

We Rank The 10 Best Colleges For Hunters—p. 20

June 2009

66 Dream Trophies

Your Bucks, Bulls, Bears & More



American HUNTER

NRA Official Journal of the National Rifle Association

25 Things Every Hunter Should Know

Rifery, Wingshooting, Navigation, First-Aid ...

**10 Ways to
Improve Your
Deer Property**

**NRA Hunters' Alliance
Don't Let the Antis
Divide Us!—p. 60**

TESTED:

**Remington M700 XHR
Nikon Monarch X Binoc**





The Training Timetable

By Ron Spomer, Field Editor

Some dogs learn at almost frustratingly slow paces. Don't fret that. My last springer showed no interest in fetching anything until it was nearly a year old. Then a light switched on and young Boo became a retrieving fanatic. He suddenly became persistent when he searched falls and even began diving underwater to grab targets. My weeks of worry had been useless. I should've just drilled "hup," "stay" and "here" and saved the retrieving for when he was ready.

Ah, but we trainers learn at our own speeds, too. Fortunately, we can gain from others.

Sue Melus began training German shorthairs just five years ago, but she's perceptive enough to have discovered that not all pups mature at the same rate. "We shouldn't be forcing them into any preconceived training schedule," Melus said.

That advice is bolstered by Melus' latest pup, Elsie, and her three littermates. Melus' training partner, Gary, bred the litter and kept Itty Bitty and Zorro, and another friend got another littermate, Cruzor. "It's interesting that four littermates that are raised and trained together can be at such different stages," Melus said. "At 10 weeks we saw signs Elsie was ahead of the pack, the first to cross creeks, the most interested in the training pigeons.

"At six months we worked them on leads to start quartering and using their noses to find birds. Elsie and Cruzor accepted the lead and were steady on point from the start. Zorro fought the lead, but locked up like Elsie when he caught scent. Itty Bitty was apprehensive and she stayed by the trainer's side rather than venturing out to hunt."

Despite these differences, the pups could be trained on the same drills at the same time, but by 12 months this became difficult. "When we introduced the 'whoa post,' Elsie and Cruzor learned quickly, but Itty Bitty lacked confidence and we weren't helping it by forcing her to train at the same level. Zorro was stubborn and would sit, refusing to play the game."

While the trainers patiently worked the slower dogs an additional two weeks, Elsie and Cruzor got bored. "That's counterproductive to training progress," Melus explained. "We should have started training them separately then and let the advanced dogs move ahead."

At 15 months Elsie took first in the puppy stake and third in the derby at the

gsp Club of Colorado Walking Field Trial. Cruzor placed in competitions, too. That didn't mean the other pups were losers. "Dogs are individuals with unique traits and habits not predetermined by age," Melus explained. "Rushing a dog that isn't ready is a mistake, a product of human impatience more than the dog's abilities, intelligence or potential."

This doesn't mean one shouldn't have goals and training schedules. It means they should be flexible and determined as much by the dog as the trainer. "Gauge the dog's progress. Take a step back if needed," advised Melus. "There's nothing wrong with repetitions as long as the pup is having fun and staying interested. Let it gain confidence."

The notion reaffirms the old wisdom that each training session should start with commands the pup already knows and can perform to lavish praise. And you shouldn't force a pup to perform a new behavior if he seems clueless, flustered or spooked. How do you tell? "A negative response might be a tail that drops, ears that are lowered, a refusal, cowering or

Quick Tip Train by Example While you await a pup's maturation to its next level of training, stimulate it by letting it watch more advanced dogs at work. Pros use the chain gang, but a single dog will benefit, too, if it's staked in clear view as you train another. Let it watch the very action for which you wish to train it next. Then snap the more advanced dog on the chain and work with the new recruit.

Photo: Glenn Melus

even running away," Melus said. "Any negative response is a problem."

Go back to what he knows, keep the rewards coming and let him regain confidence. Then retry the new lesson. You never know when it will "catch." Give the pup regular opportunities, make it easy to succeed, and never force the issue or punish. Negative experiences never help a dog advance. Set him up for success, then make it stick with positive reinforcement. And do it daily if possible. "I have noticed that a dog that receives consistent training several days a week develops faster than a dog that just gets trained on weekends," said Melus. "In the end, they may both turn out to be ace Gundogs, but not at the same rate."

Plan thoroughly to maintain such a training regimen. Once you start a dog on live birds, have a supply ready for consistent work. One bird three to five times a week might be enough, but the more consistently you expose the pup to birds with minimal delays between exposures, the better he'll retain his lessons. Set a homing pigeon in the yard for the pup to find every morning and evening until he becomes bird crazy. Then change the time to noon. Then move to more challenging habitat. Substitute a quail or chukar. The pup will learn his new skill relates to bird scent, not location. Go back if the pup gets confused. Don't progress too fast, but don't interrupt the flow of progress, either. Move to the next lesson only after he's successful and confident.

"Dogs don't always want to train," Melus noted. "They'd rather set the agenda and run wild. Give them time to burn off energy, but the pup needs to know it's time to get to work eventually. Keep it fun, watch for signs of stress, confusion or fear, praise him to reinforce what he does right and never hesitate to step back to a level at which he can succeed."

That's seasoned advice from a young woman who's as precocious in her growth as a trainer as Elsie is in her advancement as a hunting dog. "I think too often people put expectations on their dogs and forget it's a long and repetitive road to reap the most benefits," Melus said. And then she gave the best advice of all: "Work a dog at its own pace. Patience pays off in the long run." **dh**

WORLD'S 1ST SELF-FEEDING CHIPPERS FOR HOMEOWNERS!



Just load a DR® RAPID-FEED™ CHIPPER, step back, and watch it chip branches up to 5½" thick!

SELF-FEEDING saves time and energy. Most branches can be dropped into the hopper and will self-feed, instead of you having to force-feed them.

HARNESS YOUR TRACTOR'S POWER! The 3-Point Hitch DR® CHIPPER transforms up to 65 HP of tractor power into raw chipping power!



NO TRACTOR?
NO PROBLEM!
Self-Powered Models
with engines up to
18 HP available!



Get a FREE DVD and Catalog
TOLL FREE **800-456-1138**
www.DRchipper.com

LIMITED-TIME OFFER
1★YEAR TRIAL

65444X © 2009

Charter Arms—The American Standard in Personal Protection

THE FULL SPECTRUM OF FEATURES WITH A BLAST OF COLOR!



Pink Lady
.38 Special +P



Lavender Lady
.38 Special +P



Undercover Lite
(Red/Stainless)
.38 Special +P



Goldfinger
.38 Special +P



CHARTER ARMS

QUALITY AMERICAN-MADE REVOLVERS

www.charterfirearms.com