

Sights, Sounds

To know a retriever is to love him. He offers unwavering courage in his profession, yet can ply you for favors equal to the Lady of the house.

My boy Rocky can hear a cheese wrapper a mile away and be there in a flash to give me that pleading Labrador look. If there was a cheese catching contest, I would put him up against the world champion.

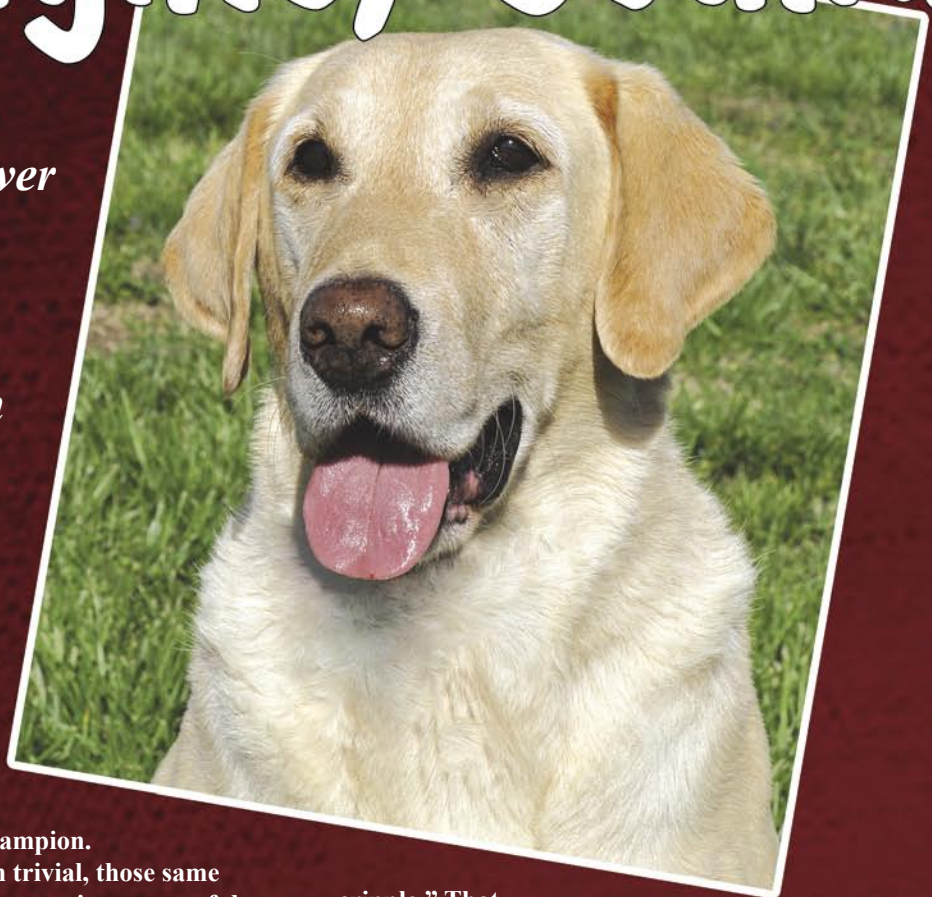
While these domestic traits seem trivial, those same assets in the field can be the difference in a successful hunting trip.

Good eyes, ears and nose are hereditary traits, passed on by the dogs' parents. (I can certainly attest to this theory because Rocky's dad had unprecedented skills in the cheese department as well.) The inherited natural ability may be present, but a dog has to learn how to utilize and apply his talents.

Retriever enthusiasts are quite fortunate nowadays because they have every imaginable training aid available to them. Most of you know what a retrieving bumper or dummy looks like. The older versions varied from rolled up towels to pieces of canvas fire hose. Today they are available in a variety of materials, in white, orange, black and a black and white color combination. I prefer the soft plastic variety because I can throw them farther, they are easy to keep clean, easy for the dog to hold and will retain their color. Avery offers a complete color range with a unique hex shape that is easy to grip and already has the throw rope attached (averyoutdoors.com).

Eyes

The AKC written standard for retrievers says, "A dog must mark the area of a fall and follow a strong



cripple." That pretty much says it all. Some dogs are natural markers. Others need practice at identifying the depth and area of the fall.

White bumpers are used to enhance marking ability and to help teach a dog to stay in the area of the fall (where the bumper or bird lands). I use white because dogs are essentially color blind, and white is



and Scents

By Jack Jagoda

the easiest to see. That bright neon orange bumper that shines like a beacon to our eyes is just grey to your dog. Start by throwing one white bumper 20 feet in front of you on a flat mowed field to be sure the dog sees it. If he is successful, lengthen the distance. Remember, continue using the long check cord we introduced in the last lesson just in case he doesn't come with the bumper.

Don't wind up and throw the bumper with the dog chasing underneath, hollering "I got it!" That's a whole different game. Throw the bumper overhand with a motion as though you are pitching a baseball. This way your puppy will initially see the object in the air and in front of you. It will also make it easier for you to make him steady (sit and stay) because he won't be dancing around beside you anticipating the throw.

Lightly restrain him and let him watch where the bumper lands before you send him. I prefer to use the dog's name as the release command. Using his name will avoid confusion later when two or more dogs are working together.

Once your puppy is retrieving consistently, it is time to introduce

a remote thrower location and extend the distance of the retrieve. You will need another person (thrower) for this. This allows you to have your hands free to place the puppy in proper

position and lightly restrain him. Start by having the thrower stand about 10 feet to your side and throw the bumper in the same place you were throwing it. Gradually, the helper moves in a semicircle away from you, still throwing the bumper in the same spot. Be sure the thrower stands still until asked to throw and has all the bumpers in a dark-colored bag so as not to distract and draw the dog to him. This allows the puppy to stay focused on the bumper, not the helper.



I like to keep the thrower visible to the dog at first and not hiding behind cover. This helps the dog understand that people are just props and will prevent shyness to hidden gun and thrower locations later. As you progress, it's time to continue the familiar sounds of the hunt. Have the thrower blow a call as an attention getter before he throws the bumper. Noise means fun, birds, retrieving. If all is going well, it's time to extend the distance of the retrieve.

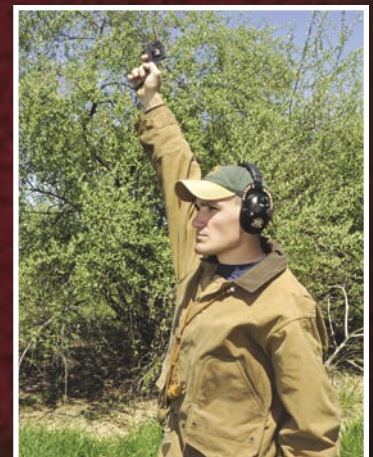
The easiest way to initially extend distance is to back up 50 feet or so at a time, leaving the thrower in the same position. Keep the retrieves at a reasonable distance in light cover. The objective at this stage is to teach the dog to use his eyes, maintain reasonable manners, and introduce calls and guns.

The Gun

I am amazed at how many prospective hunters come to pick up their eight-week old pups at my kennel and ask, "Has he been shot over?" The answer is NO. He has been around a lot of intentional noise, clanging food pans, duck calls, ATV's and guns at a distance. We introduce these noises while puppies are with their litter mates. This gives them a feeling of security and builds confidence. Later your puppy will learn to rely on you and trust your judgment.

Once your dog is retrieving with enthusiasm, it's time to introduce the gun. Have another helper (the gunner) fire a starter pistol well away from the puppy and the thrower as your puppy is returning with the bumper. "Oh! A shot means a bird for me!" the pup thinks. Gradually, the gunner will move closer to you and the dog.

Always have your dog on a check cord when you start shooting near him. If he starts learning he can get away from you to avoid that loud noise, you may create a dog that is gun or noise shy. Some dogs are just naturally spooky, but most gun-shy dogs are created. Introducing noise too



loud and too soon and lack of obedience are major factors in creating a gun-shy dog.

Nose

A hunting dog's nose is his single greatest asset and an absolute necessity for the hunter. I can walk or paddle out in the boat for a bird I can see, but a crippled bird in high cover is next to impossible to locate without an experienced nose.

Careful



observation of infant puppies within a litter indicates which puppies have the more acute sense of smell. When we start working with them, we let them use their nose to find a cookie buried in bedding or we place them downwind of their food dish. This is how they learn to use their nose to find a reward. Soon a good hunting puppy learns to follow his nose.

As you progress, take your puppy to an area of moderate cover and toss a pigeon in there for him to scent. Go in the cover with the puppy and encourage him to hunt. Watch the puppy work the cover and get excited when he catches that bird scent: his tail starts wagging and he will pounce on that bird! Be excited for him and with him! What fun for him and what fun to see him put it together.

If birds are not readily available, I use orange or black bumpers that are difficult to see for short hand-thrown marks in moderate cover. A good choice might also be the black and white bumper to build confidence by adding a little visual aid. If possible, attach a bird wing to the bumper for increased scent.



Always place and release your dog on the downwind side; this puts him in position to use his nose.

Whistles

The use of the whistle is always of great concern to new retriever owners, so this is probably as good a time as any to talk about it. There are many different whistles available in every size, color and pitch imaginable.

Laboring over which whistle is senseless, because it only has a limited application. The dog only has to learn two responses to the whistle: sit and come.

Sit is a single short loud blast (tweet!) The sit whistle is used in place of the verbal command, sit. Remember, sit means sit and stay at any distance until released or given further directions.

Come is a series of short blasts (tweet, tweet, tweet). This is used any time you want the dog to come toward you, either partially or all the way to you. This is useful to regulate the dog's distance while upland hunting. It is also helpful when the dog is retrieving from high cover so he can hear and locate you on his return.





The whistle of choice for competition and hunting is the Roy Gonia whistle which is available in orange, clear, green, pea less and mega. Of course, if you have any doubt, do like I did, buy them all and spend a weekend evaluating them.

Remember

Training is not a test. Don't set your puppy up to fail. Have a specific goal in mind for each training session and stay with it. Introduce individual skills, and allow him to become proficient at one task before moving on. There is a sequence in training. Don't try to introduce more advanced skills until you have a solid foundation. Some dogs progress more rapidly than others. The bright, energetic students will often fool you and eventually be left spinning their wheels when it's time to move on to more advanced work.

You are solely responsible for shaping your dog's future. As I mentioned before, a talented young pup will only become a mediocre old dog without an education. Don't let that happen to your special puppy.

Deep Run Farm is a retriever training, breeding and boarding facility in Goldvein, Va. Jack and his partner Phyllis Giroux, DVM, are living their lifetime dream. Visit them on the Web at DeepRunRetrievers.com.

The Rappahannock Chapter of NAVHDA

(North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association)

NAVHDA Na/UPT/UT tests November 7-9, 2009

For information about registering your pointing breed dog in these tests.



General information about NAVHDA and forms can be found at www.navhda.org or Call: Jim Channon: 804-3330309
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