



Training goals

Lez Graham is under strict orders from the doctors to take it easy, so it's down to the playing fields with the dogs for some training using fallen trees and football goals!

This month has been more about me than Emrys. The cast came off, leaving my hand incredibly vulnerable, and I was given dire warnings by the hand surgeon not to use my thumb or put any kind of pressure on the tip, and the fear of 'off roading' with the boys and taking a fall was huge.

Dummy work

As such, pretty much all of my training stopped at the beginning of the month, and instead I concentrated on just getting out and about with the boys. Initially walking across the well-mown field around the corner, and sticking to well-maintained paths, I focused on walking to heel and whistle recall to heel, calling each dog in turn. Anything to

keep them focused on me and using their mind.

When I started taking out the dummy bag, it was met with great excitement, which was wonderful. I started back with one of my favourite training exercises, which is to put a dummy down by one of the goalposts and heel Emrys down to the other goal. When halfway down, I throw a dummy out to the left and keep walking. Once I'm at the other goal, I about-turn and send him up the field for the long memory. Then, when he returns, I position myself so that I can sit him in front, take a step back and cast him to the right with a 'Get Out'.

I like to start with a longish retrieve with Emrys as it helps him run off the excitement and adrenaline rush of the first retrieve and helps to settle him quicker. Setting up the dummies this way means that I've got lots of options of how to have them retrieved.

An alternative to the above exercise is to Whistle Sit my dog halfway and leave him sitting, and then when I get to the other goalpost, I can whistle him in before putting him to heel and sending him for either of the dummies.

Or I can Whistle Sit him halfway and when I get to the other goalpost send him for a Get Out for the dummy on the right.

Or I can Whistle Sit him halfway and when I get to the other goalpost send him back for the dummy at the other end of the field.

Or I can send him from my side for one dummy, stop him halfway and redirect him on to the other dummy.

All these options make this a really simple set-up of two dummies with lots of potential!

Into the woods

Once I got sign off for fully using my hand, I headed up to the woods around the little loch to start retrieving across natural barriers. It's great to do things like this with young dogs as it helps build their confidence no end, and because dogs see better in the dark and in shadows, sending them from the dark into the light can be a real challenge, whereas sending the from the light into the dark is exciting and can really fire up their predatory response.

Quite a few of the smaller trees came down in the storms earlier in the year so I had him retrieving over them. I'm always really cautious jumping youngsters and wait until their growth plates are closed, in order to try and prevent any injuries to the long bones. In Labradors it's around

LEZ'S TOP TIP

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Dogs see better on darker, shadowed ground, so working in woods with dappled light is a good idea when advancing their retrieve training



PICTURES: LEZ GRAHAM



Lez likes to use walks around the village or loch to instil excellent steadiness – a crucial skill for any working dog

ABOUT LEZ GRAHAM

Lez Graham is author of The Pet Gundog series and is a canine behaviourist and gundog trainer. Training gundog trainers via the Accredited Pet Gundog Instructor programme, which is now in its sixth year, Lez also supports and mentors owners in The Pet Gundog Club.

The Pet Gundog series is available via amazon.co.uk for £19.99

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the 15-month mark, so I'm enjoying starting to incorporate natural jumps in our retrieving.

Steadiness training

I tend to do most of my steadiness training on dog walks, whether that's using the ducks being fed at the little loch around the corner or walking past the village cats on a loose lead, as well as pheasants going up, and an occasional deer taking off in front of us.

One morning this month, we pootled round to the field, and I let Emrys off to toilet as normal. As I turned onto the main field I couldn't believe it – there must have been easily nine or 10 rabbits enjoying the early sun. Quick as you like, it was a case of popping my whistle straight in and getting ready to react.

Emrys came bouncing over as usual and then froze. Bunnies! He was absolutely transfixed and was exerting so much self-control he was trembling. A pip on the whistle, nothing... however as soon as I started moving towards him, he sat, which made me feel as if all the steadiness training has paid off. Good boy, happy owner. **55**

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



Lez has been using shadows to teach novice dog Emrys how to confidently cross natural barriers

‘Once I got sign off for fully using my hand, I headed up to the woods to start retrieving across natural barriers’



Once your young dog's growth plates have closed, you can start to incorporate jumping natural obstacles into your training