**Gun Dog Puppies Need Stress**

As dog trainers continue to move towards more marketable “positive” training methods, it is important not to get caught up in all the hype. These are still canines and an entirely positive method is not likely to result in a bold and efficient gun dog. The issue is not necessarily with a particular positive training method but with the human desire to think of positive as the dog having fun and not being punished.

Our puppies spend their first year with essentially no rules. They are essentially never corrected for anything during the first year. The year is spent developing the future gun dog to become a prospect that has the ability to learn. This is entirely accomplished with a clicker and treats, except for bird introduction. While the clicker and treats would be considered “positive” training, it is actually being used to shape behaviors that we will enforce at a later date. This is a long process based on allowing the future gun dog to make choices and develop into a problem-solver. This post is not about that process, it is about the very biddable dog that “just does what you want.”

We all want a biddable dog that seems to grasp what we want right away and is “smart.” It is the kind of dog that “just does it” and before you know it, it is already doing basic tasks, quartering and retrieving. We have one of these dogs in for training. It came to us last year for about a month of hunting in Kansas at 18 months of age and returned this spring at about 22 months of age to get steadied. This is a really nice puppy but there were some red flags when we were hunting as the puppy would routinely come in from hunting and walk at heel. After some effort, he would start hunting again.

This spring, we cleaned up a bit of sloppiness, gave him formal obedience and steadied him. Throughout the process, we routinely assessed his habit of coming in to heel. It was still an issue. We had a health check done to eliminate anything and that came out fine. We tried to “let the puppy go” to be sure it was not pressure related due to the training. In the end, it was pressure related, just not in the conventional sense.

The final assessment was that the puppy was too easy for the owner. As he never tested the owner and picked things up quickly, the owner never put the puppy under any light stress that he had to learn how to deal with. Once we got to actual training that required him to make choices, he was ill-equipped to deal with the added pressure. The choice the dog made was to come in and heel as opposed to take direction. The puppy suffered from being a quick learner so he was not properly developed into a pupil that was developed with an ability to learn. This brings us full circle back to our development process.

A puppy needs to be developed with an open mind that is willing to try things and not be afraid to make mistakes. It needs to learn to choose and when it chooses wrong, it must have developed an ability to shrug it off and try something else. We all want easy and biddable gun dogs. However, this does not allow you to short-change your puppy and not properly develop it for future complex training.

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