



Hide and seek

Emrys's understanding of simple (and not so simple) retrieves has been well developed, so Lez Graham starts to work on the hunting drive that is crucial for retrieve work in the field

Do you know how some months you feel as if you haven't done that much training, but your dog has progressed massively? Well, that's the kind of month we've had... and it's been great.

Moving on from the simple split retrieve that we covered last month, I started to even out the distance when throwing the dummies so that it was more of a V formation rather than an L, and started to send him for the first dummy down.

My husband then threw some split retrieves for us so that we could develop Emrys' eye for marking at distance whilst maintaining his steadiness for thrown items while he was by my side.

Leaving Emrys in a Sit/Stay, I'd also walk out to throw the dummies, changing the V into more of a Y formation – that way, not only am I working on his steadiness to thrown items but also varying

the distances that I throw for him; the last thing I want is for Emrys to always expect a dummy at 30 feet, which is my average throwing distance.

Find it!

As well as developing Emrys's eye on the retrieve, I also need him to be able to put his nose down and hunt on command. I love training this exercise as it's such good fun and it really gets the dog motivated to drop his nose on command, regardless of where he is or what terrain he's on.

I always train 'Find it' using half a digestive biscuit as they're easy to crumble, smell amazing and appeal to the dog's sweet tooth. To start off, I leave my dog in a Sit/Stay and walk out a couple of paces before crumbling a bit of biscuit. I then move around creating two or three piles of biscuit crumbs to hunt. Calling Emrys over to the crumbs, I 'fluff' the grass while saying "find it," encouraging him to snuffle around. I then bring him across to the next pile before he's quite finished so that I can toggle him back and forwards between the piles which helps to keep the excitement levels high. It's so great as you can hear them snuffling and sniffing as we pair the action of hunting with the words.

When I was happy that Emrys knew what 'Find it' meant, I took him up into the white grass and pretended to put a ball on a rope down, drawing

'Leaving Emrys in a Stay, I sometimes walk out to throw a dummy – I don't want him to expect it to always be at my average throwing distance'



Handsome Emrys!

PICTURES: LEZ GRAHAM

LEZ'S TOP TIP

When you're doing any kind of Stay training, don't always go straight back to your dog. Instead, walk around them or walk past them, then stop and take a moment to rearrange your equipment or catch up with your phone messages before returning to their side. By moving around during your Stay training, you're not only increasing the duration of the exercise, but you're also including a bit of distraction training too.

ABOUT LEZ GRAHAM

Lez Graham is author of The Pet Gundog series and a canine behaviourist and gundog trainer. Focused on training the next generation, she runs the Accredited Pet Gundog Instructor programme which is now in its 6th year.

Contact her via lez@thepetgundog.co.uk or visit www.thepetgundog.co.uk

him into the area to hunt and use his nose while swapping hands with the ball behind my back, before dropping it when he wasn't looking and allowing him to find it for me.

Assessment time

As part of upping the ante this month, we passed our Beginner Pet Gundog Certificate. Although I wrote the assessment over 10 years ago, with a few tweaks along the way, I felt quite nervous doing it as not only is the assessment a mark in the sand as to how we're doing with our training, but I was being videoed and remotely assessed by an Accredited Pet Gundog Instructor, so the pressure was on. Still, I'd put the time and effort into the training and was delighted to have achieved a distinction.

Good boy, Emrys. ■

Lez encourages Emrys to find biscuit crumbs in the grass



Pretending to put a ball down, I drew Emrys into the area to hunt before dropping it and allowing him to find it for me



When training a Stay, don't always return straight to your dog's side



Missed the start of Emrys's diary? Head to magsdirect.co.uk for previous issues of Sporting Shooter.