



It's not too late to make sure your gundogs are prepared for the shooting season

READY, STEADY, WORK!

Lez Graham adds new commands and exercises as she continues her advice on how to ensure both you and your gundog are ready for the partridge season

So the partridge season is upon us and the cycle has started again. Have you spent the last month or so increasing the distance your dog walks to get fit? And what about going across rough ground and getting your dogs' noses used to the smell of blood? If you haven't, it's not too late; go back to last month's *Sporting Gun* and start putting in place the suggestions given to get your dog ready.

Picking up (no pun intended) where we left off last month... The terrain that you work in will not only have great bearing on how you prepare fitness-wise for the shooting season, but also on the type of training you'll be doing to hone your and your dog's skills - so if you work in the forest, go and train in the forest; if it's hilly, go and find a hill to work your dog.

When I'm preparing a dog for the season, regardless of whether it's

for picking-up or beating, the exercises that I do tend to be same. For both disciplines we're looking for the dog to be very steady walking close in a line, steady when watching game being shot, and to be keen hunters and retrievers. Both must be working on the whistle and both must have a "go hunt" command.

To back all of these things up in the training environment I tend to work



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with small dummies tucked away in the undergrowth, either in the forest ferns or buried at the bottom of tufts of grass. The dummies that I prefer for these exercises are the puppy pheasant dummies from www.hilost.co.uk; tucking them in a tuft is perfect for replicating a partridge that has pulled itself in really tight to avoid the dogs. Laying a few out as blinds, then bringing your dog out to do a couple of marked retrieves before sweeping up the field is great for getting your picking-up dog hunting.

It's at this point in my dog's education that I start to introduce a new command: "work" followed by the dog's name. We spend such a long time training our dogs to go there and back with a retrieve that we forget to give the picking-up dogs a command to sweep the field, which is one of my roles at the end of the drive. If you're unfamiliar with the term, it is quite



Lez uses the "work" command to get her dogs to sweep up

literally working your dog up and down an area (be it field or forest) picking up any missed birds, this is also known as sweeping up or hoovering.

If you're taking on this role with either your picking-up dog or beating dog, it's only fair that you give them a new word. If you're constantly saying "get on," your dog will quickly switch off to the "get on" command as it will mean different things at different times, which will cause confusion. The more confusion you cause, the more likely it is that your dog will ignore you and do his own thing.

Sitting to the shot

I tend not to train a dog to sit to the shot, rather I work with a tight stop



Pip your whistle and raise your hand for "sit", before throwing the reward

whistle. I worked with a couple of dogs, quite early on, that got confused when working in a beating line away from the guns, and froze every time a gun went off. They got so confused and stressed that they wouldn't leave their owner's side for fear of getting it wrong.

There are many ways to tighten up your stop whistle throughout the season, and this is something I train more than anything else at this time of year. You can either do it with biscuits (like Shapes), toys or balls. Decide which hand you're going to stop your dog with and make sure that's the hand that has the ball/toy/food in it. Pip your whistle and raise your hand for "sit" and the instant your dog sits, throw the reward while the hand is still in the stop position.

You'll only have to do this a couple of times before your dog realises that the reward comes from the hand giving the signal, and this will keep your dog focussed on you and your hand rather than putting his head down for a sniff. It won't take long before he realises that the quicker he complies, the quicker the reward will be forthcoming. Once you've got that snappy sit on the whistle, you can start making him wait for his



Using a toy is a good way to tighten up your stop whistle

from us, either getting too far ahead or because they have picked up a scent. When this is the case it's always easier to redirect the predatory aggression, which is what's involved in a chase/hunt, rather than stop it dead, hence using a dummy. Not only does it work with the dog's basic instinct of "what's in it for me?", but the movement of throwing the dummy is normally too exciting to ignore.

I really like using small dummies for this exercise as I can tuck them in a pocket without the dog seeing them. They need to be small enough to hide but big enough so that you can find them. I've been using mini-rabbit dummies lately with great effect. **563**

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Got a question for Lez?
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reward. The main thing is that he's now listening for the whistle, as he knows there's something in it for him, which is the main motivator for any dog.

The recall whistle is another command that we need firmly in place for the shooting season. Not having a good recall on the shooting field is asking for trouble, and an invite to "close the gate on the way out".

A great (and quick) way to sharpen up your recall whistle and have your dog being tuned into you while on a walk is, when your dog is a little way ahead,

to peep your whistle. As your dog turns to face you,

you throw a dummy

in the opposite direction with a "get on", then it's into whatever routine you have when your dog is doing a retrieve.

Many people train a recall with their dogs facing them. However, most of the time we call our dogs they're heading away

from us, either getting too far ahead or

because they have picked up a scent.

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