**Overview of the West/Gibbons/Lindley**

**"Silent" pointing dog training method.**

**by Jere Murray**

Ideally, the dog is first allowed to explore wild bird habitat and interact with wild birds until it has begun to at least flash point birds. The dog is also introduced to gunfire at this time.

Then the dog is trained, in the field, on a check cord 3/8 to 1/2" diameter, 20' long (maximum) made of braided nylon and blunt prong collar to stand on the input of a couple of light upward pulling "taps" with the check cord (CC). The dog is released from a "stand" with a hand tap on the head or shoulder, which may or not be combined with a verbal "OK" or some other release. As training progresses, the dog will be required to remain standing when the handler walks around the dog and then when the handler drops the lead and walks around in front of the dog feigning flushing of birds by kicking cover. A bird downwind of, and undetected by, the dog may also be flushed. Here, also, the dog is taught to come when called, recall, on a verbal command.

For early bird work wild caught pigeons are initially used. The birds are not dizzied in any way but their ability to fly is hampered by attaching a piece of cardboard, ~ 8 inches square, to one leg by a string (a loop of knitting yarn ~ 10" long). Otherwise, being pigeons, they would fly away, perhaps to where they were caught. The birds are allowed to fly into a field containing no trees on which they will try and land and enough short cover that they will be sometimes hidden, sometimes visible. Low bushes are OK, so long as the birds do not attempt to land in them. Several birds, two or three, are released for each training session.

After ten or so minutes, the dog and handler go for a walk in the bird field. The dog is on lead and is allowed to generally lead the way but the handler does influence the actual route. To an extent the dog learns to be influenced by the handler's movements here. This carries over to influence handling with the dog off lead in some dogs. Recall training is continued as is standing during this walk. The location of the bird is usually known to the handler - especially in early work, but not necessarily in later work. The wind direction is noted carefully as well as the presence of possible sight obscuring cover in the bird's vicinity.

The dog may be guided to pass either upwind (if this can be accomplished without dog locating bird by sight) or downwind of the bird.

If it passes upwind, the bird will flush on its’ own or be flushed by the handler. In this case the dog will be given the CC taps commanding stand. Over time, the flush becomes a stimulus that is layered onto the CC command and becomes a "command" to stand - achieving what we call "stop to flush." Similarly a helper may fire a gun with similar layering of the report resulting in stop to gun. Or another handler may be working a dog that either is stopped to stand in response to some one of these stimuli or is actually on point. When the dog we're talking about sees this standing or pointing dog it will be given the CC taps commanding stand. In this way a standing or pointing dog also becomes a stimulus that the dog responds to by standing. None of the "standings" are "points."

If the dog passes downwind of the bird there is every effort made in the earliest work to arrange its path so it will not see the bird and will pass perhaps 10 - 15 feet downwind of the bird and perpendicular to the wind direction to get a good snout-full of bird scent. (Later there is less concern for this and the dog may see some of the birds - especially in the desert cover Bill Gibbons works in.) The dog is not physically constrained in any way as this happens and no words are spoken (as none have been except for the possible verbal releases from standing). The dog will probably choose one of two options at this juncture. It will point the bird (as it has been pointing wild birds during its initial work mentioned above); or it will rush the bird and try and catch it resulting in a bird flush and attempted dog chase.

If the dog points the bird, the handler will signal a helper to move toward the bird (quite quickly in early stages of this work, and perhaps from the side and towards the dog from in front) to flush the bird, and, if the dog is OK with gunfire now as it should be, perhaps shoot and kill the bird is directed by the handler. Simultaneously, the handler moves to shorten the lead to a foot or less. The handler is acutely aware of any body language signs the dog is going to break point. If any are seen, the dog will be lightly constrained by tightening and releasing the CC quickly. If this fails to steady the dog and it rushes and flushes the bird we go to the procedure in the case the dog chooses to flush. A dog flushed bird is not shot for the dog. A handler-flushed bird may be shot if the dog remains steady through the flush, perhaps even if not - early in the process. If a bird is shot, the dog will, sometimes but not necessarily every time, be sent for a retrieve with another verbal - "fetch." If so, the dog will be given a verbal command to release the delivered bird. If no bird is shot, the dog will be released from stand (it will probably have broken point when the bird flushed) and led away in a direction opposite the flight path of the bird to work another bird.

If the dog chooses to rush the bird and flush/chase ("take the bird out") it is allowed to do that with little or no constraint until the bird is actually in the air. I say "little or no constraint" because we try real hard to let the dog flush the bird unhampered but, at the same time, try real hard to ensure the dog does not catch the bird. Though these birds are freshly caught wild birds and have not been dizzied in any way, we can never be certain they won't have enough difficulty in the flush to get caught by the dog. So, as the dog rushes the bird, the CC is let slip through handler's hand providing next to no tension unless it becomes necessary to slow the dog's progress ever so slightly to allow the bird to get up and on its way. (It can be a bit tricky.) Once the bird has actually flushed, the dog is stopped by tightening the CC which is held off to one side from the direction the dog is running. There is no yanking or pulling on the CC and the handler is careful not to allow the CC to lead back directly over the dog's back. The dog comes quickly to the end of the CC, spins and the chase is thwarted. The handler moves quickly to shorten the lead and require the dog to stand in response to the flush. The dog is not allowed to dash around on the end of a long CC. After several seconds of standing the dog is lead away in a direction opposite that the bird flew in to work another bird. Everything that happens after the dog becomes aware of the bird, by scent or sight, until the bird flushes and flies away is between the dog and the bird. After some repetitions of the dog making this choice (I have seen as few as one or many more) the dog begins to choose to point the bird rather than flush and attempt a chase. Then we go to the process applicable to this choice as described above. (The point exhibited in this choice is, generally, distinct from the "stand" in intensity, posture etc. There is no mistaking it as the natural point of a pointing dog.)

The dog may be worked on all birds out, possibly several times on some, but the session is generally stopped as soon as a good solid performance for the dog's level of training is achieved.

In practice; Bill Gibbons, who was a long time student of Bill West, the originator of the process; often has a number of folks around working dogs at a given time and he has developed a variant of the process to utilize these extra people. When this is the case they will set up a sort of parade with dog/handler pairs strung out more or less behind one another in a rough line. As the "parade" moves over the training grounds, handlers stop their dog to stand, birds are flushed, guns are fired, birds fall, dogs stop in front of another to point or stand, etc. Each time one of these stimuli occurs a dog seeing or hearing it is either stopped or stops to stand depending on its stage of progress. The dog leading the parade has the bird encounter and, if a bird is killed, each dog in turn gets a retrieve after the lead dog's turn. Each dog learns all this stuff "in parallel" sort of and it really speeds the learning up according to Bill Gibbons.

As a dog progresses, it is introduced to the e-collar used at as low a level possible (just enough that the dog shows a response) to simulate the "taps" of the CC and prong collar as a cue to "stand." When the dog can be reliably stopped with the e-collar it is released to drag the CC and work pigeons as above. Then the CC may be removed. The e-collar is, generally, only used to "enforce" stop to flush. When the dog is reliably (needing few, if any, corrections) finding, pointing, etc. carded pigeons this way it is taken to new grounds where bobwhite quail or chukars are flown from a recall pen and worked on these birds. Here it may also be worked on ground covering pattern. When this work is finished it's time to go hunting with the dog. The dog should be hunting for, finding and pointing birds, stopping and standing on wild flushes, backing, steady to wing, shot and fall, and retrieving downed birds at this stage. But the possibility of relapses does still exist<G>

Throughout the process good performances are rewarded with "good dogs" and slight pats on the lower part of the side of the chest away from the handler. The dog's body language is constantly observed and assessed for any signs of stress. If any are detected the situation is reviewed to attempt to understand and eliminate the source of the stress.

This process, after the early young dog work on wild birds, generally takes three months of work in which the dog is worked two or three days a week in the pigeon fields, two per week on recall birds. Force Fetch is generally done during these three months also.

I've left out quite a few details such as actual timing of corrections, reading the dog, when to go on, or back, what problems come up and what to do about them.

This process seems to have originated with a need to deal with dogs that had been messed up by folks attempting to use other methods of developing a pointing dog. It appears to be based on the observation that a well bred pointing breed dog, left to its own devices and free to interact with lots of wild birds will, eventually, stop any efforts at flush/chase and begin pointing. And, will, as birds are shot for the dog over held points, become staunch and steady on point over time. This natural process requires a plentiful supply of wild birds, adequate grounds and, generally, a season or more of time to develop a serviceable dog. Most people do not have any of these and have to seek the services of a professional trainer if they want a serviceable bird dog. Few would be willing to pay for such services over the years required to finish the dog. Nor would they have the patience to wait that long. The West/Gibbons process attempts to simulate, as much as possible, this natural process and compress the time by adding the handler control facilitated by the CC and e-collar. The e-collar provides continuing opportunity to remotely remind the dog of its manners during its first season of actual hunting when inevitable relapses occur. Additionally, being so different from the highly verbal, control oriented methods in use by others; it is ideally suited to the dog messed up by poor application of these other methods.

There are, actually, a couple of internet forums devoted to discussion of this method where folks experienced in its use are available to tutor and coach beginners.

© Jere Murray, 2003, 2004