

The first 60 days of having a puppy! ...by Bryan Taylor

Once upon a time retriever trainers didn't begin serious training until the dog was at least a year old. But times have changed.

The two months following the arrival of your new puppy can have a big impact on how your dog learns, how well it socializes with humans and other dogs, and even how boldly it behaves in the field. The key is creating a secure environment in which you are the undisputed--gentle, benevolent--Leader. Once a puppy is in your home it's very important that you understand that you have changed its life and yours big-time. So it's worth mentioning that it's not the best thing to have a lot of people--the kids, grandkids and friends--there to meet the new arrival.

Guidance, not rigid discipline, is what your youngster needs. But before you begin the training process, you'll need to have the right supplies--I.e. crate, fenced yard, flat buckle collar--not slip collar and the best quality large breed puppy-chow you can afford--large-breed is the operative phrase. Many of the bone and joint problems that occur in the larger breeds of dogs can be precipitated by having these puppies grow too quickly and be too heavy for their height. According to the AVA and the CAVA--veterinary associations--large-breed puppy foods which have low levels of fat, will help keep your pup trim and healthy.

Next on the list is a trip to the veterinarian. In the case of good breeders you will already have the first set of shots. But if not that is your first of must-do chores. You should also ask for an intestinal worm test (you'll need to bring fecal samples) and finally; have the vet give your new buddy an overall health check: eyes, heart, teeth and bite, lungs, bone structure--the whole nine yards.

At this point, you should have a puppy that is a happy --healthy--camper. The dog doesn't know it yet, but it needs you for direction. That direction is the socialization process, which begins the moment you bring him/her home. Done right, this will set the stage for how the dog learns for the rest of its life.

It's important to take junior with you as much as possible--kennel in the vehicle, walks in the park on leash just walking at this point no command to heel but try to keep junior on your left side as much as possible, meet other pets--etc. Your puppy should have the chance to go with you everywhere it can. When you introduce the pup to children, keep it low-key--one or two at the most and have the kids sitting and the pup go to them not the other way around.

Housebreaking is a process that there's no easing into, and it can be an ongoing, frustrating struggle. Have the attitude that if you do your part correctly it will be over quickly and fairly painlessly you usually can have junior pretty much under control by the time they're 10 or 12 weeks old. But some owners have unrealistic expectations--they think they can leave it to the puppy to let them know when it wants to go out. The key is being in tune with the puppy's needs. Puppy out the door and you going back to have breakfast is not acceptable. What is--take the puppy out to a designated spot immediately after a nap, meal-drink-first thing in the morning or immediately after play. When not under direct supervision back into the crate goes pup,

But hold on a moment--I--and maybe you are training a well-adjusted pet and a bird dog. Plenty of exposure to birds alive and dead and basic simple retrieves in the early weeks will be extra that we add to junior's education. In the case of birds--there is a saying amongst pro trainers--no birds no bird dog. So start with a clipped--wing pigeon or chucker--available at a local game bird farmland in short grass let the puppy find and chase around--if you have access to its litter mate it is encouraging to the more unsure natured pup to have the help of its sibling at this point. Pretty soon pup will be looking for birds every time it goes outside.

An early, positive association with birds makes bird work much, much easier to follow up with later on. Retrieving work should also be started quite early. Roll up a sock, toss it down a hallway and encourage pup to bring it back to you. Always keep early sessions brief upbeat and with objects that

are soft only. This brings up the pup to be positive inquisitive and most of all trusty nag in you and its environment.

Now lets move on to the experienced dog of say a year or two--like all of us too little time and not enough practice tend to turn us a little bit frantic as we end August and tart into a new year of hunting. Now you have to sharpen the obedience, Marking, blind handling and hopefully not too much increase his physical condition--all this and the season is just opening--are you nuts. No need to be -- trust your past training and trust your dog more than you trust yourself. At this point you must avoid overworking and over correcting our dog--**TIP OF THE MONTH**--with **EVERY** success of your dog praise lavishly--even treat him/her and you will find a very quick response to your requests.

To sharpen our dogs realistically as possible **KISS**--keep it simple stupid. Basics and in that way you can prepare him to handle probably 90 percent of your hunting retrieves. But if you start throwing a lot fancy stuff at him at this late date, you and he will frequent frustration. So keep it short simple and success--filled and you will be much happier and so will he. Keeping the ob audience precise should be a year long process but like all of us we don't always follow the plan. So with a young dog or old keep the basics of control tight and refreshed and the rest of it will be a lot easier. Steadiness both to the whistle and close is must so that hunting season doesn't become a yelling match that you will lose very much most of the time. Thus we should give our dogs a rigorous refresher course in basic obedience every month or so that way August doesn't become panic month and the fall becomes most enjoyable for you and the dog.

To sharpen up steadiness and marking you need help--either human or a remote electronic launcher. Either way start with water marks that are short, simple; and exciting (to encourage dog to break so you can correct immediately) Place several decoys out near shore--with a pup have him follow you while you do this so he sees they are fake and not real. Blow your call, shoot for each throw--in other words practice like you play. Drop several dead ducks or bumpers in the same general fall area--all the time being ready to correct for a break and then send junior or senior and this way you promote marking and steadiness.

If your dog is ready for handling--i.e. trained for it then to sharpen up those skills now you should start out by reintroducing him to those drills of land and water for the parts of blind handling(lining, stopping and casting)

For example, turn your dog loose in cover and after a few minutes, when he's perhaps 20 yards away, toot the Sit-Whistle. If he "doesn't" stop, correct him in your normal manner. Then, with him sitting where he should be sitting and you standing where you were when you blew the whistle, toss a bird or bumper some yards off to either side or back of him. Wait for a five count then send him with hand signal. After a few of these you toot the sit whistle he should stop spin and look at you expecting another retrieve--don't disappoint. Now this drill encourages prompt responses to the sit whistle but also makes your dog focus intently on you after he sits. It even leads him to believe ever so much more in your casts. After the dog is again comfortable with lining, stopping and casting drills you can run three or four blind retrieves--but remember the ratio--three seen to 1 cold blind.

If you work your dog mostly in water, he'll swim a lot during the year and should keep him slim and muscled up. But if your dog is really out of shape you should condition him in water. A good drill for him and you is to sit stay him on shore proceed about 50 yards out in a boat and call him to you. As he swims out start rowing but slowly. After he follows for a reasonable distance stop bring him aboard and praise him lavishly. He'll come to love this "road work" in the water and you will too.

Well I was going to cover a couple more points but I need to go hunting--duty calls. Till next time, good luck and great dog work.