

The Bird as “Whoa” Peter Wax

The following silently teaches a pup to quarter sharply, stop to flush, to be steady to wing-shot-fall and to honor another’s retrieve. You will need some pigeons and a couple kids. Leave the remote collar at home or turn it off.

Your pigeons will need to be strong fliers and carded or shackled so they can fly a fair distance but still be easily recaptured by the child who releases it.

The child can be any age or sex. At five my daughter was a dandy pigeon girl and by eight my son could run this whole exercise.



Essential to have both kids and pigeons

Before beginning, your pup must be whoa trained to the point that it will stop in the field to a single command.

Your kids also need to be trained to reliably hang onto a strong pigeon, to toss the pigeon on a nonverbal signal and be able to recapture it with minimal trouble.

The training starts when each child gets his or her own pigeon. Once ready, set out for a “downwind” walk with the pup rambling out front.

At first, each time the pup makes a good quarter and is passing in right in front of you give a whoa then go and hold pup.

Once you are in control, signal a child to throw a pigeon. Not real close this first time, but where the pup can get a good look at it.

This usually results in chaos the first couple times so don’t worry if it happens to you - it just means your doing it right.



Hold your pup during the initial stages

If pup tries to break, hold firmly until it settles down than have another bird thrown a little further away.

Do this until pup will stay when a single bird is thrown in clear view without physical restraint. Remember, other than a single whoa this is a silent exercise.

Each child is responsible for his or her own pigeon and must recapture them each time before the pup is released.

You will be surprised at how quickly your pup will begin quartering very sharply and then stop each time it runs in front of a child in anticipation of a pigeon. At this point don’t throw a pigeon every time and extend the downwind walk.

After the pup is reliably stopping every time you throw a pigeon, delay the verbal whoa until after the pup sees the pigeon.

Once pup stops every time the bird is thrown, but before the whistle or voice command is given try it without any verbal commands.



When your pup starts to anticipate the pigeon by stopping extend the time between releases

If the pup stops to just the bird go to him and for the first time since beginning this exercise give pup a gentle full length stroke and a quiet “good dog”, or just one pat and a quiet “that-a-girl” than go back about your business without a whole lot of fan fare.

Once reliable to a single bird and no verbal command start throwing two pigeons spaced a few seconds apart, than three.

When you can throw three birds right at pup and pup doesn't move you are ready for the next step of shooting the third pigeon.

When moving to the shooting stage go back to the beginning and hold pup before throwing the pigeons and have them thrown a fair distance away.

As you progress, keep the pigeon shooting to a minimum and never shoot the first pigeon.

Expecting only the third pigeon to be shot teaches pup to be steady through shot.



Eventually add multiple thrown birds

Shoot just enough to keep pup intense. If pup is force broke give an occasional retrieve, but most of the time and especially if the whoa wasn't crisp or pup took a step let the kids retrieve their own birds, dead or alive. This teaches steadiness through fall and honoring.

When your pup is perfect at this game, three days in a row in three different fields you are ready to move to a remote launcher.

The launchers are placed downwind and the exercise is run the same with the kids taking turns retrieving.

Each time the pup is quartering by the launcher but before he can smell it whoa pup go and hold him and then release the pigeon.

Progress with the launcher just as you did with the thrown pigeons. This teaches pup that the pigeon means whoa.

At each major step keep your pride in check. For this exercise, that means backing off, holding pup, and using both a visual and vocal whoa command.

Lastly, keep it fun. Your kids and your pup will be glad you did.