

Hunting Dogs: Essential Training Equipment and Information

Producing a "finished" hunting dog, one that will perform the tasks of pointing out game or retrieving game, is not a simple matter. In some cases, it can take several hunting seasons and specialized training equipment to achieve the desired results.

It would be ludicrous to begin training a dog to perform hunting skills without first teaching it basic obedience. Your dog must be able to sit, stay, remain quite and come on demand before moving into the more complex areas of the hunt. The success of the hunt, as well as the safety of the dog and its handler, is directly correlated to the dog's performance and self control. For example, an unruly dog that barks at incoming geese will not only spoil the hunt, but will not be invited back again. Further, a dog that bolts out of a blind too quickly can jeopardize a shot and even cause a shooting accident. Control is most essential.

When the hunter is ready to begin training his dog for the hunt, there is a variety of equipment that will prove valuable. Probably the first and most essential item is a piece of 3/8-inch polypropylene rope of about 30 feet in length. The rope allows the handler to maintain control of his dog during exercises and eliminates the chance of having to chase the dog and correct him for straying.

Most dogs have a natural fear of loud noises, especially gunfire. Therefore, the trainer will have to involve a training pistol or firearm in his training program. A handgun is preferable; a shotgun is too large and difficult to handle while holding the lead line and juggling other training devices. When training the retriever, training "bumpers" or dummies are utilized to teach the dog to fetch. These aides come in various colors and sizes. White bumpers are generally used for "marking" drills where the dog is being taught to retrieve by sight and colored bumpers are used for "running blinds" where the dog is sent blindly into an area to retrieve a downed bird that fell out of sight.

The retriever should be trained to respond to the sound of a whistle. The voice of the dog's handler will not always be loud enough or distinct enough to alert the dog to give up the search and return to the handler's side. Some of the more elaborate whistles come with built-in megaphones that allow the sound to be heard more easily and direct the blaring sound away from the hunter(s). They are usually well worth the extra cost.

Some trainers will use a friend or "bird boys" who position themselves some distance from the trainer and toss the bumpers high into the air to simulate a falling bird. For those who train without assistance, bird launchers are a big help. These launchers come in single or multiple bird capacity; however, they are usually bulky and can be expensive.

Electric dog training collars are effective but controversial. These collars have a small electronic device attached that administers a remote controlled mild electric shock to the dog. The control is hand held by the trainer. These pieces of equipment allow an immediate correction when the dog fails to respond to the more conventional command. The level of shock involved has been compared to the static shock one receives from a carpet or from touching a car door handle in cold weather. Actually, the electric collar could be considered a humane alternative to the aggressive tactics or brute force used by some trainers.

One of the best ways to embark on training your hunting dog is learn from the experts. Training tips and guidelines are now available on tapes that show the student step by step training procedures. These instructional tapes should be on every novice trainer's list of essential training equipment.

When you're training your dog in the wilds you should be prepared to care for him if he is injured. Therefore, the final thing on our list of essentials is a First Aid Kit. Many of the items you'll need for your dog are also appropriate for use on humans, so the kit can be mutually beneficial to both you and your dog. Fill the kit with such items as: sterile bandages, topical solutions, tape, scissors, tweezers, antibiotic ointments such as Neosporin, ibuprofen (safe for both humans and canines) and possibly a veterinarian prescribed anti-inflammatory such as Deramaxx or Rimadyl. A well stocked First Aid Kit has prevented many a pleasant hunting trip from becoming a nightmare.

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