

ANOTHER year and the quest goes on — more exciting and rewarding than ever — full of these great qualities of hopes and dreams, expectations and gratifications. Appraising the young dogs, constantly looking for those potential champions to add to our gene pool is such a great sport. Evaluating the results of test breedings of young dogs is like opening a present on Christmas Day.

Contrary to what many people believe, breeding potential champions is more sophisticated than simply matching up names on paper. It involves careful analysis of both parents from puppyhood on, learning all their qualities both good and bad, then carefully selecting matings with the compatibility to produce the desired results, constantly breeding the very best to the very best.

Sixty-two years of this kind of breeding has its rewards. This past season in the grouse woods, four Elhew dogs won Champion or Runner-Up titles eight times in twelve Championship trials, including the Grand National Grouse Championship with 68 competitors.

Congratulations to David Calcagni with Autumn Whisper and Discovery, Bill McFadden with Hustler and Bob Stewart with Flicker — such wonderful accomplishments by the handlers and such grand accolades for the dogs.

The response to dry hunting has been incredible. Thanks for the many letters endorsing this concept of enjoying the dog's performance and letting the birds fly off unharmed to be enjoyed again and again. A wild bird is too valuable to be pointed just one time.

The killing of wild birds is so terribly destructive to the population be they upland birds or waterfowl. Many years ago the killing of game may have been acceptable but today, with all wildlife in such jeopardy, the killing of game birds is simply not acceptable to many of us. It's a breach of true sportsmanship. Dry hunting is so much more satisfying and rewarding and brings such a good feeling to our hearts.

I'M still hearing stories of dog brutality. It's hard to believe that with all the knowledge available on dog behavior and development, some alleged trainers with a caveman mentality find it necessary to torture, electrocute and brutalize their dogs. For the record, I have an intense dislike for anyone who is mean to a bird dog. If you should be such a person, please do not try to buy a dog from me.

Monty Roberts' video, "A Real Horse Whisperer", gives great insight on animal behavior and response. His basic concept is just as effective on dogs. After all these years, I realize more and more how important it is to communicate with my dogs. I've had more success this past summer developing young dogs at Henderson than ever before. I attribute this to modifying my methods to include much closer verbal and physical contact with them. I now talk to them constantly at the kennel and in the field. They love to hear my voice, it's as simple as that. The words are not important, but the tone of the voice is. I try to associate my voice with something very pleasant to them.

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For instance, after a field workout when they are very thirsty, while they are drinking, I tell them how pretty they are in a soft, friendly voice. That tie-in appears to be very effective and they feel you're their very best friend. It's important to return their affection and devotion in equal measure and never tarnish that wonderful image they have of you. This is a constant concern of mine. I would be very happy to be just half as nice a person as my dogs think I am.

The physical contact is just as important. Before and after a workout, I let them jump on the bench which brings their head to my head level allowing direct eye contact which is so important to them. I put my arms around them and sort of hug them all the time softly whispering in their ears, how pretty they are in a comforting, warm voice. This really turns them on. They just sparkle with happiness with their heads held high and tails cracking. It puts them in a frame of mind of wanting to please you and makes their development so much easier and allows you to bring them to championship level without leaving a single fingerprint. Remember the dog came into the world liking man and we came liking the dog, a unique circumstance that we must never lose sight of. Good development of a young dog is establishing a bond or a unison so you both can waltz to the same tune in mind as well as in heart. By not harassing a dog, but keeping it free spirited gives it more time to think and figure things out for itself and develop its own abilities.

Dogs are far more perceptive and intelligent than we realize. This coupled with their devotion and understanding make them man's best friend. When I was young, I used to finish two or three dogs a year. Now that I'm middle-aged, this past summer I developed five nice young dogs mostly due to this revised training method.

If you disagree with any of the above, for heaven sakes, tell me. I always enjoy a good controversy, particularly if I can win. If you agree, for the benefit of our dogs and wildlife, preach your feelings from every hilltop.

FRRIENDS constantly tease me because every year I tell them we have the nicest young dogs we've ever had, but it's true and this year is no exception. We have three brag dogs this year: Fibber McGee, son of Snakefoot, Rhubarb Pie, daughter of Jefferson, and The Blacksmith, son of Discovery. There is also a litter out of Pretty Bones that's going to be hard to part with for every one looks like a potential Champion and I want to keep them all — worse than a kid in a candy store.

When quite young, I said to my father, "I want to be a dog trainer when I grow up." My father said, "Son, I don't believe you can have it both ways." It has taken sixty-two years to prove him right.

Now on the waning side of a wonderful life, one wonders where we have been and what we were or what we could have been had we not become what we have, which we did. In the meantime the great quest goes on.

Grata and I wish you all the very best for the holidays.



Bob Wehle