**"DEVELOPMENT OF THE RETRIEVER PUPPY FOR HUNTING"**

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We are very much in control of developing our puppy's attitudes " his attitude and self-confidence are either built-up or destroyed by the "associations" he makes. If coming to you is ALWAYS associated with reward, he will soon absolutely love "coming when called" and will stop whatever he is doing to race over to see what you want.

If retrieving is fun, he will become a driven retriever. As well, if enough of a negative occurs while puppy is doing something, he will lose desire and eventually find ways to avoid that activity. I remember a dog I was training in the field years ago, a German Shorthaired Pointer male, who had had such a horrible association with retrieving birds that he would actually walk right past planted pheasants. He seemed happy to be out in the field yet gave no indication what-so-ever that birds were there.

Once he had some real fun retrieving live pigeons, he became a solid pointer because now he associated finding birds with fun and excitement. Dog psychologists have proven that the first four months are the most important in a dog's life. From the earliest opportunity, positive bonding must take place. The puppy should see you as "the one who feeds him, plays with him and teaches him. I believe hand feeding, touching and rubbing, and being held are important to the small puppy.

These communicate to puppy that you are strong, yet gentle and that you are in control. You are the head of his new family and you are his caregiver. He develops the desire to please you. Serious training should not begin until about six months of age, as too much structure too early can inhibit desire. The young puppy can learn that very basic commands from you *are* very rewarding though. A handful of puppy kibble or pieces of hot dog in your pocket is perfect to have when spending time with your puppy. Remember that food reinforcement is most effective if the dog is hungry, so plan your teaching time for puppy before meals are given. Two puppy exercises that are easy to establish, using words and the whistle, are

**"Puppy-Come" and "Sit"**

The very young puppy has a natural desire to be near people. With two people a few feet apart, sitting on the floor at puppy level, one holds the puppy with both hands between his legs and facing the other person. The opposing person pats the floor or ground with his hands, claps and calls, "Puppy’s name, COME!" Puppy is instantly rewarded as he comes with lots of petting and praise, and with happy tones of voice before being turned around facing the other way to repeat this very inviting exercise.

Repeat only three or four times and quit WHEN the puppy is really excited. The primary rule to develop drive on action exercises is knowing when to quit. Build the puppy's enthusiasm in the exercise to where he is really excited and then, quit. The next time he hears "come", he will remember how exciting it was to do it before. Never "teach" something to a puppy so many times that he become bored and looses interest. Extend the distance between handlers gradually and practice inside and outside; first without any distractions and then with mild distractions present. For the puppy sit exercise, using bits of hot dog or kibble makes "Sit"™ fun.

With a piece of hot dog in your fingertips, hold it near enough to his nose to get his attention but don't let him get it. As he looks up at it and sniffs, trying to reach for it, use the food to bring his nose slightly up and tip him back into a sitting position. INSTANTLY, give him the treat and say clearly, "Sit". Add even more positive association with lots of praise from your happy voice tone, saying, "Good sit!" When you know he understands the meaning of the word, give the command to sit and the food immediately AFTER he sits on his own.

Whistle training is so easy for a puppy to associate with simple commands like "come" and "sit", similar to small children learning another language. They can associate simply without thinking too much about what they are actually doing. The training whistle is so much more effective than the human voice or whistle, it is perfect to begin now for field work later. Get yourself a standard hunter's whistle or a good quality referee whistle. NEVER LET CHILDREN USE OR PLAY WITH IT as it is extremely easy to confuse the puppy.

The whistle is NOT a toy and ideally one adult should be responsible for the whistle training. Put the whistle around your neck every time you plan to spend time with your puppy. An easy first conditioning to the whistle is to blow short "tweat-tweat-tweats" as you he follows you carrying his meal dish to your feeding area. Introduce the same whistle tweets (not a blast), as you play the "come" exercise. Experiment once-in-a-while by blowing the whistle teats (meaning "come"), WHEN he is slightly distracted looking at something else. When he comes, give lots of praise with a happy tone of voice and perhaps even a treat. Put your hand on him and rub and pet him all over.

When you have the chance to be outside, run a few steps away from him as you whistle several "teats" and call "come", then, quickly squat down to his level for reward. Begin teaching him that your command to "Sit" is followed *by one short blast* from the whistle, perfect to use immediately before you put his meal bowl down. Retrieving for you should be done with pure enthusiasm! The exercise "Get it!", is the most exciting action exercise of all for your puppy. I use a sock stuffed inside another with a knot tied in the end. This little "bumper" is easy for him to hold and carry and perfect to rubber band feathers onto. It should not be so large that he trips over it constantly as he brings it back though. The socks will hold the scent of your hands and is easy to apply a few drops of liquid bird scent to also.

White socks are the easiest to see. Really get his attention by dragging the sock dummy around on the ground in front of the puppy until he is "tracking it". Then, give it a short toss straightforward and directly away from him so he sees "the fall". AS he picks it up, pat your hands on the ground in front of you calling, “Name, come!" (and, happy short teats on the whistle).As he gets in to you with "his prize", do NOT snatch it away from him but instead, help him hold it with one hand under his chin, saying, “Hold, hold", while petting him with the other hand. After a few seconds, clearly tell him, “Give" and gently press his mouth open by squeezing with your fingertips.

Immediately, get his attention again by dragging the dummy until he's chasing after it, and repeat. Remember, repeat only two or three times until he is truly excited and then, quit. If he misses your toss, just pick it up and start again, this time perhaps a bit shorter. YOU must make sure he sees the toss and NEVER use the word "NO". Do not let him play with his retrieve or run away with it. Bring him back to you through invitation. This has to be wonderful, thrilling and rewarding. Prevent faults rather than needing to cure them later. Puppies want to please and love to learn. You are very much in control of developing your puppy's attitude and his confidence. Shape your puppy and develop him into WHAT you want him to be.