

## RETRIEVING TIPS

Included in this information are some excerpts from an interview with Mr. Bill Little of Ontario, Canada, from the American Hunter Magazine, 1987.

Start pups on dead pigeons at seven weeks of age. Birdiness is important for a gun dog, and I want the pup to be bird crazy before we ever get started with formal training. At first we make it very simple for pups by throwing birds into the wind so they can use their noses, and from day one they learn what their nose is for. All fetching is done first on land. When the pup carries back a bird, try to run backwards a little ways. Don't be quick to take the bird away, but instead pick up the puppy, bird and all, and cuddle it and make a fuss. As soon as you try to take an object from them, they start pulling away because they think you are going to take away their prize.

A pup's introduction to water is very crucial. We come down to the pond, with waders on, and we walk out into the water, coaxing all the pups in with us. Some will go in right off, others will follow, and some will be bolder than others. Never start the water introduction until the weather and the water are warm. We don't want any bad first experiences. Keep pups away from rocky shores, and steep banks. If a young pup falls or slides into the water, you create a problem. After the pups are very birdie on land and introduced to water, put a little shoelace slip collar on them and let them drag it around and become comfortable with it. Then start getting them used to a lead. A piece of garden hose for the puppy to carry around is a good thing to introduce now. Encourage them then to walk into the water with the piece of garden hose in their mouth and swim around. Carrying the hose helps to eliminate the paddling-up type of swimming some young retrievers start with. Let them carry this hose on land as well while following you along, learning to come to you anytime that they can and bring you their prize. They will be about 3-4 months old at this point.

After a young dog is retrieving, you can introduce the shot with a .22 blank gun. *Always associate the shot with a throw of a pigeon or bumper, never alone.* Shooting without a retrieve associated is an easy way to make a dog become gun-shy... After the dog is used to the .22, use a .410 a few times. If that goes well then use a shotgun, starting with a 20 guage, then a 16 and then a 12 guage. Start with the gun far out, slowing moving it closer to the dog with each retrieve. Never overdue it or scare the dog. Use common sense. You must cover all the groundwork with a pup and give it the confidence of learning the basics perfectly. A common mistake an amateur makes is to hurry and not get the basics finished before the dog is pushed into more complicated work.

Avoiding problems is always a lot easier than correcting them. Look at it from your dog's point of view. If he runs around the pond instead of hitting the water and you punish him for not going in on the line, the dog doesn't understand and thinks he is being beaten for retrieving. Next, you throw a bumper out there but he doesn't go, so he gets in trouble for not going. Then he bolts and gets a real thrashing for bolting. Then the dog's mind says "I know for sure he doesn't want me to go." Can you blame him? Everything that you can do to soften the stress of training is important. Always make a dog's compliance with a command as happy an event as possible-so that the dog wants to obey. Your animal then begins doing things *for you* and not *because of you*. After a strong correction, don't be afraid to use a lot of petting, and good-boy's. Throw a happy bumper for him, give him lots of praise, ending on a happy note. Don't forget the dog biscuits, especially after a "rough" training session.

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