our sister publication.

On several occasions it has been my pleasure to spend time with Tom at his Oak Ridge Kennels in Northfield, Minnesota; Oak Ridge is a state of the art training facility and Tom and his wife Tina always roll out the red carpet for my visits. I've greatly enjoyed watching their dogs work in the field and the water; years ago we shot a series of retriever training DVDs with Tom and I can confirm that the Dokken Labs are all outstanding performers.

Tom also pioneered shed antler hunting with dogs and he and Tina now hold a National Shed Dog Championship each spring at Oak Ridge. I attended the event a couple years ago and as I reported at the time, it was a heckuva lot of fun, a real family affair with handlers and dogs of all descriptions. As you might guess, sporting breeds predominated, but I still recall a Boston terrier Chihuahua mix who wasn't much bigger than the antlers he retrieved. He gave new meaning to the expression "mitey but mighty."

Tom Dokken brings a wealth of experience to his new gig as *GUN DOG*'s "Retrieve" columnist, and we're delighted to have him sharing his expertise with us. We think you're going to like what he has to say.

Tom Dokken brings a wealth of experience to his new position as "Retrieve" columnist.

rick.vanetten@outdoorsg.com



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# Defining Able

**TYLER DENSFORD IS** a retired U.S. Air Force veteran from Mississippi who just received a service dog named Able from non-profit Retrieving Freedom, Inc (RFI). RFI trains service dogs for disabled veterans and children with autism, as well as diabetic alert dogs. I had the great fortune to hunt with Able and Tyler, who became a paraplegic and is remanded to a wheelchair after falling 50 feet from a Blackhawk helicopter during a training exercise in 2016. Before the accident, Tyler had plans to become a pilot, which he still hopes to do. He has not let this disability dictate his life.



“Rather than wilting away in bed, I decided to take this crappy situation and run with it,” Tyler said.

Katey McClenny | Via email

## FIRST RETRIEVE

This is Eli Remington (Remy), our golden retriever one week after his 1st birthday. Remy had just retrieved his first diver, a nice ringneck, and come back into the blind when three shovelers came into the decoys. You can see the intensity as he watches the working ducks. Remy has already made numerous difficult blind retrieves and has phenomenal drive, a great nose and a fun-loving personality. Remy is also doing very well on pheasants and his father Tito became the first golden retriever to win the AKC Master Hunter Upland title in August 2014.



Gil Diekhoff  
Morton, IL

## CORRECTION

The description of the SportDOG training unit on page 35 of our June/July issue included two errors. The unit pictured and described is actually the SportTrainer 875 (SKU: SD-875), not the SD-825. Also, the price shown (\$120) is incorrect; the correct price is \$224.95.

We regret these errors and apologize for any inconvenience to readers and SportDOG.



**On The Cover:** Welsh springer spaniel SHR CH Greenwood's Angus MH, owned and photographed by Brian Schmidt



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**2 LADY KILLERS**

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This is **DIESEL** sleeping on a gun after a hard day of hunting pheasants at the Black River Fish and Game Club in Clinton, New Jersey.

— Roy and Phyllis Billich, Clinton, NJ



Good day in the field with our three well trained versatile hunting dogs: **REMI**, a Braque Francais; **VINNY**, a Bracco Italiano; and **GUNTHER**, a Large Munsterlander.

—Lance Olson, Kettle River, MN



This is our 7-year-old Brittany, **PAIGE**, on opening day of pheasant season. Paige is fearless with lots of heart and loves to hunt pheasants and chuckars.

— Ron and Sharon Vail, Moro, OR



This is **RUGER**, an almost 2-year-old shed-hunting Lab. We took him dove hunting once and he retrieved the lone dove we shot. He loves the dog park and retrieving sticks from the water.

— Saige Glasford, Buckner, MO

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This is **RYTER**, a 10 month old German wirehaired pointer on his first hunt in Drummond, Oklahoma. He's ready for quail to open in a few week for sure!

— Joshua Levendusky, Norman Oklahoma



This is my yellow Lab, **SHELBY**, retrieving a ringneck on her first hunting trip to North Carolina.

— Terry Moore, Newport News, VA



This is **BAILEY GRETTA**, our 2-year-old German wirehaired pointer. Eccentric and cuddly at home but a great grouse dog. Hunts close in thick woods, always eager to learn and loves the challenge no matter the outcome.

— Tyler and Alexandria Stineman, Allen Park, MI



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# Fat-Free

Here's how to keep your dog in shape.

**IT ISN'T JUST** Americans that are overweight, it's our dogs.

Sure, we've all seen fat Labs, but English pointers and setters? Aren't they supposed to be the wiry endurance athletes of the bird dog world?

Dogs, like people, have widely varying metabolisms. I've owned a springer spaniel and several Brittanys as well as a half dozen English pointers and English setters, and while the spaniels tend to pack on the pounds far easier than the pointers and setters, they'll all get fat if you let them. Notice I said, "if you let them."

Barring some kind of health issue, if they pork out, it's your fault, not theirs. When my dogs have become a little too chunky for my taste—and they have on rare occasions—it was my fault, not theirs. After all, your dogs don't control how much they exercise and eat; you do.

So why bother? Why not just let them lounge around in front of the TV until opening day, then have them burn off the pounds while they hunt? Let's answer that question with an analogy. Let's say you decide that, in nine months time, you're going to enter and run in a marathon. But rather than train for it something I tried once briefly in my long ago and squandered youth—you decide to read training manuals about marathons, rather than attempting to build your endurance with actual training runs. When race day rolls around, you figure, what the heck, I'll train while I'm running. Make sense?

But this is an excuse I hear over and over again when it's applied to dogs, i.e., that they'll hunt themselves into shape. I will admit, grudgingly, that it sometimes works. But just as often, a few days into the season your dog is so exhausted he can't get off his bed in the morning. Or worse, he's sustained an injury that will sideline him for days, if not weeks.

The protocol for keeping your dog in shape is simple: exercise him and



control his food intake. Let's talk about feeding first.

I'm not going to decipher the arcane ingredients in dog food, since I know next to nothing about that subject. I buy the best food I can find at the best (most economical) price. I'm assuming most of you operate the same way.

First, determine if your dog is actually overweight. There are easy to decipher charts available from, among others, the Purina Company that show what an ideal weight should look like. Basically, when seen from above, a dog should have an hourglass figure. When looked at from the side, his bottom line (chest to belly) should slant up. If it's level or slants down, fatso needs an intervention.

Many people prefer to free feed their dogs, and while there are dogs that will control their intake when given the option of endless food, I wouldn't bet the ranch on it. My suggestion, and one I've always followed with my own dogs, is to control their food intake myself.

A good place to start is with the recommended amounts that are posted on most bags of quality dog food. If the recommendation is for three cups for a 50 pound dog, then feed your pup three cups, period. If he doesn't lose weight, drop the amount by half a cup, then wait a week and see how he looks.

Has he trimmed up? Good, you're on your way. Still chubby? Drop the amount by another half cup, and so on. This can be an ongoing process with some dogs, since their requirements will go up during the hunting season. But it's a starting point.

A caveat: don't give in to your dog's pleading for more food. Bird dogs are always hungry. In the long run, a little bit of hunger is far healthier for your dog than being overweight. Give him a treat once in a while if it makes you feel better, but stick to the program.

Next comes exercise. There are all kinds of ways you can do this: swimming (if your dog likes to swim), fetching Frisbees or tennis balls, even running

© DEAN PEARSON





© JERRY IMPREVENTO

You can see a hint of rib cage in this GSP, the sign of a healthy bird dog.

him through agility drills. But the old fashioned way works as well as anything: taking him out for long runs.

If you've got the time, an hour long run every other day is great, but even a half hour is a big help. Although you can make a considerable improvement in your dog's endurance with just a couple months of weekly training runs, I like to start whenever the snow melts off, which here in Montana is usually late April or early May.

My favorite method of conditioning dogs, however, is by roading them. Pro trainers have been roading their dogs off of horseback or ATVs for decades, and if you've got a horse or an ATV, go for it. Since I don't have either one, I attach logging chains to a roading harness, and run my dogs for approximately 25 minutes at a stretch, several days a week.

Twenty percent of the dog's weight in chains is about right. It works quite well, and what's more, every dog I've ever roaded this way has loved it. In fact, the minute they see their harnesses, they're almost as excited as if I were taking them hunting.

But there are some downsides you should be aware of. Never take a harnessed dog to any location near water. Your pup, looking for a drink, will run into a stream or pond and the chains could potentially pull him under. Instead, choose an open area where you can keep an eye on him in case he gets hung up.

Finally, if your dog has had, or may

be prone to, joint problems, than you may want to reconsider harness work. In the past 18 months, two of my dogs have had four separate surgeries on joints and Achilles tendons, so if I road either of those dogs this year and I probably will with at least one of them it will be with much reduced weight.

You don't need to, nor should you, road your dogs every day. Again, I'd like to offer an analogy to training humans. I've long been a proponent of physical fitness. You name it, I've done it: running, speed walking, biking, rowing, jumping rope, weight lifting. For as much as I've done over the last 45 years, I should be better looking, but that's beside the point.

The current hot training trend for geezers like me is HIIT training, or high intensity interval training short bursts of intense exercise followed by rest, which seems to equal or surpass the efficacy of the traditional cardio work that guys like me have been doing forever. I suspect, although I can't prove it, that it works the same way for dogs. In any event, two or three days per week of short, intense, 25 minute runs in their harnesses and chains keeps my dogs, over the course of the summer, in excellent condition.

The takeaway from all this is the prescription: to keep your dog fit and healthy, exercise him and control his intake of quality food. It will work for you and me, and it will work for your dog, as well. \*

## EXCELLENCE BEGETS EXCELLENCE



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## STARTED & FINISHED DOGS AVAILABLE NOW

I can remember my Granddad telling me that an English Pointer was somewhat like an automatic shotgun: efficient, but frigid.

His thoughts on English Setters: like an over-under: graceful, but without passions. As to all other dogs: kind of like an Iver Johnson; you would only use one if you had nothing else to hunt with.

There was one exception. To him, an Irish Setter Gun Dog was like a well-worn double: comfortable and sweet in your hands and joyful at your shoulder. We believe that Granddad was right and to that end, have been breeding Irish Setter Gun Dogs for over 25 years. Those of you who follow field trials know the Celtic Red Setters: only Celts have ever won an Open All Breed Championship...and they did it twice.

In 1970 we decided to take the old double barrels and compare them to the automatics and the over-unders and so embarked on a field trial program pitting our Irish Setters against the best English Setters and English Pointers in the world.

Twice we won Open All Breed Championships: no other "minority breed" has ever done this. Just this past May, Fireboy was runner-up in the Region I Amateur Shooting Dog Championship (against 36 white dogs, in the heart of New England Bird Dog Country). No other minority breed has ever done this either.

The Celtic Red Setter win record spans 42 years and includes over 1,000 wins against English Setters and English Pointers. Having been forged in the fire of competition, we now believe that the program has earned the right to offer its progeny to the general hunting public.

The Celtic program produces dark, smallish sprites which exude class both going and pointing. They have been bred primarily for brains, so the training is a pleasure; they have been bred secondarily for temperament, so that love for humanity is more than an afterthought. Those qualities combine to make a fine gentleman's shooting dog, the canine equivalent to Granddad's double Purdey. Call or write with your specific needs and desires; we will do our best to match one of our Celts to your home.

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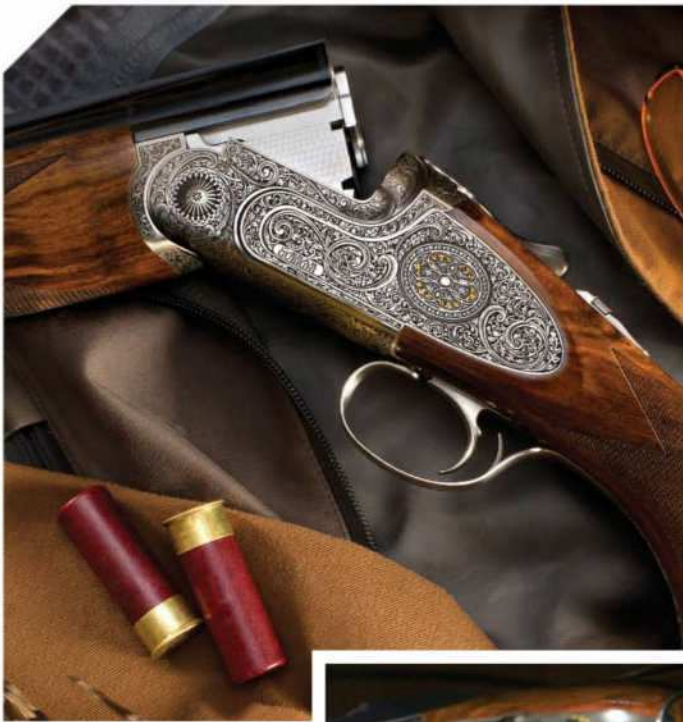
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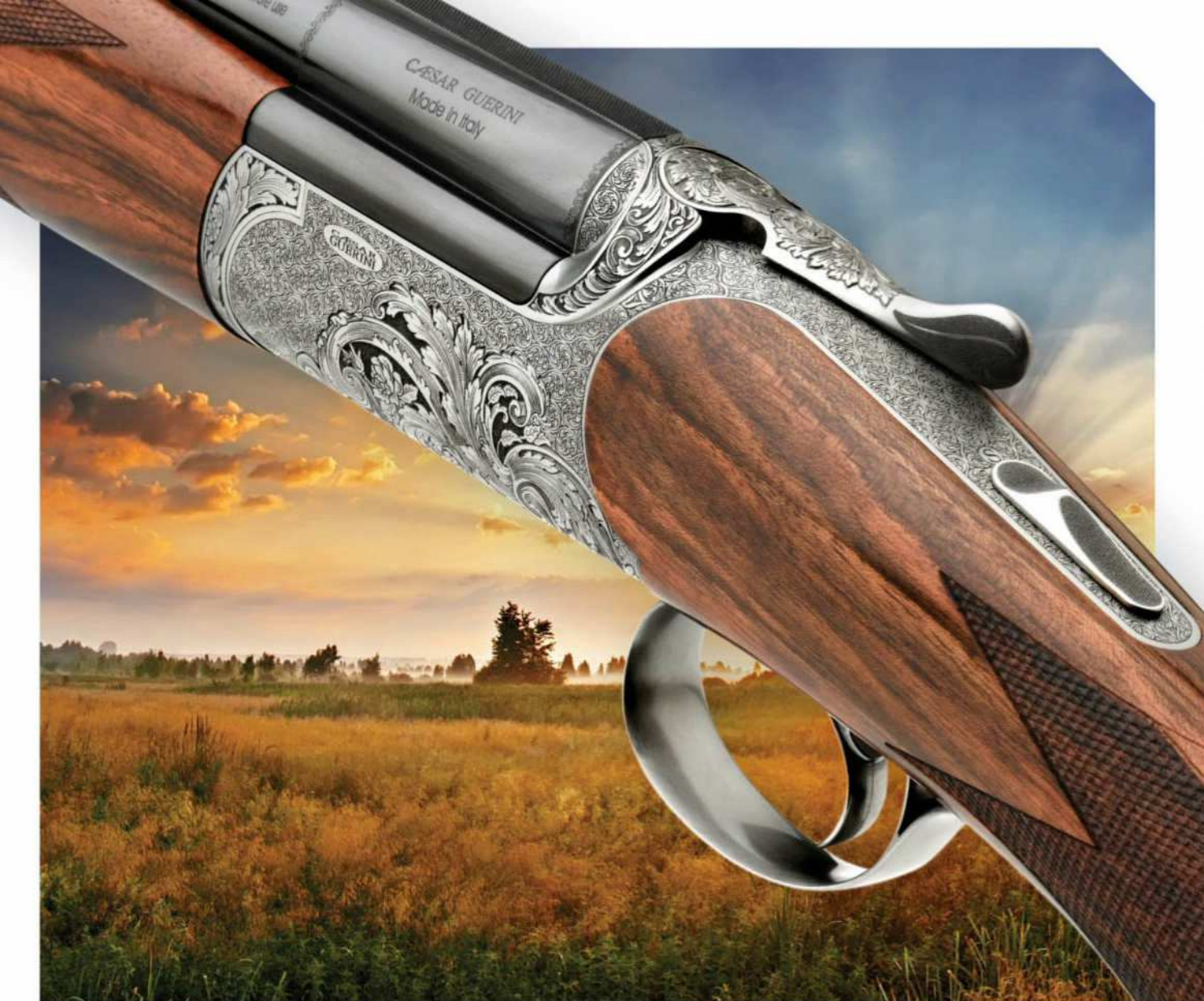
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# No Quarter?

Teach your dog to work a field correctly before the season opens

**AS SPORTING DOG** owners, we train for a lot of things—especially when the season is looming close like it is now. One hunting skill that doesn't get as much love drill wise this time of year, but that certainly should, is quartering properly.

This isn't just about having your dog simply work ahead of you in the CRP, but is about him running a pattern that is conducive to getting high percentage flushes. Now, what exactly constitutes proper quartering varies by breed. Retrievers, spaniels and other flushing breeds need to learn to run this pattern within about 20 yards or so.

This is because a flushed bird will oftentimes get up 10 or 15 yards ahead of the dog, which already puts them at the edge of ethical shooting distance. In the thick grouse woods of the north country, or many of the places quail and woodcock spend their time, 20 yards might even be too far. If you're running a pointer, you can encourage him to work farther out with the understanding that once he makes contact he won't flush the bird.

The task of encouraging proper quartering is much easier today than it was 40 years ago. With the advent of e-collars, we can issue corrections whenever they stray too far. Back then, it was a

different and much more difficult story.

E-collars enable you to communicate to the dog that he will potentially receive discipline once he hits a certain point. This also drives home the fact that you are an active part of the solution to getting corrected. He will quickly learn if he works in range of you, he won't get disciplined.

I've seen it many, many times where dog owners thought they had hopeless cases on their hands, and almost every time it was because they weren't train-

inclined to do this if you work him into the wind, so whether you're hunting or training, pay attention to how it's blowing that day.

Quartering correctly is essentially an extension of basic obedience. Without the foundation of control in place, you'll have a tough go when it comes to teaching quartering. Provided your dog knows he needs to come when you command him to, you can start training in your yard or the neighborhood soccer fields.

I like to use a check cord in the initial

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E-collars enable you to communicate to the dog that he will potentially receive discipline once he hits a certain point.

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ing with the proper equipment. This meant they had to run to the dog to issue a correction by hand, which is terribly inefficient. Of course, simply owning an e-collar isn't the sole answer to the quartering problem.

**THE BEST PRE SEASON DRILL** I want to make it clear that you've always got to give your dog a chance to succeed. Odds are, your dog naturally wants to quarter on his own. He'll be even more

stages, especially if I'm dealing with a young dog. When the dog is working a certain way and is about to hit the end of the cord, I give him a pair of short whistle blasts and start going in the opposite direction. This is called bending, and it's easy for a dog to learn once he understands that whatever command you choose means he needs to turn.

If you're working a truly young dog, the kind with no actual hunting experience, you'll have to be careful. He's not

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Quartering can come naturally, but for a dog to do it properly and within the right range, you'll have to work some pre-season drills.

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likely to be 100 percent under your control, and that means if he gets out too far and keeps getting corrected, he might give up.

He'll simply walk next to you or follow in your footsteps — you don't want this. It is so much easier to rein a dog in than to try and build lost confidence to the point where he'll range out, so be aware of this with pups.

**BREAKING THE RULES** What happens when your Lab is doing exactly what you want him to in a dreamy section of prairie grass and he suddenly gets a snootful of running rooster and takes off? You've got two options: channel your inner Usain Bolt and get running, or work on getting the dog to stop.

For most of us, the latter is the better option. A basic drill that works well to curb the urge to sprint starts out by teaching your dog to sit no matter where he is or what he is doing. I do this by working in the yard with my dogs and then giving the "sit" command. Most of the time, the dog is going to start coming to me as soon as I issue the command, so I anticipate this by immediately going to the dog to make him stop and sit.

As I work this drill, I always make sure to not call the dog to me once I've asked him to sit somewhere. Instead, I'll issue a release command so he can keep going about his business. This may not seem like a big deal while running training drills in the park, but my main concern is the dog doesn't start to get into the habit of coming to me after I issue the "sit" command to him.

If he's hot on the trail of a rooster, I don't want him to lose that trail if I ask him to hold up so I can get closer while we're actually hunting. Eventually, I'll transition from the verbal "sit" command to using a short blast on my whistle.

If you want to know how good your dog is at this, toss a training dummy and wait until he is going 100 mph to make the retrieve and then issue the command to stop him and have him sit. If your dog can do this, he'll be able to hit the brakes on a sprinting ringneck.

You can even start this type of training with a young puppy by having him wait for his food. When he has learned to sit and wait (and obeys his release command), leash him. Have him sit and wait for his food and then release him.



E-collars make quartering training much easier than it was in the past. They allow you to issue warnings and corrections while the dog is actively working, and certainly streamline the whole process.



Quartering rules vary by breed, hunting location, and upland quarry. For flushing dogs, a good rule of thumb is to encourage your dog to work no more than 20 yards ahead of you, no matter what. This ensures that most of the flushes will occur within ethical shooting range.

Before he reaches the food, lightly stop him with the leash and issue the sit command.

This may not seem like much, but it provides an excellent starting point for a dog that is going to have to learn this later in his life, and it's always easier to teach a puppy something than an older dog.

Quartering is probably the most over looked part of upland training. The good news is, if you've got control over your

dog then you're well on your way because the dog already instinctively knows how to do it. You just need to encourage him through some training drills and in field work.

After that, he'll have more fun hunting and so will you, and that special kind of teamwork we all look for between ourselves and our four legged hunting partners will really begin to develop. ✨

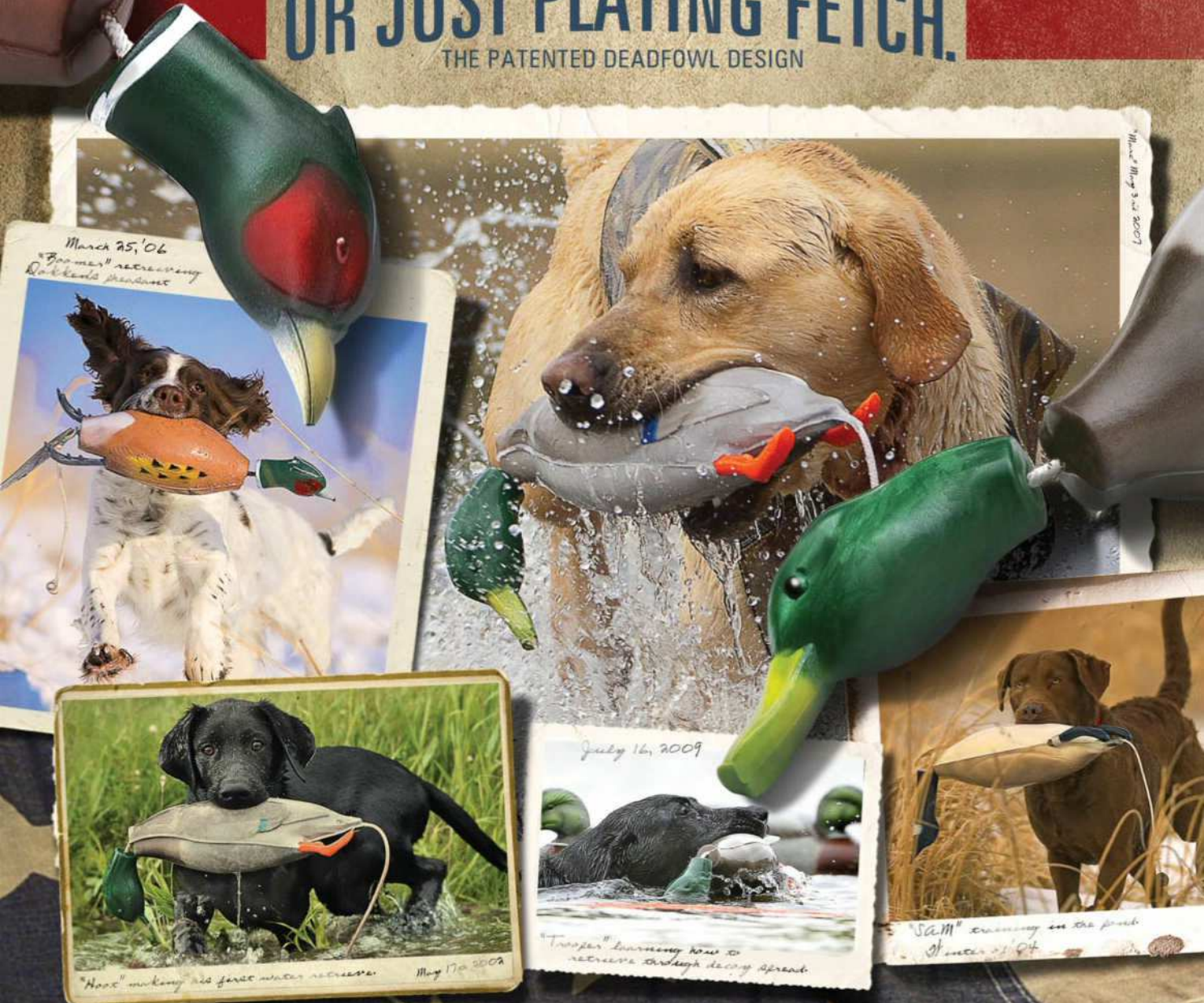


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# Breaking Methods

Over-pressuring pups will only lead to more frustration.

*Note: For the purposes of this article, the term “break” refers to instilling dominance by force over a dog. In this context it does not refer to a dog moving on a bird, or leaving the hup position on a flush or shot in order to chase.*

**WHEN I LOOK** around at dog trainers, I am routinely struck by the fact that the best of the best are often keenly aware of their shortcomings. I recently heard my friend and fellow trainer Delmar Smith address a group of gun dog enthusiasts, and was pleased he made a point that resonated with me.

Delmar, whose gift with animals goes well beyond dogs, was discussing how he managed to diverge from the conventional wisdom that he’d been taught regarding horses. He maintained that in his younger years, and in some circles still, horses were meant to be “broke” rather than trained.

Implicit in “breaking” a horse was the practice of enforcing the trainer’s will upon the horse until it cowed to his or her demands, punishing undesirable behaviors while giving little thought to rewarding the positive. According to Delmar, in shifting his focus from “breaking” to “teaching” the process of developing horses became far more pleasant for all involved.

Delmar’s story spoke to me, as I had been educated in much the same school of thought where dogs are concerned. The first dog I really trained and trialed was a gifted springer pup. I was young and enlisted the help of a Scotsman named Alex who made a decent name for himself training gun dogs in the Hudson Valley of New York. Alex was a classic, old school British trainer, and tolerated no nonsense from his dogs.

His policy was to work dogs in such a way that he would “break” them, setting them up in training situations wherein they would likely fail so he could effectively “correct” the undesirable behavior. It was something of an all or nothing proposition. The grim reality was that in the early days undesirable behaviors were often corrected remotely with a

few pellets of bird shot in the hind end, or with the advent of e collars an excruciating charge of electricity.

In the case of the more resilient dogs, my pup being one, these harsh corrections were not quickly forgotten, and in the best cases the intended behaviors became cemented. But for a good many more dogs, the gravity of the correction, coupled with the failure to establish any clear definition of the intended, desirable behavior, resulted in dogs that simply shut down. These dogs would often refuse to work, and cower with tucked tail, unwilling to do anything at all that might result in pain or confusion, or both.

The tragedy of this early modeling in “breaking” dogs was my young pup was one of those few that made it through

the process relatively unscathed; be it due to toughness or stubbornness I’ll never know. Regardless, he went on to be a great gun dog and trial dog, and I assumed therefore the “breaking” method was universally effective.

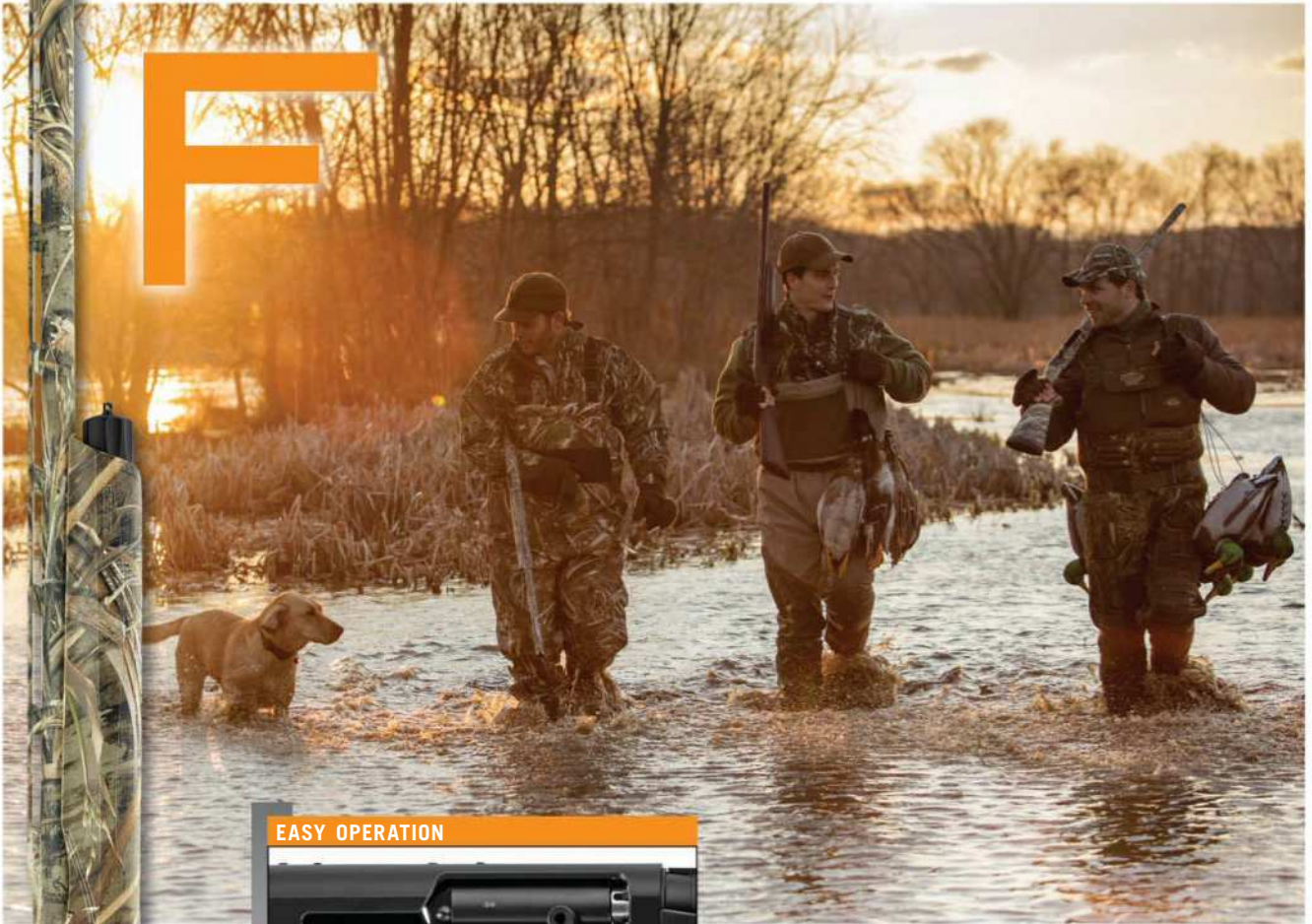
Inspired by Alex’s model and the success of my pup, I reared a litter of five more springers with the intent to train and sell them. I started them early in my chosen regime, determined to break them all inside of a year, dazzling the would be buyers.

Inside of the first five months I had ruined all of those pups. I over pressured all of them and wound up with dogs that were too afraid to work, or learn. It is one of the more shameful admissions of my life in gun dogs that I wound up driving all of those pups upstate and giving them away, because I knew there was no hope for them as hunting dogs. The worst part was I knew full well it was my fault.





# F



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This story is an old one, and took place at a time when the world of dogs and training was at a less evolved place. But don't assume the philosophy of "breaking" dogs is not still in practice. An e collar in uneducated hands has kept "breaking" very much alive.

Breaking a dog simply means putting it in a training scenario in which there is a likely possibility of failure, and then punishing that failure. In breaking a dog, a successful training session is often defined by the opportunity to make a harsh correction. It is not uncommon to hear "That was a good session; we got in a couple good corrections." I am always leery of such words.

Following my experience with the five failed pups, I began to re evaluate my processes with dogs. It was about this time that I began to work with a trainer named Ruth who helped me explore positive reinforcement methods, and the concept of teaching rather than breaking. This process made sense, and still does. If I can teach a dog the intended behavior, and reward that behavior, and all the while maintain enough contact with the dog to 'steer' him into the desired behavior (which gets rewarded), suddenly the whole circumstance becomes more palatable.

I achieve this end by keeping the dog close and keeping myself well stocked with treats and praise. Come, sit, heel, and stay are all achieved with the dog on a check cord, and then perhaps on a light stimulation e collar, but I do all of this instructing with the dog inside of 10 feet. If I maintain physical control, and the ability to quickly steer the dog into a sit (for example) for which he is immediately rewarded, I can achieve numerous positives during a single training session.

This highly productive method juxtaposed against an uncontrollable "breaking" scenario, in which I am hoping for an undesirable behavior, proves itself far more efficient and effective. Moreover, when we look at the cost/benefit of teaching vs. breaking, there is simply no comparison.

Perhaps the worst part of the breaking model is that many dogs simply are not wired to take the pressure, and it is hard to pre determine which dogs might weather the storm. Those dogs that cannot make it through a breaking



methodology will almost invariably wash out, and the breaking trainer will see them as worthless. Sadly, a softer hand might well be able to extract the most potential out of those same dogs.

A true teacher, on the other hand, who embraces a positive reinforcement methodology, has a virtually limitless opportunity for success. Those dogs that have innate drive and biddability will develop quite quickly within this style of training, while those dogs that are a bit more hard headed will require a bit more time and understanding, but will no doubt be poised for a similar degree of success.

In the end it is a win win; though there are those dogs that thrive within the adversity of a breaking scenario, there are many times more dogs that simply collapse under the strain. I for one don't have the stomach to be giving away any more dogs that I've ruined by breaking.

It all comes down to a belief in process, and an understanding of thoughts that inform our definitions. If a "broke" dog is one that works well, behaves and obeys commands, then I would dare say that we all hope for a "broke" dog to take to the field. But if

a "broke" dog requires us to overpower that dog's will, intimidating the unnecessary behaviors without teaching the necessary ones, then I believe we are not fully aware of the power of real training. When properly and thoughtfully approached, nearly any dog can be taught the rudimentary behaviors for effective work in the field or home. I have a lifetime's worth of examples to prove it.

Let me end by issuing a query to all readers for comments, thoughts, and questions. It is my sincere hope that this column serves both to educate and entertain, and I certainly have more than enough steam to keep addressing topics that I see as pertinent to flushing dog breeders, trainers, and handlers in general, or at the very least of personal interest to me.

That said, in keeping an open ear to the questions and thoughts that are stirring out there among my fellow flushing dog enthusiasts, I see a rich opportunity to not only leverage my experience on behalf of you, the reader, but also to learn from you, and to explore the finer points of gun dogs by your side. With that, keep in touch and keep sending questions, in order that we may continue to learn and teach together. ✨



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# Getting It Right

Dogtra's Stephen Cho is working hard to move the needle in the e-collar market through a feedback-based business strategy.

**THE FIRST WORDS** that Dogtra's Stephen Cho said to me when I began interviewing him were, "I'm allergic to dogs. It's so unfortunate, but every time I go near a dog my face gets swollen. And I absolutely love dogs." I think he just wanted to get that part out of the way before he dove into his history as a man who knows how to develop brands and address consumer needs.

But he didn't start in the world of working dogs.

"I originally worked as a graphic designer for six years, and then started getting into brand management related work for a variety of companies before finally ending up at Dogtra," he recalls. "I was interested in working with a company where I could really help drive growth year over year, which was one of the main reasons I decided to work at Dogtra."

**A CULTURE OF INNOVATION** Dogtra is well known for churning out technologically advanced and forward thinking products, but according to Cho that is largely in part due to their willingness to listen—and listen closely—to the consumer.

"Dogtra is very linear in some ways, but still manages to stay agile at the same time, which matters a lot. We try to be forward thinking in our product ideas, but to also be very careful about listening to the consumers.

"We take varying routes to understanding the market, one of them being at trade shows and canine shows. At these, I get face to face time with our customers and it's always amazing to me to hear how our consumers always want our products to evolve."

Cho went on to explain how the customers offer feedback on a daily basis, and that it's not just hunters he hears from. Police officers, professional trainers and a host of others weigh in on



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what they like and don't like about products. That constant stream of information is put to good use at Dogtra for future innovation and product development.

Dogtra is not one of those companies, however, that sets a deadline for product release and will meet it even when a product needs more time. They know they have to get everything right. If the drop date comes and the product isn't at 100 percent, it doesn't get released.

According to Cho, that might be the most exciting part about his job. "I'm continually blown away by the fact that not only does the consumer's voice matter here, but also that it's a driver into our product development in such a meaningful way. It's truly mind-blow-

ing, and when that is coupled with our commitment to getting things right, it really results in top notch products.

"Just as an example, one of our K9 Officers mentioned that a lot of times when he is in the field, he can't have anything on the right side of his body because that's where his sidearm is. If he needs to reach for his weapon, he needs to be able to do that as quickly as possible.

"That necessity, in a true life and death situation, prompted us to start working on the ARC HANDSFREE. It led us to develop an e collar with a transmitter that you don't have to reach for. You can strap it to your hand, or to your belt, and essentially have both of your hands free to do what you need to do.



“Now, naturally this was a good thing for law enforcement officers who work with canines, but also became very popular with our dog-training and hunting crowd. The ability to issue corrections instantly while safely handling a shotgun in a boat or in a blind, or simply while going through various training drills, has gone over very well.”

As you can probably imagine, it’s not just the ARC HANDSFREE that is making waves with dog lovers this year. Dogtra has released several new offerings that address the needs of hound owners, amateur trainers, and anyone who spends their time with working dogs of all varieties—most notably the PATHFINDER GPS E-Collar, which is dubbed “one of the most unique products that has been introduced in its category, because it allows users to employ the smartphone they already own to track and train,” according to Cho.

**THEN & NOW** Although Cho has only been with Dogtra for a couple of years, the company has been on the map for going on three decades. That’s a healthy run for any company, but is pretty impressive when considering the overall amount of competition in the e-collar market. There is no shortage of offerings for the consumer to choose from, and Cho admits that a major part of their strategy, aside from taking into account customer feedback to meet their needs, is their pricing.

“We try very, very hard to not over-price a product. We are always looking for opportunities where we can offer a reliable, quality product that is packed with essential technology, without pricing out our customers.”

Dogtra’s new tagline is “Make Every Dog Exceptional.” It’s a simple, straight-to-the-point mantra that encompasses what the company really stands for. They want to develop products for—and with—a wide variety of dog enthusiasts that are reasonably priced, outperform expectations, and possess hints of what the future holds in e-collars and other training tools.

This is something that the company does very well, and despite his unfortunate allergies, it seems highly likely that Stephen Cho is the person to help make all of that happen for at least another 30 years or so. \*

Dogtra is a company that is well known for churning out technologically advanced products, like the new ARC HANDSFREE, which are designed for dog trainers of all skill levels.



Products like the Dogtra PATHFINDER don’t happen by accident. The company is committed to listening to customer feedback and then developing useful, cutting-edge offerings that are reasonably priced.





# Oral Tumors

## Also, dealing with “split tail.”

**QUESTION** *I have a 9-year-old female Lab named Maggie. At our annual exam the vet found a lump in her mouth, kind of on the gums. It seems to be pushing on a tooth and he said we should do anesthesia and surgery to take care of it.*

*He said it may be cancer and we can send the lump off to find out, but that would add some cost. Do you think it is worth it to biopsy? If it is cancer we probably wouldn't do chemo or anything like that. Or is it worth it to even do the surgery at her age? —L*

**ANSWER** Oral masses in dogs can range from very benign to very malignant. One of the most common benign masses or growths would be epulis. This is an outgrowth of fairly normal gum tissue. It usually occurs right at the gumline. Some more troublesome types of epulis affect the bone surrounding a tooth.

These would require more aggressive surgery to remove the abnormal gum and the underlying bone as well as a tooth. Your letter does not mention what tooth is affected. If canines, premolars or molars are getting moved around or loosened up I would be more concerned about some of the more aggressive tumors of the mouth.

Malignant melanoma, Squamous Cell Carcinoma, Osteosarcoma, and Fibrosarcoma of the oral cavity are aggressive tumors that are very hard to manage successfully. These tumors would require wide excision, usually involving some of the jaw bone. Some clients don't elect to have surgeries that remove significant portions of the jaw due to the setbacks to the dog.

If these tumors are diagnosed and you would like to pursue treatment, you may want to consider an opinion from an oncologist at a university or private referral practice. I have had dogs that beat the odds and had longer than expected lives after removing most of these tumors

without removing a complete section of the jaw. But most dogs with a diagnosis of one of these tumors would only have a few months left on average.

I think it is almost always worth having the biopsy sample submitted. If it is benign then we have good news. If it is malignant we know what we are up against and we can make referrals if needed. Also, we have more information when it comes to making end-of-life decisions.

Any useful information can help us be more educated when making a tough decision. I definitely think it is worth doing surgery and giving her a chance at her age. Nine years isn't too old at all.

**QUESTION** *I have a young Lab that keeps splitting his tail open. Now it has a sore or scab that won't heal. We have used ointment that is supposed to help it heal and tried to tape it but it won't heal and keeps bleeding. What should we do? —R*

**ANSWER** These are challenging cases. These are young to middle aged dogs that are so happy they beat their tail tip against anything solid and damage the tail.

Several things may help the situation. You may have to manage where the dog stays during the day. If it's in a run and he has time to anticipate getting out for exercise and attention, he may beat his tail on the sides of the run waiting for you to get to him.

You could change to a bigger pen, a smaller kennel or make sure to let him out first or some combination. If the damage is happening in the house and he will continue to be a house dog, changing the environment for the better

could be very hard.

So make the changes in his environment that you can and if the wounded area is minor it may heal on its own. If this is a long drawn out problem then you should visit your veterinarian soon. Solutions may involve antibiotics, pain medications and the always challenging tail bandaging.

If the tail gets completely split open at the tip and the skin mushrooms open, surgery will probably be necessary. And then you still need antibiotics, pain medications and bandaging.

Padding and bandaging the tail is tough. You can't put tape on too tight and cut off the circulation. You can't leave the bandage on too long and have the wound get infected because of mois-

ture. And you can't hardly keep the bandage on due to the dog attached to the front of it. Have your vet examine the tail and create a plan for you.

*Doc's Reminder: Remember to get your dogs out and start getting them in shape now instead of two weeks before the season starts. Don't delay; it's time to get the weight off, get the heart and lungs in shape and toughen up the feet.*

*Make sure to start off with short easy work in the early morning to avoid the heat. Offer plenty of water and try to do all the feeding in the evening. Use heartworm preventative like Heartgard year round and continue flea and tick preventatives like Nexgard into November or December, or year 'round if you are in the South. \**

Contact Dr. Holcomb with your questions at [john.holcomb.ccac@gmail.com](mailto:john.holcomb.ccac@gmail.com)



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# Ramping Up

There's help for your dog's joints...and your aching back.

**ANYONE WHO HAS** ever owned an enthusiastic hunting dog and that's the only kind worth having knows all too well how they exit the back of a truck: like a projectile shot out of a cannon.

Most of the time, that's fine. The dog hits the ground running and is ready for his next big adventure. But over the years, I've heard a disturbing number of stories about dogs who blew out knees, Achilles tendons, and other crucial body parts by hitting the ground too hard or slipping on ice.

My vet confirmed the rumors: She told me that not only had she treated many dogs for these various ailments, but that jumping into the back of a truck

was nearly as dangerous as jumping out.

My corrective, and it's worked so far, is to stop my dogs on the brink of bailing out, pick them up, and set them, wriggling for all their worth, on the ground. A couple of them eventually learned the drill; they pause on the tailgate and wait for me to hoist them down. (I haven't had nearly as much luck getting them to wait below the tailgate for a lift up, however.) With a history of footing the bill for a string of canine knee surgeries, I cringe every time a dog bails out of a truck unassisted.

Picking them up works. But if you've got a bad back, or if your dog is an 80 pound Lab, you may not be able to handle the weight. The solution is a dog ramp.

There are several different styles, and they're available just about everywhere from online sporting goods stores (try [gundogsupply.com](http://gundogsupply.com)) to traditional brick and mortar shops like PetSmart. Basically, they give your dog an easy way to get himself from your vehicle's tailgate to the ground and then back up again, no lifting required. When not in use, they fold up and can be tucked away inside the bed of your truck or the back seat of your SUV.

At anywhere from \$50 to \$170, they're reasonably priced and will last a long time. As an alternative to the cost of your aching back or your dog's blown joint, a ramp is well worth considering.\*





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# Pre-Season Thoughts

A brief on parasites.

**HEY, I WAS** just wondering...has your dog been through a pre season checkup with your veterinarian?

How are you doing with your dog's exercise/conditioning program to prepare for long, tough days hunting?

Have you spent some time reinforcing commands... maybe so your season doesn't begin like it ended? (LOL)

How about introducing the pup to birds and gunfire?

Is your kennel all secure and ready for travel?

Have you touched base with land owners to be sure you're welcome?

Some of you are smiling and thinking, "I'm way ahead of this guy." But I'd bet with a few more shots at it, I could get ya. Just the same, I only offer the above as a checklist and suggest you consider each while you still have time before hunting season.

Although we don't have room to cover all the points above, let's go with the first for our discussion this time around.

Why do I keep harping on the importance of working closely with our veterinarians? Simply because our hunting dogs are hardworking top athletes, and if we expect that level of performance throughout the season special care is required.

Realizing our gun dogs have a particularly high risk of contracting parasites while less able to afford the added burden, parasites are often the number one concern on your vet's checkoff list. With that in mind let's narrow our discussion even further. A better understanding of parasites, cause and effect, should be helpful to us all.

## PRIMARY EXTERNAL PARASITES

**-FLEAS AND TICKS.** Fleas are our dog's number one concern. Fleas are brown, wingless insects, less than an eighth inch long, that travel from one host to another. They're among the leading causes of skin problems in dogs and can carry diseases.



Fleas are high on the list of external parasites your veterinarian will check for during your pup's checkup. Although it appears Dr. Ann and Tonya are combing Cammie to check for live or dead fleas on the comb, they're not necessarily expecting to see actual fleas, but what the flea left behind. Called "flea dirt," flea excrement is made up of dried blood. By bumping the comb on a white paper to shake off the residue then adding a drop of water, flea dirt will dissolve and leave a rusty red or blood color on the white paper, while plain dirt will not.

Fleas can also act as intermediate hosts to some tapeworms. When they are ingested while the dog attempts to eliminate the annoyance by biting at them, the dog in turn becomes host to tapeworms.

It can take three months or more to break the flea's life cycle so it's something we should stay after year round. Clearly prevention is our best option, so we should clean kennels and discard old bedding then vacuum and spray or dust the kennel before replacing the bedding. After vacuuming house or kennel it's best to burn the vacuum bags.

Ticks are another parasite common to hunting dogs and probably the most difficult to control. Most common are the brown dog tick and the American dog tick, yet the little deer tick that causes Lyme disease is getting lots of

press lately.

All ticks are blood sucking parasites and have four stages in their life cycle: egg, larva, nymph and adult. Adult females, engorged with blood, detach from the host and lay eggs in the environment. The eggs hatch into larval form in about two weeks; the larvae then attach to a host and feed until distended with blood and drop to the ground where they molt.

Nymphs are formed in about a week and once again attach to a host for some time then return to the environment, where after several weeks they molt to adult ticks. Both adult male and female ticks feed on a host. This complete life cycle is variable and may take more than a year.

Aside from the possibility of diseases, ticks suck many times their weight in



blood so heavy infestation can cause anemia. Along with that, the bites can cause skin irritation and secondary infection so we should do our best to prevent infestation.

It's ironic but thanks to Lyme disease, there are some very effective topical and pill form products on the market designed specifically for dogs. Even so, we should carefully look dogs over from head to toe when changing fields or quitting after the day's hunt.

As with fleas, proper treatment of the premises is essential for control of ticks. Use insecticide designed for ticks; read and follow instructions for safe use. Do not spray directly on dogs and be certain sprayed areas are completely dry before allowing dogs back in runs.

**PRIMARY INTERNAL PARASITES -WORMS** Roundworms are probably the most common internal parasite of dogs and their life cycle demonstrates

why they can be controlled but not eradicated. When roundworm eggs are shed in the feces of infected dogs they aren't infective, but require days to weeks in soil to mature to the infective stages. This is also true for other parasites and one reason frequent removal and disposal of waste is essential.

In the small intestine, roundworms compete with the dog for nutrients, resulting in stunted growth in pups and general poor health in all dogs.

Through examination of fecal material your veterinarian can diagnose roundworms and prescribe a medication schedule for removal and prevention.

Heartworms also present a serious health hazard. They are usually found in the pulmonary arteries and in the right ventricle of the heart. The adult female can measure 10 inches long and live up to seven years while producing millions of microfilariae. As the mosquito is an intermediate host it's the primary

means by which heartworms are transmitted.

In the case of heartworms your veterinarian will perform blood tests for diagnosis and provide a preventative schedule.

Hookworms can be very destructive. Puppies with heavy infections can die from acute blood loss before three weeks of age. Adult dogs with mild infections may show no symptoms, but those with severe infection exhibit anemia, dehydration, weakness and listlessness.

Adult hookworms measure less than an inch, have ridges and are slightly bent in a hook like shape. They attach themselves to the lining of the small intestine and suck blood from their host, as they shift feeding sites they can leave bleeding ulcers which may become infected.

Tapeworms require an intermediate host such as fleas or rodents to complete their life cycle. Symptoms are often minimal and infection is often detected by visually observing rice like, egg containing segments in feces or around the dog's anal area. Although many effective medications are available, prevention is your best bet. Control fleas, rodents, and consumption of uncooked meat.

Whipworms, like roundworms and hookworms, don't require an intermediate host to complete their life cycle. They pass directly from one dog to another through egg infected food, feces or water. Once ingested the larvae hatch in the small intestine and penetrate the lining to remain up to 10 days, they then migrate to the large intestine and complete development to the adult stage. Within 90 days the infected dog begins to pass eggs and the life cycle is complete.

Remember, we have only looked at the primary culprits, yet the message is loud and clear. Even though we depend on our veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment, the ball is really in our court when it comes to controlling parasites and it all comes down to regular checkups, consistent preventative care for our dogs and sound kennel sanitation practices. ✨



Roundworms and whipworms are among the more common internal parasites but tapeworms are also on your veterinarian's checklist. Detecting the presence of these and other internal parasites typically begins by examining stool samples.





The Mossberg SA-28 is a well-made, gas-operated semi-auto that makes a perfect field gun for gamebirds over pointing dogs, and new loads extend the versatility of the efficient 28-gauge.

# The 28 Revolution

Better shot technology has created a sustained small-bore buzz.

IF A BORE size can achieve “cult” status in the shotgun world, the 28 gauge certainly qualifies. Of course, over/under models predominate, although many are a little pricey for a lot of shooters.

Enter the new addition to the sub bore semi auto world in the SA 28 from Mossberg International. The SA 28 is made by the Kayman Armsan Company in Istanbul, Turkey. Armsan is a totally modern outfit, and makes excellent pumps, O/Us, SxSs, and semi autos for many U.S. firms.

I shot the heck out of it, and whacked some birds over dogs, but just hold your ‘taters and first let me tell you all about this new gun.

The sleek little SA 28 is listed at 6½ pounds, but our test gun was an ounce under 6 pounds with a 26” vent rib barrel and full complement of choke tubes. The magazine holds four rounds, but comes with a plug that reduces the magazine capacity to two. Gone are the fixed chokes of merely improved, modified, and full. The SA 28 comes with what Mossberg calls the “Sport Set” of five interchangeable tubes that range in constriction from pure cylinder to full.

The SA 28 gas operated action is “self regulating.” Mossberg notes that the SA 28’s “gas operated action vents excess gases, reducing recoil for the shooter and lessening stress on components for smooth, reliable operation.” I can’t speak about those internal components, but I can confirm that the SA 28’s recoil is light as a feather, even with the heaviest

loads (more on these later).

The stock and forend are made of (what else?) attractive Turkish walnut with plenty of dark streaks and figure in the buttstock. There is plenty of laser cut checkering in all the right places, and there aren’t any ghastly overruns, or skipped diamonds. The length of pull is 14½ inches, and the drops at comb and heel are 1½ and 2¼ inches, respectively. The stock fit me like it had been determined with a try gun, and when shouldered, I was looking right down the rib, and the SA 28 balances right in its middle.

**LOOKS CAN KILL** The barrel has a deep, dark blue/black finish, and the aluminum alloy receiver is anodized to match perfectly. The bolt locks up into the barrel extension, so the aluminum receiver reduces weight without reducing strength. The cross bolt safety is conveniently located behind the trigger, and the trigger group is easily removable for cleaning by merely drifting out a single pin. Speaking of the trigger, it broke cleanly at 7 pounds, 13½ ounces, but was so smooth that it felt lighter, and I never noticed it during shooting.



The SA-28 loads easily through the receiver port, and has a four-shot magazine.





Editor Rick Van Etten and I shot the SA 28 extensively at a recent Writers' Roundtable gathering at Brownells, and not only did it crush targets with aplomb, it never hiccuped once. Although the SA 28 is light, its recoil was modest. It swings smoothly, and a good follow through is easily maintained—as we well know, a requisite to connecting with a scattergun.

But the true test of a field gun is a flushing bird in front of a good bird dog. Flying Feathers Game Farm near Lockwood, Missouri ([flyingfeatherhunting.com](http://flyingfeatherhunting.com)) is a small and efficient operation run by Marsha and Bruce Lilienkamp, and has become my default live bird home base for testing new iron. They offer quail, chukar and pheasant, or a combination of all three; my usual choice.

**THE REAL TEST** Hunting at Flying Feathers is warm and comfortable, like old home week. Bruce has a kennel full of well-trained dogs that are part of the family, and which obviously enjoy the hunting as much as we bipeds. Bruce sometimes sets the birds one species at

a time, but for this outing he had all three out, so you never knew what was going to flush over a point. Consequently, I used the little SA-28 with the improved cylinder tube on quail and chukar and pheasants.

The ammo was Federal's new 1-ounce load with #7½ shot (#5s and #6s are also available). This load is no pipsqueak. The velocity is listed at 1,220 fps, and the shot charges averaged .994 ounce. In the field, this load powdered pheasants cold at 25 to 30 yards. These heavy loads (for a 28 gauge) are put up in 2¾-inch cases, and are suitable for all action types. Mossberg specifically says that they are perfectly okay for use in the SA-28.

I should also mention that it seemed to me that the recoil was about as light as any other 28-gauge load. Of course, the SA-28 functions just fine without any adjustment with standard ¾-ounce 28-gauge lead and 5/8-ounce steel-shot ammo. Fiocchi also makes a "Golden Pheasant" load with 7/8 ounce of shot, so there's plenty of ammo choices for just about any game.

On this hunt, I was joined by my elk-

hunting partner from Colorado, Jan Larson, and my friend and local FFL dealer, Jens Barclay. These birds obviously didn't get the email reminding them that they were pen-raised and supposed to be tame. Instead, they were wild as March hares, and sometimes flushed wild. But with three guns, three setters and pointers, we prevailed.

Gracie, Dot and Cash swept back and forth, noses vacuuming the ground for scent, but ranged close enough so that we didn't have to play "find the pup." The points were rock solid, and the retrieves were pretty and precise. The shooting was at times fast and furious, and we kept the dogs busy. All in all, a fine time was had by everyone, humans and dogs alike.

If one looks at this logically, it is obvious that there is always room in the safe for just one more bird gun. If you don't have (at least) one 28 gauge, you owe it to yourself to give one a try. Based on my extensive shooting of Mossberg's new SA-28, I can confidently recommend it for your consideration. It is an efficient blend of beauty, quality, and value. \*

## MOSSBERG | SA-28 SPECIFICATIONS

<b>MANUFACTURER</b>	Mossberg International, Inc., North Haven, CT
<b>ACTION TYPE</b>	Gas-operated semi-automatic
<b>GAUGE</b>	28, 2¾-inch chamber
<b>BARREL</b>	26 inches, ventilated rib, brass bead front sight
<b>MAGAZINE CAPACITY</b>	4, magazine plug provided to reduce capacity to 2
<b>CHOKES</b>	"Sport Set" choke tubes, C, IC, Mod, IM, and F
<b>OVERALL LENGTH</b>	46½ inches
<b>WEIGHT</b>	5 pounds, 15 ounces
<b>TRIGGER</b>	Pull weight 7 pounds, 13½ ounces; trigger group easily removable for cleaning
<b>SAFETY</b>	Cross-bolt behind trigger
<b>STOCK</b>	Select Turkish walnut stock and forend, cut checkering, semi-gloss finish on forend and buttstock
<b>STOCK DIMENSIONS</b>	14½-inch length of pull, 1½-inch drop at comb, 2¼-inch drop at heel
<b>METAL FINISH</b>	Semi-gloss blue on barrel, black on receiver
<b>MSRP</b>	\$654



# Single Pup Socialization

The best bet is to find a surrogate litter with which the pup can interact.

**PROBLEM** My NAVHDA breeder inseminated one of her females with the frozen sperm from my Versatile Champion that passed in June. One female pup was delivered by C section on Jan. 18. After reading your columns for several years, I am concerned about how to acclimate this pup so it learns how to be a dog.

The breeder has six other grown dogs in her kennel, has been producing NAVHDA GSP litters for about 20 years, and she is a vet tech. She thinks she has a client that will have a litter of collies on the ground shortly that we could use to acclimate this pup to other puppies.

Do you have any advice I should follow to make sure this new puppy will turn out to be a well-rounded dog?

**SOLUTION** Unfortunately, small litters of one or two pups are all too frequent in artificial insemination attempts. Singleton pups are always something to be concerned about. As you've probably gathered from my long time beating the drum in favor of keeping pups in litter to 10 weeks, the major part of a pup's social learning occurs through social interactions in the form of play among the pups of a litter.

The timeframe for this learning is from coordinated mobility to the end of the critical socialization period from about six weeks to 12 weeks. The window for social learning is then closed. The basis for all adult dog behavior is etched in stone through sibling interactions before 12 weeks or it won't happen. It is during this time that a pup learns all its social skills, learns how to be a dog and learns the necessary language to interact socially for the rest of its life.

What would be most ideal is if someone in your chapter has a very large litter of pups of any breed, but preferably a breed of similar size and age, who would foster some of the excess pups onto your breeder's bitch so they could become simulated siblings. Then let her bitch rear the extra pups as her own up to 10 weeks of age. It is most important that your single pup has a lot of social interactions in play form with similarly aged pups for the four- or five-week

period from week five or six to week 10, then the pups can be separated and go to their new homes.

If the collie litter is the only possibility, and if their age is similar, say within in a week or close to it, and if the collie female will accept your pup, you will

have to use that litter. Start when the collies are about five to six weeks old by taking your pup to the collies and introducing her right into the group.

If the collie bitch will allow her to suckle, good. Though your pup may be close to being weaned by her own mom, and she and the collie pups will be on some solid food supplement, she should burrow right into the litter and engage them in play, sleep, eating and these sorts of both social and individual behaviors.

You can let her interact with the collie pups for two or three hours, at least, through one cycle of eat, sleep, play and sleep again or eat and then sleep. Don't interfere at all unless she is getting hurt by the collie mom or pups, or if she is



© MARK ATWATER



hurting the collie pups. You don't want to antagonize the owner of the collie because you and your pup really need that litter. Try to do this three or four times a week.

As your pup is growing and doing its thing at home with just mom and without the other pups, your breeder should be introducing her to noise and people and to handling, especially before the end of the sixth week, just as she would if it were a normal sized litter instead of just her.

Then when your pup is about six or seven weeks old, as I said above, get her into the litter for several hours at a time, including a sleepover or two so she can go through two or three cycles of behavior interactions with the collie pups every other day or two. This is a sort of puppy daycare.

Keep this up until she is 10 weeks old and is pretty much independent of her mother. Then you can take her home and she will be your new dog.

One other thing: if the collie pups are more than a week or 10 days younger than she is, you should consider leaving her another week to interact with the collie

pups. It is really the seven to 10 weeks when the play is heavily into social play.

This is the time they learn how to turn off a fight or start one or what to do if a bite is too hard. They also engage in stalking imaginary game or fearful things. In short, this is the most important time to learn good social habits and it is interaction with other pups

and various breeds of various sized pups. This will be practice for all the social amenities she has learned in a foster litter.

At this young age, pups learn very quickly what the outside world is going to be like and this will stand your pup in good stead when training, testing and hunting with other dogs of various breeds. It is all part of your dog's edu-

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It is most important that your single pup has a lot of social interactions in play form with similarly-aged pups.

---

that will be the teacher, not mom or the people around her.

An additional thing you can do is enroll your pup in a puppy "kindergarten" obedience class for pups that are under three or four months old. These are really just play time classes where your pup will get to socialize with other pups of similar age

cation so the more, the better. No social learning experience is a waste of time; it is not only useful, it's essential. \*

*For solutions to your dog's behavior problems or behavior related training problems, you can contact Ed Bailey at: [edbailey@uoguelph.ca](mailto:edbailey@uoguelph.ca)*

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# A DOG

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## Comes of Age

Success afield comes from repeated opportunities.

BY JAMES MCCANN

**W**hen it comes to making a good bird dog it sure helps to train and to hunt in a target-rich environment of wild birds. And for me, living in just such a place has made training a pup much easier and an immensely more enjoyable experience over the decades. Alaska is where I make my home, and over the course of a very long upland season for ruffed, spruce and sharp-tailed grouse, as well as willow and rock ptarmigan, I owe much of the credit for training and developing good bird dogs to the birds themselves.

My hunting friends with bird dogs share my feelings. Many good hunting dogs from good breeding stock have benefitted from living and hunting here in Alaska, and I've been lucky enough to have witnessed many of these dogs passing from an awkward pup just finding its way to becoming a real bird dog learning its trade.

My heart and mind hold many fond memories of pups coming of age in a wild bird environment, but special memories of hunts I made this past fall season with my friend Tom Halverson and his young Drahthaar, Driggs, turned out to be rather special. Driggs is a big, fun loving, energy packed dog who really needed wild bird exposure to draw out his natural abilities, and after some brief struggles, we witnessed first hand the magic of a pointing dog coming of age.

During the early part of our upland season Tom and I were out hunting a

favorite area for sharp tailed grouse. Reports indicated it was likely to be a rather good year for sharp tails, and those reports did not disappoint. We were hunting a combination of tall wild

grass and thin woods of aspen, spruce and willow.

From our experience, we knew that on many mornings the grouse would either be in or along the woods digesting a meal of nearby kinnikinnick berries while remaining somewhat safe from raptors, or lying low to the ground and soaking up the morning sun out in the tall grass. But it was up to Driggs to figure all that out so we let him hunt out front and let the birds teach him a few lessons.

As luck would have it there were plenty of grouse just inside the treeline this day, and after the 68 pound dog busted several into flight he realized it





might work better if he worked slower and more cautiously. Driggs was starting to figure out this pointing dog stuff, and when he did, he did it with style.

Tom and I were perhaps 150 yards behind and out of sight of Driggs when Tom heard the dog's beeper. My hearing is bad enough I couldn't hear it.

"Driggs is on point!" Tom said to me excitedly.

"Let's get up there," I said, and off we went with a bit more liveliness in our steps.

After cresting a slight ridge, we spied the dog standing staunch on point some 30 yards farther on. He was looking straight ahead into the tall grass at the edge of the woods. The dog's hindquarters quivered ever so slightly, and his nose twitched as he took in the bird scent that unlocked his genetic propensity to point. It was easy to just stand and gawk at the dog, but it was time for one of us to do something more.

"Go ahead, Tom. Your dog, your birds," I whispered to my friend.

Tom moved up past Driggs with his gun at the ready while Driggs stood rock solid on point. I stood smiling and watched the episode unfold.

At the flush, I saw at least three of the cackling grouse take to the air before us, while also hearing others flush through the woods off to one side. At the shot, I was delighted to see a puff of feathers in the air and a sharp tailed grouse plummet to the ground. Driggs held staunchly to wing, shot and fall, just like he'd done in his summer training.

"Dead bird. Fetch 'em up!" Tom happily said to Driggs.



Off like a rocket, Driggs made a brief search in the grass for the bird, scooped it up and made a snappy retrieve to Tom's outstretched hand. It was the beginning of a young bird dog's career as a pointing dog, and after Tom had showered his dog with words of love and encouragement he sent him off to hunt more grouse. We slapped a high five and relived the moment while examining the grouse he'd just taken.

Throughout the morning the grouse continued to school Driggs and to teach him some valuable lessons, lessons clearly learned as he continued to excel at his job as a bird dog. Tom and I would eventually lead the dog away from the aspen edges and out into the tall grass where Driggs learned to quarter and work the wind, to find and point singles

and coveys of grouse, and to make more retrieves to hand.

On another such hunt, Tom had been struggling with his shooting and his misses were getting on his nerves. But misses with a shotgun mean little to a young dog intent upon finding and pointing more birds and Driggs was having a blast hunting the tall grass.

Making matters worse were the rain and the considerable wind Tom and I experienced on this particular hunt. The grouse were jumpy, and when they got up they immediately took full advantage of getting that wind under their wings and rocketing away from the imposing danger. Late afternoon, as we were headed for the truck, Driggs got birdy up ahead and alternated between ground scent and sticking his head up





high in search of any scent on the wind.

In a relatively flat section just beyond a slight rise, and not far from a significant patch of kinnikinnick berries on the ground, Driggs abruptly stopped and went into a stylish point. He stood unmoving, slightly crouched, with his tail out straight in typical Drahthaar fashion.

We'd already experienced many grouse running out on points, so Tom put a move on and hastily passed the dog. And it's a good thing he did because at the flush, two birds got up way out and Tom missed with his first barrel. Using the tighter barrel, Tom swung fast and out front of the birds and made an incredibly good shot.

After the triumphant retrieve was completed, another high five was in order. Tom asked me, "How far out was that bird, do you figure?"

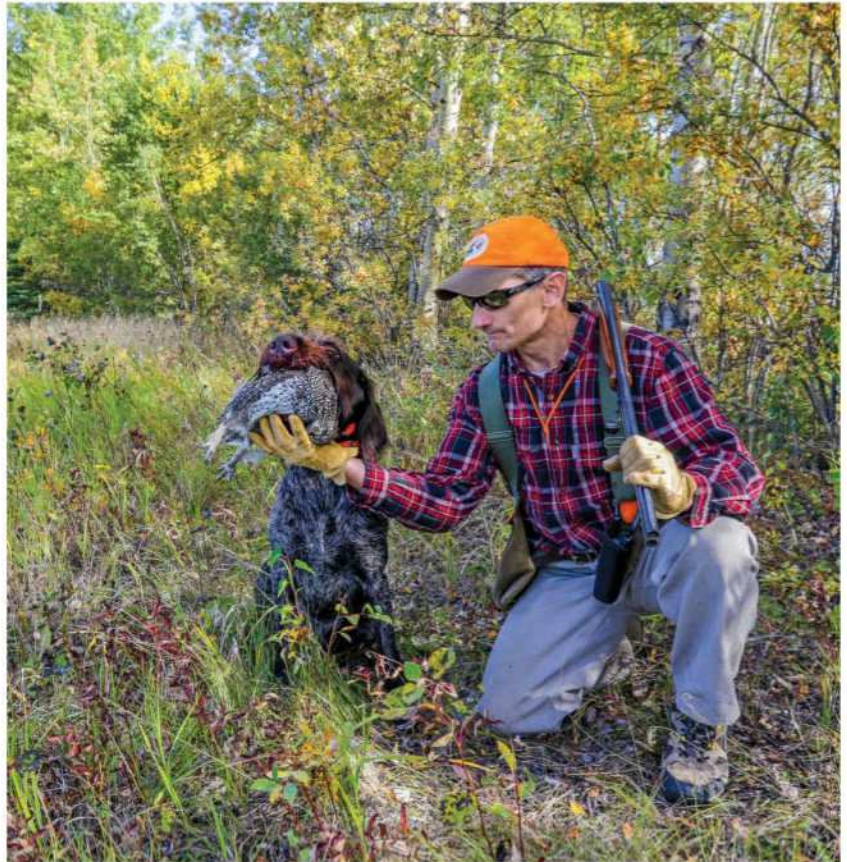
My reply was something on the order of, "About a mile. Nice shot!"

Since those early fall hunts, Driggs has continued to improve his skills on more sharp tails, not a few ruffed grouse and plenty of the ever present spruce grouse. After the first snow of the year arrived in our part of Alaska, Driggs also proved himself a reliable ptarmigan hunter as well.

With any dog, sometimes things just don't go right and they find themselves on the wrong side of the scent cone, and the grouse is bumped into flight. Some bird hunters might become upset because of missing a chance to take a shot when few opportunities might come their way throughout the day, but in a target rich environment, we call these moments good training opportunities. Each time this occurs and a young dog learns to stop at the flush like Driggs has done, is cause for more celebration.

Soon, the dark and frigid winter months will keep man and dog mostly at home, savoring the memories of all those autumn hunts. Sure, there will be some chances to get out and hunt ptarmigan whenever there is a break in the winter weather, but as winter turns toward spring and warmer temperatures, Driggs and Tom and my dogs and I will be hunting ptarmigan until the April 30 season end.

We are looking forward to watching Driggs, now a trusted bird dog, hone his skills even more. ✨







# The MAGICIAN

You always had to be ready when this springer was afield.

BY HERB EVERT

**O**l' Tar was a magician. Or perhaps "sorcerer" is a better word. His super power was to conjure gamebirds from places they shouldn't be. We're talking about plowed fields, asphalt roadsides, a few weeds in otherwise over-grazed pastures, clumps of long-gone-by aspens or dried out alder swamps—places where a flushing dog enthusiast should theoretically be able to let down his or her guard for a few minutes and catch a breath.

We flusher-meisters know full well that the secret to playing our game is to stay focused on the same wavelength that our dog is on. Let your mind wander even briefly and a bird is up and away before you can tune in again and lift your shotgun. We know this. But staying focused every second that you are afield is a real strain.

Our dogs don't point anything out to us; they simply detonate it. And, perhaps perversely, that's exactly what we love about them—that's where the sport lies. If you can take a grouse, a woodcock or a pheasant under such circumstances, you have earned it, my friend.

But Tar... Tar just wouldn't give a guy a break. He was "questing," as the pundits

call it, every moment he was out of the truck. He wasn't out of range, at least not often, and he was doing exactly what he was supposedly trained to do, but, darn it all, he just never let up.

Before I tell you more, I should let you know that Tar was a springer, as handsome a black-and-white spaniel as you'd ever hope to see, and field-bred to be sure. And he seemed to know it. He wasn't a fighter but he certainly tried to be an intimidator! He was one of these dogs who seems to puff up before your eyes when greeting the competition.

He not only swelled up; he gained an extra inch by seeming to walk on his tiptoes. And he would cock a hind leg so high he would almost fall over on his opposite side. But since he never weighed an ounce more than 45 pounds,



the Labs, Chessies and shorthairs we'd meet afield always looked twice his size. Nevertheless, Tar would play his game until he became convinced that his adversary wasn't buying it, at which point he'd return to me and suggest we team up against the threat.

His name on paper was "Evertage Tar 'n Feathers," AKC, OFA, and all that other rigmarole, but otherwise he was always just "Tar." Oh, I had a choice selection of other (unprintable) names on hand when needed, but they were seldom employed because he was smart enough to figure out that we both had more fun when he behaved himself.

He was home-bred and my pick of the litter, and that was one of those times when I got lucky. Not only that but, given his good looks and illustrious forebears, as his reputation spread, he got in some off-season lovin', which he took very seriously by the way, and he sired some fine pups.

That reputation of Tar's was initially built on his doing well exactly what a springer is supposed to do well: flush



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birds within shotgun range and retrieve them to hand—and he would retrieve anything from anywhere if he could get to it, even ducks and geese from skim-ice water or stubble fields. But it was only those folks who hunted with us who witnessed his sorcery.

Case in point: my brother and I met on opening day of Wisconsin’s pheasant season one year. In Wisconsin, pheasant season opens at 12:00 noon on the third Saturday of October, and for that weekend, the bag limit is one rooster

with a possession limit of two. Thereafter for the duration of the season the bag limit is two and the possession limit is four.

The opener is always popular, and the hunting ground we chose that day was by no means a secret. For one thing, it was a known DNR release site, but it is also good-enough habitat to have some carryover of birds from the year before. Yes, we practice put-and-take pheasant supplementation in Wisconsin despite the best efforts of Pheasants Forever.

Our native population would be mighty slim without it.

The parking lot contained a half dozen trucks and cars by the time we pulled in at about 11:00 o’clock in order to have time to catch up on each others’ lives while eating some lunch before heading out. My brother was hunting behind one of his fine springers that day. I loosed Tar, and away we went.

It was one of those “too-something” days. You know the kind I mean: too wet or too dry, too hot or too cold, too windy, or you’ve walked too far and can expect leg-cramps before the night is over. This day was hot, dry and windy. Is there anything worse for a dog? But “too-something days” do help us in coming up with excuses.

We followed those dogs for half the afternoon, watering them frequently, and we’d had a couple of wild flushes as pheasants are prone to do on a windy day, but our vests remained empty when we turned back toward the parking lot. In the lot hunters and dogs were milling around, the lucky few showing off their birds.

We were within spitting distance of that gravel pad, double guns broken but not yet unloaded, when Tar went a whirl and up went a cock bird bound for the outback. We did our best to snap our shotguns shut and try to get on that bird but to no avail. We managed to get some lead in the air but, discombobulated as we were, all we managed to do was to bruise some down range weeds.

Does anyone really need witnesses to a performance like that? NO! And what was that bird doing there anyway? Why hadn’t any of those other dogs winded him before we got there? And why us? All my brother could say was, “That dang dog of yours has done it again!” as we, averting our eyes amid a few gestures of sympathy and a guffaw or two, made our way to our trucks.

Had this sort of thing happened only a time of two, I suppose we would have just chalked it up to chance, but it happened too frequently with Tar to just dismiss it.

On another occasion we were in Nicolet Forest up in northeastern Wisconsin looking for grouse or woodcock. After pushing our way through a thick as hair on a dog stand of young aspen, we climbed our way up to the top of a sizable hill. We had heard a few flushes



The author with Tar (left) and another of his springers.



Tar at three months after his first swim.



along the way, and even seen enough of a bird or two to take a few pokes here and there despite the thick cover.

When we arrived at our destination, what we found was a bald knob perfect for sitting on a log to catch our breath, enjoy the breeze and munch an apple. Within minutes, however, what Tar found was a mature red-phase grouse which

The woodcock flights should have been in by that third week of October so we were a bit disappointed that we had not really found them as yet.

We put leads on our dogs just in case a lumber truck should careen around a bend and walked along side by side, talking about what we had seen and the shots we had had. Abruptly Tar stopped,

tions. My buddy downed one but I, as usual in such circumstances, blew my chance. Tar made the retrieve as he was closer to the bird than was my buddy's dog, but again, we just had to shake our heads: why hadn't both dogs scented those birds?

You get the idea. We never did figure out what it was about Tar that enabled him to find birds where there just should not have been any. Was it a great nose? Or uncanny bird sense? Was he just lucky? Or was it my superlative training? (Ahem; not likely!) And why didn't the other good dogs along with us scent some of those birds as well? Whatever it was, I would not have believed it if I had not witnessed it so many times.

Needless to say, I was mighty proud of that dog, but the downside was that Tar surprised me so often that my shots to birds-in-the-bag ratio took a real hit.

But I could live with that.

*When not spending time with his family or his spaniels, Herb Evert managed to eke out a living at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. \**

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Our dogs don't point anything out to us; they simply detonate it.

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he put up into an azure sky with no intervening obstacles for that bird to dodge behind. Needless to say, we were foiled again.

Then there was the time, also in Nicolet, when we hunted hard all morning and were lucky enough to bag a grouse and a couple of timberdoodles before hiking out to a forest road to get our bearings and return to our trucks.

staring into a few alders along the edge of the road. I had three choices: drag him, pick him up and carry him, or honor what was as close to a point as I had ever seen him make.

It was apparent that he was not going to move, so we reloaded, closed our shotguns, and I unsnapped his lead. With one leap he put up not one, not two, but three woodcock, all off in different direc-

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# The “Other” SPRINGER SPANIEL

The handsome red-and-white Welshman deserves the attention of more hunters.

BY M.J. NELSON

In the 18th century, the hunters among the Welsh gentry had a secret weapon, a red and white springing spaniel whose talents as a bird dog were considerable. Originally a falconer’s dog, these spaniels were acquired by other hunters in the valleys of Wales, where their exceptional skills enabled local sportsmen to preserve the breed until the end of World War I. Then, however, due to the low numbers being bred, the Welsh spaniel was facing extinction.

Fortunately for the breed, a few breeders remained to ensure its continuity. Incidentally, “springing” or “starting” game is actually what *all* sporting spaniels are supposed to do, although the much more numerous English springer spaniel fanciers more or less appropriated the name “springer.” Only the Welsh springer folks stubbornly insisted upon including that term in their breed’s name, as well.

The Welsh springer is generally a methodical hunter, according to the people who own them, although as is

Mazie, owned by Susan Willingham, is Ch. Ivywild’s Mazie Morning Dew RN MH.

the case with all generalizations, there are exceptions. “A Welshie’s pace in the field is substantially slower than that of a field bred English cocker and even slower than that of an English springer from show breeding,” said Frank Pampush, whose dog Larsen has an upland master hunter advanced title from the AKC. “But they are perfectly capable of tracking down and flushing a running pheasant.

“They are indefatigable in the field, not intimidated by tough cover and will dig a bird from under a fallen log in a plum thicket if that’s where the bird is hiding,” Pampush said. “If you hunt them in a wooded area, they’ll be more methodical than in an open field. They

may air scent more than an English cocker or springer.”

Brian Schmidt, who also owns master hunter Welsh springers, agreed with Pampush’s assessment. “Welsh springers tend to be moderate paced hunters that rely on their good scenting ability,” he noted. “You won’t need to wear sneakers to keep up and many will constantly check back with you to make sure they’re still in proper gun range. I’d say the style of a Welsh springer is most comparable to that of an American water spaniel in its pace and persistent hunting style.

“They’re adequate water retrievers. With proper water introduction and training and keeping in mind they don’t have the coat needed for duck hunting in cold weather—a WSS can be a dog that will retrieve waterfowl all day long in favorable conditions.”

According to Susan Riese, it’s important to be aware that the WSS has a very strong prey drive. “They’re pretty easy to train for field work and they’re generally ‘soft’ dogs as far as temperament is concerned in that they don’t do well



with a lot of harsh corrections, but they have such a strong prey drive that they can appear to be hardheaded," she said. "Most of them get like they are possessed once they catch scent of a bird. We teach our dogs to associate us with birds by using a lot of clipped wing birds.

"When training, we always have a clipped wing bird in our pocket to be waved to get the dog's attention and then tossed as a reward. Many years ago a gamekeeper from England told us to 'make haste slowly' with a Welsh. Those were true words of

wisdom as almost any Welsh you get will be a good hunting companion if it is raised and trained correctly."

Susan Willingham said, "WSS are anxious to please you but need clear communication to understand what you want. At times, they can definitely be stubborn or act like they have a mind of their own. You can't do repetitive drills with this breed. They need variety, challenges, positive reinforcement and consistency.

"With the basics of finding, flushing and retrieving birds, most Welsh spring-

ers catch on to that work very quickly if they are started as pups. They are fine with an electronic collar on a low setting used to reinforce what they've been taught, but they will shut down if you try to use the e collar exclusively as a training tool.

"Welsh springers are really a 'gentle man's hunting dog' as they are efficient and work at more of a trotting pace. Most are happy to make water retrieves unless they are pressured to perform. One of the things I really like about Welsh springers is that they turn on to hunt but then settle in easily at home with the family. They are not good kennel dogs and need to be with people."

Sandy Holmes noted that some of the older lines in the breed were much softer in temperament than today's Welsh springers. "Welsh springers are generally biddable and eager to learn," she said. "But, just as in any breed, there is always a curve with some dogs that are very biddable and easy to train while others are a bit more stubborn. These dogs tend to want to hunt on their own but I've found with just a little more training they become very good bird dogs.

"Some of the older lines were much softer than today's WSS. Some importing and selective breeding has created temperaments that are much better and they are easier to work with, in my opinion. You have to keep in mind, however, that this is not a breed that responds well to severe or harsh corrections.

"They do adapt well to the e collar if they are properly introduced by an experienced trainer. But, as is the case with every other dog, they have to understand completely what is being asked of them before you use an e collar for a correction. If you use it incorrectly, it will cause them to quickly shut down."

Frank Pampush added that spaniels are the class clowns of the sporting dog world and Welsh springers are no exception. "In training, you have to distinguish between genuine knuckle headedness and dog like antics that are put on for your amusement and the dog's," he explained. "If you were to coach a kid like that, you'd make him run extra laps after practice and then give him a hug. The same is true of a Welsh.

If you happen to have one that is hard headed, you absolutely must correct



Gretchen is owned by Frank Pampush and is Rolyarts Playing Hooky BN CGC. She has three qualifying scores (of four needed) for her junior hunter title.



Rusk (Ch Trystyn Quack the Code), owned by Sandy Holmes.



that dog and firmly. But it is also absolutely essential to maintain that true bond of love, trust and understanding with a Welsh. Also, the fact that e collars go up to ten is not a benefit for spaniels. A one or two setting will lift many spaniels off their feet and that's certainly true for a Welsh. They will tolerate a firm and fair correction, e collar or otherwise, but a fair correction does not mean sparks flying off the e collar."

Welsh springers are a rare breed, sitting in the 123rd spot (ranked by popularity based on registration numbers) on the AKC's list of the 190 breeds it recognizes. While the rarity of the breed can make it challenging to find a pup, it does have the virtue of the breed not having split into "show" and "field" types, according to Susan Willingham, who is the vice president of the Welsh Springer Spaniel Club of America, the breed's parent club with the AKC.

"It's the same individual dog bred for the show ring that's also designed for field work," she said. "As a result, there is a variation in drive within the breed so it's important to find a pup from a breeder with the WSSCA and begin the field introduction early as well as exposing the pup to lots of new experiences."

Brian Schmidt added an additional caveat to Willingham's comments. He said, "Since the Welsh springer is rare and even more rare in the field, finding strict hunting lines has become almost



Stetson (Ch Benton Essence O' Wales JH) is owned by Sandy Holmes.

impossible. Many breeders are choosing to breed for conformation and/or making their breeding decisions based on health clearances and don't choose to breed based on field ability.

"Virtually no one is breeding Welsh springers on the basis of their field abilities alone. In other words, they are being bred for characteristics that aren't based on performance in the field and as a result, there is no split.

"This has been going on for decades and the result has been a shift away from the breed's hunting roots. As a consequence, for someone looking for a Welsh springer as their hunting dog, I'd strongly suggest contacting the WSSCA for infor-

mation on breeders."

"This is definitely a rare breed," added Frank Pampush. "Statistical analyst David McCandless created a classification study of dog breeds that placed the Welsh springer in the 'overlooked treasures' category. There aren't many breeders of Welsh springers, and only a few of those that are truly interested in breeding a true hunting dog.

"In addition to contacting the WSSCA, prospective puppy buyers should look for 'Breeders of Merit' on the AKC's website. These breeders know and love the breed and can help you find the kind of WSS that will best suit what you want to do with the dog."\*

Angus (Ch SHR Greenwood's Angus MH), owned by Brian Schmidt.





# GOING SOLO

There's a lot to be said for being out there with just your dog and the wind for company.

BY SCOTT LINDEN

**A**ldous Huxley said, "The more powerful and original a mind, the more it will incline towards the religion of solitude." I don't believe this great author was a hunter, but he sure could have been with that attitude. Which comes first, the solitude, originality or powerful mind, is immaterial. We can use all of them.

Hunting only with your dog and your thoughts is an exercise in self-discovery. It is a chance to take a new path, or find new dimension in an old one. As your last act of conformity in a world too damn full of it, pencil in a solo hunt. You will not regret it.





The British have a phrase, “keeping your own calendar.” It’s that point in professional life where you define your work schedule rather than the other way around. I often hunt solo because my so-called “days off” seldom coincide with the few people who will put up with me in the field, let alone the camp kitchen. That’s one good reason.

But civilization is often not so civilized as to allow you to schedule spontaneity. It may be happenstance, a wrong turn or blown head gasket that puts you out there with only your dog for company. That’s okay, because if you hadn’t heard, the rat race is now full on, balls to the wall 24/7/365. And that’s without measuring the hassles and headaches of less than ideal hunting companions, who may have been the inspiration for this ancient Roman graffito: “The more people I meet, the more I like my dogs.”

Finding a partner—especially on short notice—can be tough. Honey do’s, career, Little League games, all get in the way of fellowship afield. Others have hung up the shotgun, picked up (ugh) golf clubs, maybe even bought a new recliner. The pool of hunting partners started shallow and is draining fast as knees and backs fail.

The choice becomes going solo, or not going. For many of us, it’s the former. For the others, well, maybe it’s time for them to take stock of what’s truly important in life.

Because there is something deeply organic about questing for prey solely in the company of another species, teamed with one goal...feeding the tribe. It doesn’t have to be Zen, but it can be. You’ve felt it. The momentary flash connects you and your dog across the field, indescribable in something as puny as words. You know the feeling, because when I asked many of our friends and fellow hunters I wasn’t surprised at their responses and you won’t be either:

Philip J. Urban: “I am free to choose my path, closer to contentment, further from alone.” Joel Witt: “It’s more pure.”

Then, there’s the quiet. Atop a chukar hill you can hear the wingbeats of a passing raven, listen to your own pulse in your head. Deep in a grouse covert, you pause—is that wind rattling aspen leaves, or a gnome wandering the same path as you? Balm for the soul.

Delve deep and remember that time you sat wearily against a rock wall, your setter’s head on your lap. Or the way your shorthair trotted back, eyes down cast and tail gently swaying, with the last bobwhite of the day held gently in his mouth. The magic would have been diminished with a witness.

T.J. Downes says it give us time to really understand our flaws and limitations, if we dare. There are plenty of other rationale, just as legitimate: go where you want, when you want. Nobody else hacks your dog, and his performance is always just fine; there are no low shots. You rest, eat, have coffee, take photos, on your schedule.

Charlotte Bronte, in *Jane Eyre*, said, “The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I

will respect myself.” And she’s right. Take yourself back to your last solitary hunt...when you pulled into the driveway blistered and beaten, weren’t you a better man than when you left?

Treading middle of nowhere hunting spots alone merits caution. But the benefits of losing yourself in your thoughts (versus just getting lost) are myriad. From snoring without guilt, to eating beans straight out of the can for supper, to taking credit for every hit (and miss), you are your own man.

Dogs get the run of the room. You can stay up late or “lights out” comes at 7:30 p.m. There’s no stealing points, fighting over retrieves, or just fighting. You pick the soundtrack—go ahead and turn the volume to “11.” Unless you picked AC/DC on the radio your dog





probably agrees with all of these reasons, as well.

He may have other, more cerebral reasons, too. Joe Bradley says one person hunts “let the dog have the pure joy of what he was bred to do and for me to have the good fortune to witness it.” While they’re social animals, I wonder if they prefer a pack leader’s company, without distraction? A solo turn is probably more rewarding than sharing a spotlight. You see it in his gait, that look of unbridled excitement when the entire field is his to explore, to perform for you and you alone.

Some would call us selfish—but I’ll

bet none of them are hunters. They’ve never wandered alone along a skid road, gun in hand and bell tinkling in the distance. They’ve never weighed that fullness of heart against the grinding demand of all the other days weeks months. Hunting may be the cheapest form of therapy.

Thoreau said even the best company becomes wearisome. Meeting others’ expectations, even mundane ones such as bringing the right brand of beer, are as he put it, “dissipating.” He sought his Walden Pond, and we scrutinize maps for walk in areas.

You don’t want to do something

stupid—or in my case, many things. Traveling alone helps us realize our limitations, and if we’re smart we act on them before we need to summon a helicopter. And there are more practical downsides: all photos are selfies, some birds get away unscathed, if you forget something it’s well and truly forgotten. Dog power becomes an issue on long hunts. And everything from fuel to hotel rooms costs twice as much.

Not to say there aren’t positives. Sarah Bradeen says, “I hunt with someone for a witness to those I can’t believe—that really happened moments!”

She’s right. Hunting companion less, the fulsome camaraderie of shared goals and similar outlooks is absent. Connecting with a long lost brother or sharing a last hunt with Granddad will have to wait. Each has inestimable value, but when you weigh those costs versus the emotional benefits of self regeneration, they are often trumped. We inherently have a need for inner calm.

Pointing out a heart stopping point to your hunting buddy is an ego stroke, your dog quivering as he swivels eyes your way in hopes of a flush. But savoring that moment with just the birds and sky, your memory and possibly your God, is precious beyond measure.

So is that deep sigh as your dog settles into the passenger seat, homeward bound after a hard hunt. And telling him with a touch or a look, “thank you.” Ain’t gonna happen when someone else is fiddling with the radio dial, is it?

Yakking about last night’s game, giving or receiving shooting advice, helping pull porcupine quills are all well and good. There are plenty of reasons to bring someone else. But in a world of stimulus overload the blessings of solitude, introspection and reflection are priceless. Cementing the bond between you and your dog, reminiscing about dogs long gone and friends no longer able to hunt...how do you put a price on those? These wisps of emotion don’t come as readily when someone is tugging at your sleeve.

Hunting only with canine company takes you to a more primitive time when instincts, interdependence and teamwork molded two disparate species into one team. And no matter how smart his phone is, a human hunting buddy can’t take a picture of that. ✨





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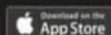
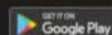
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# Abundant Land, **LOTS OF**



BY DAVID HART

Southern New Mexico not only offers endless land; it's loaded with birds.

# QUAIL





**I**t's new country for friends Angel Montoya and Ray Trejo, so they peer out the windows of Montoya's truck as he eases down the dirt road, scanning the country for good cover. We are in southern New Mexico deep within the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. A trio of bird dogs rest in crates in the back of the truck; shotguns, shells, vests, a cooler and a jug of water fill the remaining space.

So far, though, the two long time bird hunters haven't seen anything that demands closer inspection. Some of it looks good, some a little better, the rest as barren as a parking lot. Much of America's newest national monument suffers from generations of intense over grazing. Vast expanses of greasewood and mesquite, and little else, raise our doubts.

Two miles and a dramatic change in the landscape later, however, Montoya hits the brakes and leans out the window before putting the truck in park. The three of us bail out and stand over dozens of bowl sized depressions in the dry dirt.

"Mearn's quail," says Montoya. "They use their toenails to dig up tubers. We're in the right area."

The three of us scan the steep slope above us. From a distance, it looks as featureless as a suburban lawn, at least to a novice western quail hunter like me. After studying the ground, though, I see a more inviting landscape. Deep, brush filled draws trail up to the rock rimmed mesa, cutting through benches covered with yucca, junipers and assorted other shrubby plants. Knobs, depressions and clumps of thick blonde grass create an endless sea of hiding places for quail.

Although the scratchings are right next to the road in the narrow valley between two slopes, Trejo and Montoya agree our best chances of finding them are near the top, a climb of a half mile and 700 vertical feet. Mearn's, explains Trejo, prefer high ground. With years

of experience between them, I see no reason to object. In fact, I'm eager to see if I can keep up with them; both are about the same age as me.

"I think we should go up that draw and work our way to the top," says Montoya, pointing to the mountain above us.

It doesn't take long to figure out the air is a bit thinner and the ground a little steeper than back home, facts that sink in when a trio of scaled quail flush wild and then settle in a brushy depression 150 yards uphill. Trejo urges me to take off after them.

I stop twice to catch my breath before closing in on the low spot where the birds settle. A single rises near my feet and cuts across a wide, flat opening, offering a near perfect going away shot. I miss. A second quail follows and I miss again.

**BOOM TIME** Quail, desert quail in particular, lead a rough and tumble existence. Much of the Southwest was hammered by a prolonged drought in recent years and quail numbers plummeted, but the spring of 2015 was wet. The moisture fed the seasonal grasses

The country may look tame from a distance, but the closer you get, the rougher it is. Loose rocks, painful plants and steep hills make a southern New Mexico quail hunt a real challenge.





that not only provide critical nesting cover, but an abundant crop of insects that fed the chicks. Birds were abundant. The 2015 season wasn't necessarily a stand out, at least not to my hosts, but it was definitely better than a few recent ones.

"When I first got serious about it, we'd shoot a limit (15) and move a dozen coveys," recalls Montoya. "Some of those coveys would have 30 or 40 birds. We just need a couple of good springs and I think we can see those days again. The 2016 season should be good. We've had a good amount of rain."

Montoya, a 53 year old US Fish and Wildlife Service biologist and the son of Mexican immigrants, grew up an hour west in Deming, New Mexico, where Trejo also grew up and now serves as the public school's assistant administrator. As kids, they stalked doves, quail and other unsuspecting birds with BB guns and slingshots. Montoya, however, had an innate fascination with nature that went beyond plugging unwary sparrows and quail.

"I'd take home what we shot and identify it in the encyclopedia. I guess that was my first lesson in biology," he says.

He graduated to a shotgun and got a little more serious about quail, but a hunt in Arizona cemented that passion.

"I was hunting with some guys that had dogs. It was life-changing in a way," he recalls.

Two years later, he bought Chispa, a German shorthair named after a Texas ranch where he conducted post graduate research on endangered aplomado falcons. He's since added another shorthair and an English setter to his home.

Trejo also jumped feet first into bird dogs after he was invited to hunt with some friends and their dogs. He now has English pointers and German short hairs and hunts with them for a variety of birds throughout the Southwest. But like his lifelong friend, Trejo also prefers Mearn's.

**MIXED BAG POSSIBILITIES** Hunt them once and it's easy to see why. The garishly painted birds are one of the most coveted prizes in the upland world. Also known as Montezuma quail, they inhabit a relatively small region of the southwestern United States and often live in some of the most rugged and scenic



Scaled quail tend to inhabit the lower ground, but they can be found in the same country as Mearn's quail.



A dog isn't mandatory for Mearn's quail. You can walk up the tight-sitting birds on your own, but a dog will make your hunt more productive and more enjoyable.

country. Even better, they hold well for pointing dogs.

It's not that the two friends don't appreciate other quail species. They'll shoot whatever their dogs point. It's not out of the question to encounter Gambel's and scaled quail as they search for Mearn's. However, they rarely hunt just

for those species, although Montoya's new obsession is shooting all four New Mexico quail species (there are bobwhites in eastern New Mexico) in a single day. He's gotten three so far, including a bobwhite, but expects to accomplish that goal eventually.

On this day, we aren't in bob country,





The author, left and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership staffer Coby Tigert admire the Gambel's quail they shot on public land. The Organ Mountains are in the background.

but we not only find three coveys of Mearn's quail, we bust several more coveys of scaled quail and a covey or two of Gambel's. I manage to pluck a few here and there throughout the day, but miss far more than I should, including every Gambel's I shoot at.

Is it the borrowed gun, an aging body or just an off day? I don't know, but Trejo and Montoya don't need excuses. Both are as fit as the quail we are hunting and drop more birds than they miss.

Scalies and Gambel's prefer to use their legs, running hard until they are well out of cover and range before taking wing. Given the option, they'll fly uphill, as if taunting you to follow. You do, of course, because what's a few hundred yards up a gentle rise?

What looks like an easy climb for the inevitable reward of a point and flush invariably turns into a 30 minute, lung burning march up and down gullies while dodging prickly pear and mesquite daggers that penetrate bird pants like hypodermic needles. Only to find out the birds may have settled over there, or a little higher, or that they simply vanished like miniature ghosts.

"When you flush a covey of Mearn's, they'll usually be where you last saw them go down," says Trejo. "They won't run."

He and Montoya may not admit it, but there's likely another reason they climb above Gambel's and scaled quail country. As the three of us picked our way up the slope across loose volcanic boulders and around thigh-stabbing

**ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES** "There are so many places to hunt around here, you could hunt all season and never hit the same spot twice," says Trejo.

There's no need to hunt private land, either, at least not in southern New Mexico. Las Cruces is base camp for the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument, established by the Obama administration under the Antiq-

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...the inevitable reward of a point and flush turns into a 30-minute, lung-burning march up and down gullies while dodging prickly pear and mesquite daggers.

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yuccas, the two chided each other to see who would need to stop and catch his breath first. Good bird hunting partners are hard to find, but these two and their dogs work together like the best of friends. They chase rumors of abundant birds in new country like a prospector follows the promise of a new strike. Sometimes they find riches, sometimes they don't.

uities Act. The five tract, half million acre playground includes everything from towering granite peaks to flat, greasewood and mesquite studded desert. It can take some searching to find the good quail country, though.

"Look for taller, thicker cover that has a variety of plant species. You can find quail just about anywhere, but the more diverse the habitat, the more likely



it is to hold quail,” explains 50 year old Trejo. “You’ll know it when you see it. Mearn’s tend to live in the higher elevations. The other species can be anywhere from the bottom to the top.”

There are a lot of misconceptions about national monuments, says Back country Hunters and Anglers executive director Land Tawney. His group, along with various other conservation organizations, played a role in coaxing the Obama administration into establishing the OMDP National Monument.

“When people hear ‘national monument’ they think ‘national park’ where hunting, off roading, and grazing are banned, but that’s not the case with most monuments,” Tawney explains. “The OMDP remains under the oversight of the Bureau of Land Management, but the national monument designation prevents such things as drilling, mining and land transfers.

“It’s open to hunting, cattle graze it and there are off roading opportunities, so the only thing that’s really changed is that it won’t ever be sold or developed.”

In the case of the Desert Peaks area, which lies just west of Las Cruces, the federal government considered selling a large area of BLM land to a developer interested in building a high tech, uninhabited city that would be used for testing “smart” technology. Local conservationists protested and the proposal was killed.

There’s no telling how many quail and quail hunters it might have affected, but Trejo and Montoya, who lives in Las Cruces, are certain it would have cost them some opportunities. The Desert Peaks monument lies about halfway between their hometowns and serves as a meeting point for many of their hunts.

“We hunt public land all the time. There’s so much here, there’s really not much reason to hunt private land,” says Trejo. “I lived in Texas for a short time and there was almost no public land. I came back to New Mexico because the hunting is so good and there is so much land.”

There are quail, too. Lots of them. As long as you are willing to follow your dogs up every slope they lead you, you’ll come away with sore feet, a vest full of empty shells and maybe even a few quail. \*



Gambel’s quail are abundant around the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument and are often found in the same habitat as scaled quail. You might even find them in the same places you find Mearn’s quail.

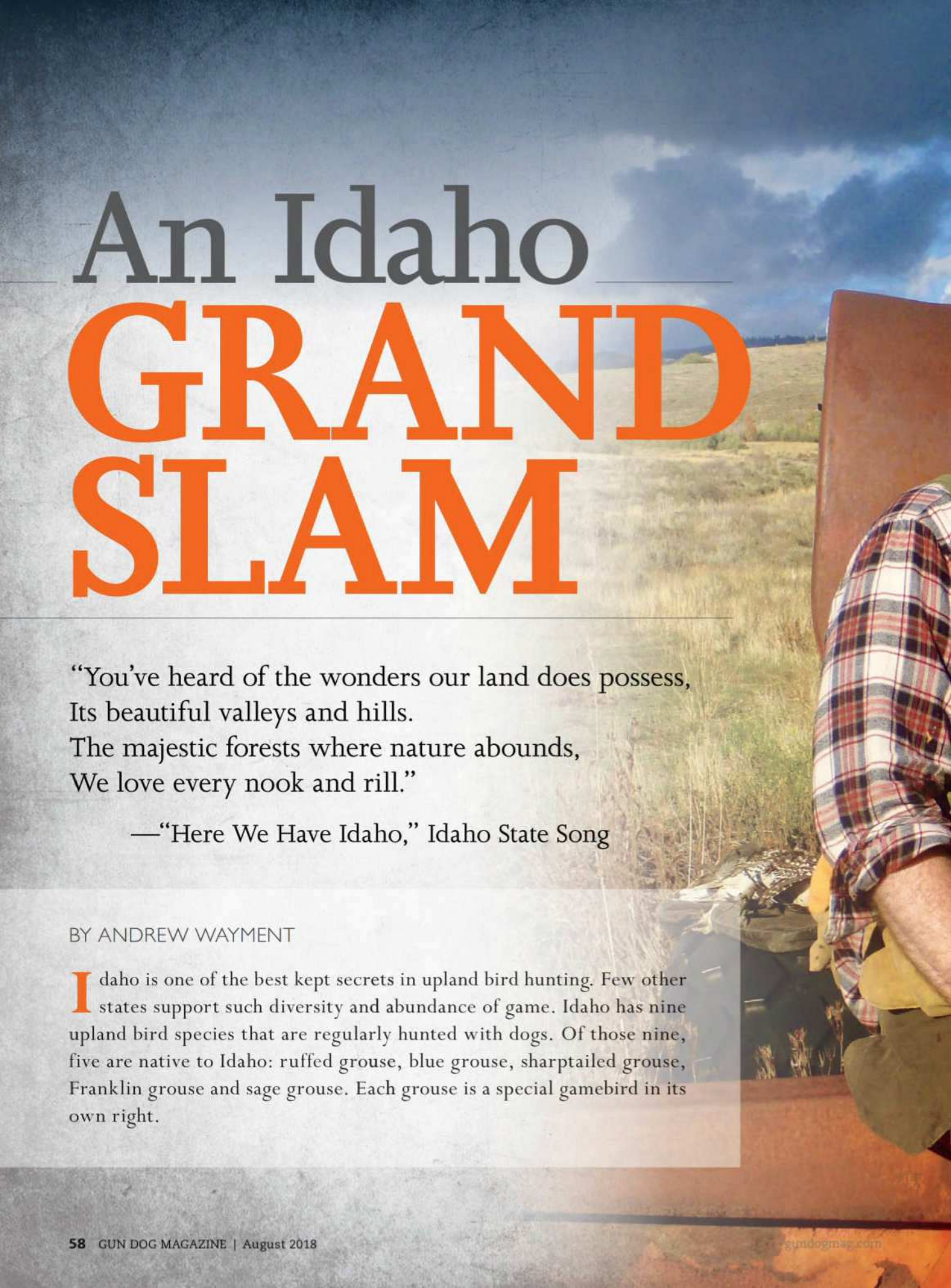
## NEED TO KNOW...

Quail season generally runs from mid-November to mid-February, with a 15-bird aggregate limit, although only five can be Mearn’s quail.

The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument covers a half-million acres, but there are tens of thousands of additional acres of BLM land in southern New Mexico.

Las Cruces, New Mexico serves as base camp for the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. The city of 100,000 has every amenity you need. El Paso is about an hour’s drive from Las Cruces.





# An Idaho GRAND SLAM

“You’ve heard of the wonders our land does possess,  
Its beautiful valleys and hills.  
The majestic forests where nature abounds,  
We love every nook and rill.”

—“Here We Have Idaho,” Idaho State Song

BY ANDREW WAYMENT

**I**daho is one of the best kept secrets in upland bird hunting. Few other states support such diversity and abundance of game. Idaho has nine upland bird species that are regularly hunted with dogs. Of those nine, five are native to Idaho: ruffed grouse, blue grouse, sharptailed grouse, Franklin grouse and sage grouse. Each grouse is a special gamebird in its own right.









A beautiful brace of blue grouse.

For more than ten years I had the goal of taking all five of Idaho's native grouse in one season. I dubbed this feat, "the Idaho Grouse Grand Slam." I know of very few other hunters who have accomplished the goal. Three of the grouse species—ruffed, blue grouse, and sharptails—are fairly easy to come by in southeastern Idaho. However, sage grouse can be challenging because of the shortness of the season and Franklin grouse are geographically limited to the Salmon River country of Central Idaho. The Frank Church Wilderness is its stronghold.

In October of 2008, I came very close to achieving the Grand Slam as I had taken four of the grouse species but came up short on the Franklin grouse. I only had a half day to hunt this bird and our group

walked away with the proverbial goose egg. In the years that followed, I did not have the opportunity to pursue Franks.

Idaho Fish & Game lumps the three forest grouse species together—ruffed, blue, and Franklin grouse—into one game bag and one season beginning August 30<sup>th</sup> and ending December 31<sup>st</sup>. My dogs and I typically take numerous ruffed and blue grouse before the other hunting seasons open.

**BLUE GROUSE** On Labor Day, September 2, 2014, my Brittany, Misty, flushed a blue grouse across an abandoned logging road on an alpine ridge and I made a nice shot as it dove down hill. A few minutes later, my elderly French Brittany, Sunny Girl, found the downed bird in the thick timber,

retrieved the bird to hand, and I had my first bird of the pentad.

Unfortunately, my hunt was cut short by an allergic reaction to hornet stings or I might have taken a ruff that day too. Instead, I took a nice ride in an ambulance to the hospital, but gratefully, I lived to hunt another day.

**SAGE GROUSE** My second bird of the Grand Slam was the sage grouse. Idaho still has huntable populations of this big grouse, but I fear the days of hunting them are quickly coming to an end. On Saturday, September 20, 2014 the sage grouse opener a good friend, Scott Johnson, took me to a place he had seen some of the big birds before the season opened.

Shortly after our arrival, my hunting companions and I saw huge





Misty poses with her mega grouse of the sage seas.



Red-phased ruffs are not as common in Idaho as gray-phased.

flocks of grouse in the seas of sage with the Grand Tetons in the backdrop. Unfortunately, the going was tough for arthritic Sunny Girl so after an hour of hunting I took leave from the rest of our group and made my way back to the truck with my dogs while hunting the cover next to the road.

As we walked, Misty flushed a big grouse which presented me with my very favorite shot—quartering left to right. Misty then went to the downed grouse and stood over it but would not retrieve. However, old Sunny Girl dove in and retrieved it to hand. Now that is a team effort!

As it had been a few years since I hunted these grouse successfully, I was glad to hold this large male in my hand. The dogs and I paused to take a few photos. I wanted to continue hunting, but I had filled my limit. As I made my way back to the truck—due to the likelihood of not being able to hunt sage grouse in the near future—the thought crossed my mind: This has to be the year to complete the Grand Slam.

**RUFFED GROUSE** In Idaho, late September through early November is the best time to hunt ruffed grouse. I call this time the “Glory Days” of autumn both for the hunting and the weather. The last weekend of September, however, was gloomy and rainy. I almost passed on the chance to hunt, but my brother, Shawn, challenged me by way of text message to get out and “Kill a wet one!” I accepted the challenge and I’m glad I did as Misty had one of her best days ever.

I decided to try our luck at a covert I call “the ‘Outhouse,’” which was my most productive covert in 2013. When we reached the gate leading to the Outhouse, it was still raining. Nevertheless, the dogs and I headed up the two-track into the narrow valley.

As we walked, Misty hunted the quakies on the hill flanking the left-hand side of the road. About two hundred yards up the two track, Misty became birdy and then stretched out into a beautiful point. I walked quickly towards her but she did not move. I then made the





A sharptail and a Ruger Red Label 20-gauge.

mistake of looking on the ground to where Misty was pointing and saw the nervous ruffie walking slowly away. For whatever reason, when I can see the bird on the ground, I have a tough time making the shot. When the bird finally flushed, I missed it the first time but recovered on the second shot.

“Good girl, Misty!” I exclaimed—pleased as a peach that she had staunchly pointed the bird.

At my shots, two other birds flushed. One landed in a nearby tree and, as I walked towards it, the ruff flushed hard straightaway and then juked up and to the right. I missed with the bottom barrel, but then corrected and took the bird with the top barrel. Misty chased down the winged bird and made a great retrieve.

I guess you can say I have “no sense to come in out of the rain,” but with grouse hunting like I experienced that day, who would?

**SHARPTAIL** My brother Shawn Wayment, DVM, is the bird huntingest fool I’ve ever known. His birthday happens to be on October 1<sup>st</sup>, which is the opener for sharptails in Idaho. I’ve always wondered if his birthday and his love of bird hunting had any correlation. When Shawn’s birthday rolled around

in 2014, this happened to fall on the first day of Shawn’s annual bird hunting trip to Idaho—by design, of course.

I had earlier asked Shawn what he wanted for his birthday and he replied, “I want you to leave work early and meet me at 1:00 o’clock at the Royal Macnab to hunt sharptails.”

“I think I can manage that.” I responded with a grin.

When the day finally came, it was again raining. Despite the inclement weather, the hunting was excellent. One particular sharptail stands out. The Royal Macnab consists of rolling CRP fields gouged with deep wooded draws. Toward the end of the day in the glowing light of the setting sun, Misty and I pushed our way down a trail across the biggest wooded draw on the property at a place where it narrows and is easily crossable.

I call this spot “the Pinch.” As we crossed over the Pinch, Misty cut across a nearby hillside and struck a beautiful point near the hilltop. I steadily walked toward her and three sharpies flushed in different directions. I swung on the bird that flew right to left in front of me heading back toward the Big Draw. I missed it on the first shot, but swung ahead and hit it solidly on the second.

“All right, Misty!” I hollered as she made the perfect retrieve.

**FRANKLIN GROUSE** With the taking of this sharptail, I then only had one more bird to complete the Idaho Grouse Grand Slam: again, the Franklin grouse. As Shawn and I planned our upcoming week of hunting, I begged him to consider chasing Franks one day. He agreed as he was aware of my long time goal to complete the Slam. Shawn happened



Shawn Wayment, DVM, the author’s brother, holds a nice male Franklin grouse, which is a subspecies of the spruce grouse in Idaho.



to be with me five years earlier when I failed to complete it.

Early Wednesday, October 8, 2014, Shawn and I stopped on our way to the central Idaho grouse woods at one of our favorite small-town cafes for breakfast. While paying for breakfast, I had a pleasurable run-in with an old-timer who was wearing a hat that reminded me of Boss Hogg's on *The Dukes of Hazard*.

I asked him, "How are you doing?"

With a smile, the elderly chap replied, "I'm fine as a fiddle string."

I almost laughed out loud at his pleasant response so early in the morning.

He then said, "You boys look like you're going hunting. What are you after?"

"We're headed over into the Salmon River Country in search of some spruce grouse," I responded.

"Are those the birds they call 'fool hens'?" he asked.

"Yessir, they are," I answered.

"I used to kill them with a beanie flipper," my new friend reported matter-of-factly. He then wished us good luck.

As we took to the road, Shawn and I had a good laugh about that conversation and considered it a good omen. Beanie flipper?

Once we reached the general area we planned to hunt, we searched for suitable habitat for Franks, which typically consists of boggy riparian areas. However, at first we didn't see anything that struck us as suitable habitat. So, after some deliberation, we ended up going back to the exact same creek bottom we had searched for Franklins back in 2008. Remembering my last time there, I was a little worried that we wouldn't find birds again.

To our absolute delight, the dogs ended up finding multiple Franks that morning and many of them indeed fit the "fool hen" description and—at the dogs' approach—flew up into the nearest tree. Some of the Franks, however, flew hard and one totally burned my biscuits as I missed with both barrels.

Shawn and I hunted an area with numerous rivulets running down the hillside. We followed one small rivulet



Kill a wet one. Misty was on fire that morning on blue grouse and ruffed grouse.

up the mountain and then turned and hunted back down another. Not far from the road, Ellie, Shawn's field-bred English cocker, found two grouse and flushed them into a tree.

I went right to the first grouse, pitched a stick, and it flew across the opening created by the rivulet. I made a great shot just before it reached the cover on the other side. I was ecstatic upon finally achieving my goal of the Idaho Grouse Grand Slam.

Having accomplished the Slam, I've come to realize that the feat is not just about the birds bagged, although that is obviously part of it. Any duffer like me can raise a gun, pull the

trigger and bring down a few grouse. Rather, the accomplishment should really be gauged by a person knowing the grouse and their habitat well enough to put his dogs in position to find them for the gun. In my book, that says more about the hunter and the feat than anything.

Even more important than the accomplishment itself, however, was the opportunity to experience firsthand the beautiful, wild places each of these grouse species inhabit. While there is some overlap, each grouse has a different and unique niche of habitat. Each grouse and its environs are special in their own way. For me, grouse are the essence of wild Idaho. \*



# TRAINING TOOLS

## for Your Gun Dog

BY TYLER SHOBERG

**WE ARE OBSESSED** with our bird dogs. Think about it: How many articles, books and online forums did you pore over before deciding on what breed of dog to get next? How much research did, and do, you do to figure out everything from nutrition and exercise, to training and hunting? If you're anything like me, it's borderline unhealthy.

But between you, me and the fencepost, our dogs are worth it. They provide years of loyal companionship and are the cornerstone to making days afield memorable. It's why we do obsess over them, and why we deserve to have some of the best equipment available to train them.

Sure, equipment alone doesn't make the dog—genetics, you know—but having the right gear to get the job done sure can make the process a heck of a lot more successful. And fun!



### DOKKEN'S DEADFOWL TRAINERS

The Dokken Deadfowl Trainer, with its hard floppy head and hard plastic feet, encourages dogs to pick it up by the soft middle. The design has been integral in helping me train proper hold during force fetch. The hard head keeps dogs from shaking, and the true-to-life weight of the dense foam body makes the process a lot more lifelike—made even more so by injecting liquid scent, if you're so inclined.

**\$25 (START)**  
DEADFOWLTRAINER.COM



### GARMIN SPORT PRO

The Garmin Sport PRO is an economical way to effectively control up to three dogs with one system. The intuitive remote is laid out to issue commands exactly where and when you need them, regardless of the dog type of hunting style. Choose the stimulation level based on the chosen dog, and decide on continuous stimulation, momentary stimulation, vibration or tone. When training is done, the collar's built-in BarkLimiter has settable levels so you can customize exactly what your dogs need to keep from after hours rowdiness.

**\$250 | GARMIN.COM**



### GARMIN FENIX 5 WATCH

Smart watches aren't necessarily a new technology, but Garmin's Fenix 5 is the original smart watch geared for the outdoorsman and hunter. Paired with other Garmin equipment, such as the Astro or Alpha remote trainers, the Fenix 5 goes far beyond just counting steps. It allows you to track dogs from your wrist or while showing the way during hikes. And if you're into fitness, you can track your heart rate, which comes in handy if you're curious about how many beats per minute you hit after flushing a bird over point.

**\$600 | GARMIN.COM**





### DOGTRA ARC HANDSFREE

The new ARC Handsfree collar has a range of 3/4-mile. The Handsfree Remote Controller can be strapped to your wrist, to your shotgun, or anywhere you want, which allows for instant correction and the usage of both of your hands (plus you don't have it swinging from your neck the whole day). For training and certain styles of hunting, this fully waterproof collar (built with two-hour rapid charge batteries) is a true game-changer.

**\$250 | DOGTRA.COM**



### D.T. SYSTEMS CANINE COACH 360

Sometimes new dog handlers can feel a bit overwhelmed by training equipment with high price tags. If you're interested in being a bit more frugal without sacrificing functionality, the Canine Coach is a nice entry-level option. A unit that works at home or on a hunt, it's equipped with 16 levels of stimulation, a beep option, and a quick charge of about two hours. Perfect for the weekend warrior or everyday diehard.

**\$200 | DTSYSTEMS.COM**



### D.T. SYSTEMS BL LAUNCHER

As a trainer of pointers who lives and dies by reliable launchers, I've made the BL series from D.T. Systems a permanent home in my training arsenal. Whether flinging chukars, pigeons or roosters, BL launchers are versatile tools for introducing a new retriever to its feathered quarry, or sharpening a veteran bird dog with some off-season field work. A special side-loading door allows the trap to be locked before a bird is placed—a great safety feature—and 16 launchers can be synced to a single remote.

**\$350 | DTSYSTEMS.COM**



### SPORTDOG CONTAIN + TRAIN

Unfortunately, hunting season is a pretty small percentage of your dog's life in a year. The vast majority of time, he's a pet, which is why the SportDOG Contain + Train was built specifically for this unique dichotomy. Combining the usefulness of the company's In-Ground Fence System with proven training capabilities of the FieldTrainer 425, it allows security at home and in the field. While in containment, it keeps your dog in the yard. And for training, it has a range of 500 yards, and is fully customizable for stimulation, vibration and tone.

**\$405 | SPORTDOG.COM**



### LAELAPS

A new dog on the block, Laelaps is a GPS tracking collar that uses your smartphone or tablet to track you and the dog's location. No proprietary handheld device and no cellular signal needed; Laelaps uses a combination of GPS, VHF radio and Bluetooth. This means no data- or battery-sucking usage on your phone. Laelaps transmits your dog's location to a Long-Range Transceiver, clipped to your vest or belt, using a VHF radio signal. Connected to your smartphone via Bluetooth, you can easily track your dog's position with a smartphone app.

**\$399 | LAELAPSGPS.COM**



### DOGWATCH BIGLEASH S-15

The Bigleash S-15 has 15 levels of electronic stimulation in both nick and continuous. Thanks to the receiver's FireFly nightlight feature—four remote-activated LEDs that turn on with the push of a button—low light no longer means quitting time for dog work. And especially handy if hunting in the thick stuff, the exclusive In-Touch Two Way Communication displays signal strength on the transmitter's LCD screen to indicate if a dog is in range.

**\$230**  
**DOGWATCHTRAININGPRODUCTS.COM**





### ZINGER WINGER REMOTE HUNT TESTER G5

Zinger Winger made the G5 lighter and shorter for easier transportation. It features heavy-duty hinges and rubber tubing, three sets of anchor hooks for multiple settings, plus a Multi-Shot Sound release mechanism that fires various-caliber blanks as soon as it's launched. Pair the G5 with a remote trainer for convenient one-person training sessions, then fling any fowl or bumper you want to prepare your dog for tests, trials or next hunting season. **\$475** | ZINGERWINGER.COM



### CONQUEST SCENT STICKS

Sometimes finding training birds isn't so easy, which is where Conquest Scent Sticks makes a suitable substitute. Duplicate the scent of the real thing while utilizing a simple bumper to lay a tracking drill or real-world retrieving scenario. Water, saliva and weather resistant, these convenient sticks are an easy way to add scent without mess. Choose from popular gamebird species, as well as rabbit, raccoon, antler and blood trail.

**\$13-\$20**  
CONQUESTSCENTS.COM



### GUN DOG SUPPLY COMPANY

Finding your hunting and dog training gear is easy at GDS. If you're a dog guy like myself, this is your version of Amazon.com. Owner Steve Snell provides articles, videos and feedback on gear choices, and you can do some quality assurance by seeing what other purchasers say. Whether you're looking for a leash or the newest high-tech GPS tracking collar, Gun Dog Supply should have a home on your web browser favorites bar.

GUNDOGSCOMPANY.COM



### Trade to Upgrade

### COLLAR CLINIC

There are few things more painful than losing a remote or transmitter—but breaking one comes close. Fret not, because Collar Clinic is an answer to your prayers. In business since 1988, they can make your gear good as new again, no matter how "classic" that collar. Or if you're considering an improved model, trade your old gear for an upgrade or try one of their budget-friendly reconditioned units.

COLLARCLINIC.COM



### LCS BIRD DOG TRAINER SYSTEM

When you're knee deep in training gear, there's something to be said about simplicity. Case-in-point: the Bird Dog Trainer. Not only is it a rugged, flexible collar for any hunting dog, it also operates the Remote Backing Dog and Bird Launchers. It's a great system for getting a pointer to honor. Pop the backing dog, handle your pointer to honor, then launch the pigeon to simulate a flush.

**\$180 (E-COLLAR)**  
LCSUPPLY.COM



### REAL DUCK TRAINING DUMMIES

My dogs absolutely destroy dummies if left to their own devices. And lots of training means bumpers take a beating. That's why I've gradually begun adding Real Duck dummies to my bumper bag. They construct their training dummies case out of a super durable poly firehose case. Practically indestructible, they also float thanks to a granulated cork core and hold scent.

**\$12-\$21** | REALDUCK.COM



# FOODS, MEDS & Supplements

BY TONY J. PETERSON

**THE HARDEST WORKING MEMBERS** of any hunting party are the dogs. They run when we walk, cover three or four times the distance we do and bust head-long into nasty cover we skirt.

In the off-season, while they may spend more time napping than we do, they also work through retrieving drills and obedience lessons with vigor. Throughout all this, a dog's body demands the right nutrition and essentials for proper recovery.

It's up to you to give them what they need because it not only allows them to perform at their peak, but also because it's the right thing to do.



© MARK ATWATER



## CROWN ROYALE SPORTING DOG SHAMPOO FORMULA

Got a full- or flat-coated bird dog? Then you might need to pick up a bottle of Crown Royale #12. Designed for specific breeds of hunting dogs, there is also a formula for hard/wiry coats as well. In addition to their shampoos, this company also produces two formulas of brushing spray, which, if you've ever had a long-haired dog get into the cockleburrs or beggar's lice, you understand why it's such a necessity.

\$11 | CROWNROYALELTD.NET



## DOC'S PRODUCTS COS PELLETS

Canine Orthopedic Solution pellets can treat a pile of your dog's issues, from arthritis to degenerative joint disease and bone fractures. If you've got a young dog that works hard, or an old dog that is still active, COS can make a big quality-of-life difference through all natural and organic ingredients like chondroitin, glucosamine, hyaluronic acid and a host of others. Choose from three different sizes ranging from 60 doses to 360 doses.

\$30-\$162 | DOCSPRODUCTSINC.COM



## HAPPY JACK FLEXENHANCE PLUS+

Happy Jack has been around for over seven decades creating great products dog owners rely on. Exhibit A is Flexenhance Plus+, which is a food supplement that is chock-full of glucosamine and creatine. These function to help reverse bone, joint and cartilage damage while enhancing strength and flexibility in muscle fiber. In other words, if you've got a hard-charging upland dog, Flexenhance Plus+ is a good way to help him stay healthy and seriously active.

\$32 | HAPPYJACKINC.COM





### INTERVET BRAVECTO

If you're the kind of person who really hates ticks, I've got bad news for you—the problem seems to be getting worse. The good news is that you can treat your dog so that he'll avoid all of the nasty diseases the little bloodsuckers might introduce into his bloodstream. All you need to do is give your dog a dose of Bravecto and he'll be good for up to 12 weeks, which is so much more convenient than most collars or topical tick treatments.

**\$39 (START) | MERCK-ANIMAL-HEALTH.COM**



### K9ATHLETE NEW DOG

Wilderness Athlete has helped an awful lot of big game hunters conquer the mountains, and now the company has introduced a line of supplements to help your sporting dog take on the gnarliest bird habitats. K9Athlete New Dog is a daily supplement that is full of glucosamine, hyaluronic acid, botanicals, and a host of other ingredients to aid in joint health and recovery. New Dog works just as well for senior dogs as it does for growing pups, and is a great way to give your dog a performance and quality-of-life boost.

**\$35 | WILDERNESSATHLETE.COM**



### KINETIC PERFORMANCE DOG FOOD SUPPLEMENTS

Kinetic has developed a loyal following among sporting dog owners, and now they've released a line of supplements. Three options—Hydration, Digestion, and Weight Gain—provide extremely active dogs with lifestyle boosts they need. Hydration, for example, is formulated with a proprietary blend of digestible proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and electrolytes, which all aid in recovery and nutrient replenishment after a hard day's work.

**\$40 | KINETICDOGFOOD.COM**



### NUTRAMAX COSEQUIN ASU SPORT

Your hunt for the right joint health supplement is over! Help support the joint and pad health of your sporting dog with Cosequin ASU Sport. Patented combinations of ingredients help deliver joint support, while biotin helps support pad health and integrity as well as a healthy coat. Whether it's through the fields or in the woods and water, use Cosequin ASU Sport to help keep your dog moving!

**\$27 | COSEQUIN.COM**



### PURINA PERFORMANCE 30/20 CHICKEN & EGG

Grain-free, Pro Plan is 30 percent protein and 20 percent fat. The protein is sourced from high-quality chicken and eggs. Each feeding you'll be giving your dog the right amount of concentrated nutrition and amino acids, while not giving them any grains, soy, poultry by-product meal, or artificial colors, flavors or preservatives. It also contains antioxidants, omega-3 fatty acids, and glucosamine to support joint health.

**\$58 (24-LB) | PROPLANSPORT.COM**





### EUKANUBA PREMIUM PERFORMANCE 30/20

Formulated for working dogs, Eukanuba Premium is a 30/20 blend of protein to fat, providing long-lasting energy through customized carbohydrates and high fat content. Expect to see your bird dog build muscle while staying lean and recover more quickly. The nutrients in 30/20 promote optimal scenting abilities as well, so your pup will miss fewer points and be able to track down cripples with ease.

\$38-\$45 (29-LB) | [EUKANUBA.COM](http://EUKANUBA.COM)



### REALTREE NATURALS DOG TREATS

Most dogs aren't all that picky. That doesn't mean they don't deserve high-quality food, or in this case, treats. Realtree's Naturals are created from one ingredient that is either sourced here in the U.S. or from our neighbors to the north. Choose from Beef Jerky, Beef Taffy, Cod Skin Bites, or Sooie Strips (pig ears) to reward your pup after running down a wing-shot rooster or throughout a day of off-season training.

\$5 | [REALTREE.COM](http://REALTREE.COM)



### REX SPECS DOG GOGGLES

When I watch my dog bust through cattails, I wonder how she does it without getting poked in the eye. One way to prevent eye injuries on your prized pup is to pick up a pair of Dog Goggles from Rex Specs. They are impact resistant, feature a fully-adjustable strap system, and block 99.9 percent of UVA and UVB rays. They are also breathable, allow full jaw motion, and fasten with a simple buckle system. Each goggle has one clear lens and one of your color choice.

\$80 | [REXSPECS.COM](http://REXSPECS.COM)



### STENDEL OILS SAMMY'S SHINY COAT

You might not have ever heard of flax oil and what it can do for you four-legged hunting partner, which is a lot. Fortunately, the folks at Stengel Oils have and they've used it to create Sammy's Shiny Coat. Cold-pressed flax oil, which is extremely healthy in large part due to the fact that it contains omega-3s, will not only make your dog's coat look better but can also improve the condition of his skin.

\$15 | [STENGELOILS.COM](http://STENGELOILS.COM)



### VICTOR HI PRO PLUS

Couch dogs need not apply when it comes to Hi Pro Plus, considering it contains 450 kCals per cup. It is just right for working dogs—especially in the heart of the hunting season. This high-quality dog food is formulated with 30 percent protein and 20 percent fat, and also contains trace nutrients, minerals and vitamins. Free of gluten, soy, wheat and corn, Hi Pro Plus is offered in four sizes and is also an excellent choice for growing puppies and lactating females.

\$45 (40-LB) | [VICTORPETFOOD.COM](http://VICTORPETFOOD.COM)



### ZOOM DOG ITCHY DOG

Have you noticed that at certain times of the year your dog will spend more time scratching himself? Or maybe you have a dog that has been diagnosed with allergies, and the red eyes and itching are incessant. Consider Itchy Dog from Zoom Dog. These chewable tablets contain vitamins, antioxidants, and polyphenols, which work in concert to keep your dog's coat and skin healthy and are instrumental in cutting down on the itchiness.

\$15 | [ZOOMDOGSUPPLEMENTS.COM](http://ZOOMDOGSUPPLEMENTS.COM)







# FLYWAY TO HEAVEN



Get in the blind and follow the migration through the Central and Mississippi flyways. One thing's for certain: it's going to be raining birds.

**HEARTLAND WATERFOWL**  
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**Outdoor**  
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[RYGLENGUNDOGS.COM](http://RYGLENGUNDOGS.COM)





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# A Glance Backward

Hunting memories can be triggered by simple items squirreled away, then forgotten, in outdoor garb.

**ONE OF THE BEST** parts of anticipating bird hunts is recapturing fragments of those gone by. Jump starting a remembrance of seasons past often needs no more than a lick and a promise, cleaning of a well used game vest or duck coat. Memories are hidden in hunting garb, and you never know what will spark a recollection you didn't realize was still lodged in your mind.

In an instant, I flashed back many years and saw my young English setter in an aspen stand easing through cover toward the trunk of a downed tree. She paused, turned her head into the wind, and froze about 15 feet from a grouse glaring down at her from the weathered trunk his drumming log! The bird's crest was flared and his ruff and tail were fanned out. He exploded from his log not in a flush to safety but straight at my setter in a flurry of feet, wings, and beak, and routed her in no uncertain terms. We left him as master of his space.

I relived that distant episode with a total habitation of each moment; the exquisite beauty of autumn, the smell of the woods, the sound of drumming, and each movement of the gutsy grouse and my vanquished setter. And all it took was a feather drifting from a shaken vest.

I hadn't used the faded camo parka in years. It needed a serious shaking to clear out accumulated "stuff," and one item that fell out, a crumpled white bakery sack, mystified me until my brain clicked on an image of snow geese over wheat stubble.

My three partners and I had put out dozens of the extra large "decoy" bags anchored with rocks and augmented here and there by staked-down pieces of sheets.

Dawn came with a breeze, the movement seemed to appeal to a flock of



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snows that dropped into our "spread." After the dogs picked up four geese, we opined "the breeze was going to put life into a placid day." It did, but not how we imagined. The sky darkened and the breeze built into a near gale and our white bags took to the air, rocks and all. The snow goose hunt ended in a fiasco featuring four men and two Labs in flapping sheets trying to corral decoys.

I admit to being a collector, a repository of things natural; of feathers, turtle shells, rocks, perfect leaves, and skulls, especially skulls. Along with having a functional elegance, skulls are, paradoxically, evidence of life and simultaneous records of death. Thus they bear an element of mystery, like the skull I found wrapped in a sweat stained bandana, forgotten in an old shell vest.

My friend's Brittany was on a hard point at the edge of an alder stand. We were walking in on the dog when a woodcock helicoptered up. At my shot, the bird collapsed about 20 yards from us into a scattering of frost burned ferns. My friend and I saw it hit the ground

and bounce slightly. When sent, the Brit found nothing. "Hunt dead," my friend commanded, but the hard working dog kept coming up empty.

To stay oriented, I dropped my hat where I was standing when I shot, then joined my friend and his Brit in the search. We used his hat to mark the spot of the bird's fall. Between the three of us we scoured a 25 yard area around the hat, and the dog worked well beyond that. Still no woodcock. But right at the spot we had marked, half hidden by leaves, I found a creamy-clean woodcock skull.

"We haven't been searching that long, have we?" my partner quipped about a warm and feathered woodcock transmogrifying into a cold bare skull. "Seriously," he added, "a hard hit woodcock seldom moves from where it falls." Nonetheless, we did not find the bird, though we fine tooth combed a large chunk of cover. The woodcock's disappearance remained an enigma, but at least I had the skull, which conveyed its own aura of mystery. ✨



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