

Friendship, Passion, Feathers & Wind
By Bill Dillon

You've received your new puppy and you ask where do you go from here? What should you do, when should you do it, how should you do it?

The beginning steps are letting your new little friend know that he or she has arrived to a safe and friendly new place. Everything is new – smells, surroundings, voices. You must understand they left their mom and siblings and have now landed in a totally new environment. Now you're their new home and you must socialize them, give them special treatment, spend time with them, bond with them. Obedience should start right away. Let them know the rules of the house and their place in the relationship. Walks in the yard and field give them their initial exposures to the new smells in their new world. You can begin right away to throw an old sock (starting the retrieving) and then move to a sock with a wing which introduces the feel of feathers. Don't worry about style and the return of the retrieve at this point, just let them have fun. If you're going to be hunting partners the partnership starts here.

The passion of any bird dog makes or breaks the end result. You've already started this by throwing a wing and beginning the retrieve. What's next? Most everyone has access to quail or pigeons. Dizzy and plant them in very easy places for the young dog to find. Then just let the young pup find and chase the bird, getting that scent in their nose and the passion in their mind started. You'll be surprised just how excited they get. Let them go, let them chase. You're not at this point trying to train your pup, just introducing them to the excitement that the find creates. You don't want to over-do this, just a couple of times when they are three or four months old.

You must expose your young dog to birds, wind and cover. Let the young dog evolve at their own pace. From eight weeks to eight months your training consists of exposing them to variables that will become a part of his training regimen at a later date. Many things they will learn just by being exposed to them. Training is made up of style, range, consistency in hunting behavior but at the beginning stages exposure is the key towards those next steps. Just letting all of those generations of breeding kick in let your new friend know what he was bred to do. The passion of scent, the movement, the search and the find are all there, you just have to open the door for him.

Wind is as much a part of your pup's education as the birds themselves. Any age dog needs wind for scenting. They must be able to scent to find the birds, so without the wind towards their nose it is impossible to scent them. When you take your young dog up wind there's no way they'll smell them. They must be down wind.

It's not always possible when actually hunting to hunt into the wind, so the next step after you have worked the young dog always into the wind, he's figured out scent and is excited about it, is to start working to the side wind and the back wind. The first find they achieve with a side or back wind they will realize the direction of the wind is part of the equation in finding birds. This is where they learn to start using the wind. If

it's a back wind they move out front and work back into the wind. If it's a side wind they move out to the side and work back in.

We as owners and trainers can only expose our dogs to situations that will enhance the natural ability that has been bred into our dogs. Sure we teach the obedience and field commands for control, but the bird finding ability, learning to work different types of cover, relocating on running birds, pinning those birds, finding cripples that have moved are all part of the dog's natural ability and how he achieves the final result of a successful hunt.

What you put into your dog's exposure, with consistency and patience, are your part of your partnership. The passion, capabilities and achievements are theirs. Today in this world of instant satisfaction, with internet and satellite signals, the relationship between man and his dog are still one of the experiences that give us satisfaction, joy and years of wonderful memories that don't come about instantly, but they do last a lifetime.