

# ALLOWING YOUR DOG TO WORK

by Nelson Whiteman

"Just turn the dog loose, let him do his job and don't try to tell him how!" Those words of advice were given to me nearly 30 years ago by an experienced field trialer and friend as I approached the breakaway point at my first AKC field trial. A nervous novice, I had asked for any last-minute advice my friend could give. Over the years I learned to heed his words, but in the beginning it wasn't easy.

Most inexperienced handlers want to keep their dog too close to be of any practical use. The hunter who wants the birds pointed right in front of him might be better off flushing them himself, without a dog. Pointing dogs are meant to move out in search of game. Chapter 4, Section 1, of the Regulations For AKC Hunting Tests for Pointing Breeds states, "A Junior hunting dog must show a keen desire to hunt, be bold and independent, have a fast, yet attractive manner of hunting, and demonstrate not only intelligence in seeking objectives, but also the ability to find game." Pick out the descriptive words in that statement! Look at them: desire, bold, independent, fast. The dog that is bold, independent, fast and shows a lot of hunting desire is probably not going to be very close to the handler. Therein lies a problem.

## ANXIETY ATTACKS

The dog that moves out, stretches to an objective, shows independence and/or ranges well out causes a good deal of anxiety to many inexperienced handlers. Novices get nervous when their dog ranges "too far" or is out of sight for more than a few seconds and get frustrated when they can't keep the dog right in front of them. Then they resort to "hacking" the dog by constantly calling or whistling in an effort to get the dog to hunt closer. Constant hacking, or over-handling, is undoubtedly the most common error in pointing breed field events.

"Just turn the dog loose, let him do his job and don't try to tell him how!" I admit it isn't easy at first. During an event very early in my field trial career, my dog had excellent work in the back course but for some reason (which I don't remember) was eliminated from contention. At the end of the stake, the judges asked if I would run him with the bye dog. When I got to the breakaway line, one of them said, "Now, I'm going to tell you how to handle that dog. First take that whistle and put it in your pocket, and after the breakaway, I don't want to hear a word from you while he's running."

## SELF SABOTAGE

After judging field trials and hunting tests for more than 25 years, I think a judge's greatest frustration comes when a handler calls a dog off an objective. Good judges evaluate the course, and there are certain objectives on every course that judges want every dog to hunt. Good dogs will go to these points unless their handler calls them off.

Some novice handlers may fear losing their dog when it's out of sight for a little while. Others believe that if their dog ranges a little bit, it will become uncontrollable. Some don't seem to understand that tree lines and hedge rows are objectives that should be hunted to the end, or until the dog goes on point.

Good handlers let their dog hunt objectives to completion and never call their dog off an objective. There is no reason to fear losing your dog. Usually he knows where you are even if you can't see him. Besides, he doesn't want to get lost any more than you want to lose him. Avoid over-handling at your next hunting test by remembering the best advice I ever got:

"Just turn the dog loose, let him do his job and don't try to tell him how!"

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