

## **Guns & Water**

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This discussion is not a substitute for a good training book, help from an experienced trainer, joining your local NAVHDA club, or seeking out a professional trainer. It is instead a short essay on a few things related to guns and water that have already been started in our kennel and need to be continued.

A french brittany should be trained to stand steady for the shot and fall and retrieve both in water and on land. A pup that not just tolerates but actually enjoys the sound of the gun and feel of the water makes training for the hunt so much more rewarding.

### **Guns**

While we have never bred a gun-shy pup we have heard some horror stories from other breeders about pups that have been nearly ruined by careless introduction to gunfire.

Remember this: Every fault your dog will ever have has been made by you. Additionally, nearly every fault you make can be over come by a professional, but one of the most difficult is gun-shyness.

If you have ever been in front of a shotgun blast it is so shockingly rude it is wonder more dogs are not gun-shy. A 12-gauge shotgun fired in just your general direction at 10 yards has a force that can be felt clear though as well as being deafeningly loud.

So for you, your pup, and the family, please purchase a good gun dog training book and follow the gun introduction incrementally and carefully.

If you have your pup from us, by 8-weeks he or she has already been introduced to a 22 rim-fire at a distance of 50 yards as well as many other noises. However, just about any pup no matter how bold can be made gun shy with careless use of the shotgun. It is imperative that you respect your puppy enough to introduce the gun incrementally.

If done right, pup will look forward to the sound of a shotgun like a child does to reindeer on the roof at Christmas.

Some things that we do in preparation to hunting that you can continue are making noises like hand clapping and the banging the dog dish to call pup to dinner. Begin quietly then louder if pup ignores you. You can increase the noise level every couple days as long as you are being ignored by pup until you can clap or bang the dish loudly and pup still ignores you.

Never make noise closer then from across the room, as pup might take this as a sign of displeasure. Remember this is to condition pup to human induced noise not to desensitize him or her to your presence.

Every time your pup has gone into the field with his brood of brothers and sisters at Coteau Kennels we have brought along a 22 rim-fire rifle or pistol. Sometimes it is loaded with blanks and when the gang was engaged in chasing butterflies, feathers or birds the rifle has been fired from a distance of 50 yards or more in the opposite direction. None of our pups have ever indicated fear or alarm at the sound and most have come running to see what it was about. This has been repeated about a half dozen times before our pups are 8-weeks old.

You should continue this introduction by carrying a long arm or a stick sprayed with gun solvent when you go for a happy run. Your pup will quickly make a positive association with the smell of gun solvent or oil and the sight of a rifle or shotgun as an indication he or she is going for a run or walk. Never punish pup with a stick sprayed with gun solvent.

Every couple days while your puppy is running and intent on something good in the field fire a shot in the opposite direction of pup. Start with a 22 cal rim-fire and at least 50 yards away. Wait until pup is interested in something or is chasing a bird and fire in the opposite direction. When you fire pretend you did not hear it and keep walking. Probably from the start your pup will not even stop to notice but if it does do it few more times over the course of a couple weeks until pup recognizes it as a normal event.

Before moving to a small bore shotgun, like a 410, I suggest finding a field full of birds (larks will do). When pup is intensely chasing a lark fire a shot in the opposite direction from puppy from a distance of 50 yards or more. Again ignore the shot.

Once the bird-bang combination is a normal event, throw a pigeon or quail where pup can see it and give chase and when pup is in full-chase shoot in the opposite direction. If pup catches the bird he/she might fetch it or just maul the bird, but whatever he does with the bird you should remain upbeat and never scold pup in the presence of birds.

By the time you do this two or three times pup will have figured out that you and the gun are the bird makers. You and the gun are now super powerful magic - a great lesson for pup to learn.

Some short notes on guns and birds: (1) Buy a book, join a local dog club, or make friends with a professional (2) Never shoot directly over your puppy, always shoot away from puppy and only if pup is running and interested in something else, and (3) never react negatively towards pup in the presence of birds even if pup catches it, runs off with it, kills it, tears it to pieces, eats some and buries the rest. This embarrasses only you as these are all natural behaviors for a pup - remember do not make a fault.

## **Water**

If warm enough our puppies have had water introduction before leaving the safety of the pack. From spring to fall we maintain a toddler's type wading pool in the backyard filled with about 6-inches of water that everyone has free access to. By the time a pup is 6-weeks old he can jump into this and wade around or get a drink. The pups have their

parents to act as guides in the backyard and while not all puppies take to it immediately by the time they are 7-weeks on hot days it is the preferred hangout for pups and adults alike.

We do not usually have the puppies long enough to do anymore water introduction then the wadding pool, but hopefully the start should make your job a little easier.

I will not pretend to be an expert on water introduction as I have never had a water shy dog and usually a wing on a fishing pole or a live pigeon with the wing feathers pulled from one side has been more than enough to get any reluctant puppy swimming. Because of that I cannot stress strongly enough to acquire a good dog training book, make an experienced friend, or join your local NAVHDA club.

While we have never produced a water-shy pup I know from experience that you can turn a pup against water with a thoughtless and aggressive introduction. I also know from dealing with one of these dogs that there is no way to force a dog to enter the water however you can overcome water-shyness with a delicate and incremental training process. Since this is difficult, tedious and frustrating it is best to do everything in your power to prevent water shyness.

For water introduction we look for a mud puddle shallower than puppy and a pond deep enough to float puppy. Both should have a gradual slope and a firm bottom. The slope is for puppy and the firm bottom is for you.

After the weather has warmed up enough to make all mud puddles warm take pup for a run and when good and hot you walk into a mud puddle and pup will most likely follow you right in. I usually have my kids do this but lacking in kids an old pair of sneakers is recommended. This is your job. Pup will go where you go.

Gauge pups reaction. If there is any hesitation play around in the mud puddle throwing a bird wing or swinging it on a fishing pole. Do this until pup shows no concern for the mud puddle. A word of caution is to never splash puppy. Splashing is considered very bad form to all puppies and might turn him off from playing with you in the water.

Once pup looks forward to cooling and playing in the mud puddle do the same with a pond deep enough to float puppy. A gradual slope is needed for if puppy falls in he can get startled. Do not panic if it happens by accident. Instead act like it was an everyday event. No puppy ever drowned a couple feet from shore.

Once you have located a suitable pond and the summer has been long enough to make the water warm take puppy for a run and when he or she is good and heated up walk right into the pond. Do not be surprised if puppy does not follow you beyond ankle deep. Give a little encouragement, but do not press if puppy does not come in just yet. Instead be happy and move along, but each day return to the water and walk right in.

If pup refuses to join you after a couple runs try a wing on fishing pole. To do this begin by keeping the wing over just the shallowest waters so pup can run after it and quit without ever having pup floating. Keep doing this over the course of a number of days or weeks gradually increasing the depth that pup must run. The first time that pup floats drop the rod tip and let him or her catch the wing.

If pup is a strong retriever you can do this same type of incremental water introduction by throwing a wing into water just a hair deeper each time until puppy floats. If a wing isn't enough enticement use a live pigeon or quail. Once puppy floats you still have to be careful to introduce greater and greater distances very gradually. An 8 month old pup that will retrieve happily 20 feet out into a pond deeper than his feet can be made into a very fine water dog by the time he is 2-years old.

I know a German shorthaired pointer trainer with three generations of versatile champions that when he has a stubborn pup he gently carries it into water just deep enough to float it and let the pup swim back. He fusses and purrs over the success just a little as swimming is as natural to a pup as walking or running. This same trainer likes to swim his pups with other more advanced pups as this gives the pup confidence and stirs their competitive nature.

## **Conclusion**

As in everything with your puppy, it is easier to prevent problems than cure them. Do not be in a hurry to accomplish any one thing. If something in your training is not working right now, put it aside, go around it a while, nibble at the edges, come back to it gradually. If you just cannot figure it out, join your local NAVHDA club or any dog club as the rules of training are the same for all trials, tests – remember nearly every fault your dog will ever have will be made by you.

If I can give you one more piece of advice it is to enjoy your puppy. Be happy and positive with your pup no matter the day and you will all be glad you did. Remember your pup is only a puppy once and there is no greater gift than watching a puppy develop into a gundog - enjoy it.