

Manners maketh the dog

Good manners ensure a dog is a pleasure to live with, says a training book reviewed by **David Tomlinson**

Lez Graham's first book, *The Pet Gundog*, took a refreshingly different approach to gundog training. It wasn't aimed at you, the *Shooting Times* reader, but rather at the owner of a pet gundog, be it of show or working breeding, who wanted a well-trained, obedient dog. When Lez acquired her first gundog, a golden retriever, she admits that she knew little about her dog's sporting heritage, but it was through this dog that she discovered shooting, and the pleasure to be had from working her dog.

What made *The Pet Gundog* so good, and ensured its success, was the fact that it was based entirely upon Lez's own experience. Lez has a natural affinity with dogs, observing them with a sharp and perceptive eye. *The Pet Gundog* was an original, with nothing cribbed from the work of other gundog trainers. In it she reported what had worked for her, and how using the same techniques

- ▶ When sending a puppy for a retrieve, the dog must wait for the command before going
- ▼ A well-trained dog will be watching you, waiting for the next command, as Lez demonstrates here

could help you. It may have been targeted at the typical pet owner, but I know of a good few shooting people who found it helpful, too.

The Pet Gundog was followed by *The Advanced Pet Gundog*, which took the training programme one step further, and thoroughly prepared both dog and owner for their first venture into the shooting field. There's no doubt that if you follow all Lez's advice in both books, you and your dog would be welcome on any shoot. Encouraged by the success of these first two books, Lez has now produced a third, *The Pet Gundog Puppy*. As you may have guessed from its title, it should really have been the first in her trilogy, but that hardly matters. Like its predecessors, it is written and

published by Lez, and illustrated with photographs taken by fellow *Shooting Times* contributor Nick Ridley, who also designed the cover. It's an arresting picture, and does invite you to pick the book up. This book is by far the most professional of Lez's publications. The text is clearly laid out, printed on high-quality paper, and is easy to read and refer to. As with previous volumes, this book is written in Lez's chatty and informal style, which at times may irritate, but admittedly it is effective in driving the message home.

Predictably, the book starts with choosing a breed. "Look for health, temperament, care and maintenance, and looks, preferably in that order; however, be honest with yourself and, if like me, looks are important, start there." That's sensible advice, as we all work better with a dog we like the look of. Equally sensible is the emphasis on buying a healthy puppy from a reputable breeder, avoiding high-performance animals from purely field trial champion lines, and never buying two puppies from the same litter. Most of us forget what hard work



▲ Lez demonstrates one of the most important lessons — teaching her puppy Ziggy to walk to heel

a dog from jumping up by insisting from the outset that it can only be patted or stroked when it is sitting down. Discouraging a puppy from chewing by using Grannick's bitter apple spray is another trick new to me.

One overriding message shines through. With her rich mixture of advice, Lez aims to ensure that anyone who reads this book and follows its advice will end up with a dog with manners. William of Wykeham (1320-1404) was spot on when he said that "manners makyth man"; good manners also ensure that a dog is a pleasure to live with.

The Pet Gundog Puppy covers a puppy's development up to six months and beyond — the dog's teenage years. Overall, this book is an invaluable guide which should be supplied with every gundog puppy, whether or not that animal is ever going to be a working gundog. Frustratingly, there's no index, though there is a comprehensive list of contents. It would also have been nice to have had a wider variety of illustrations (all appear to be of Lez's black Labrador, Ziggy), but these are quibbles. Priced at £16.99, plus £2.20 p&p, *The Pet Gundog Puppy* is a bargain. ■

To obtain your copy of *The Pet Gundog Puppy*, *A common sense approach to puppy training* by Lez Graham, visit www.lezgraham.com, or tel 01264 850633.

The down is a must for the pet dog, while teaching the stand is one of the fundamentals

must for the pet dog, while "teaching the stand is one of the fundamentals of puppy training; in the months and years to come you will be so glad that you invested some time in training this little exercise". Why? "Well, it's great for when you're grooming, drying off after a wet walk... or for visits to the vet."

There are many gems of advice here that make sense, but which I can't recall seeing in any of my other training books. A classic example is stopping

Gundogs

By David Tomlinson



Being a "pet" owner isn't such a bad thing after all

Pet or working dog? I've always been proud of the fact that my spaniels are genuine working gundogs, rather than pets, but if I worked as often as my dogs, I would be a very poor man. Guide dogs, sniffer dogs and sheepdogs can work all year, but there's not much serious employment on offer to most gundogs outside the shooting season. Okay, there may be gundog tests to run in or training sessions to take part in, but neither can really be called work.

The word "pet" appears in the title of all three of Lez Graham's books, and while it puts off some serious gundog handlers, it's a difficult word to avoid. If Lez had called her latest book *The Companion Animal Gundog Puppy* it would hardly have the same ring about it. Much as we may dislike the word pet, it's difficult to find a substitute. I am sure that most dogs one sees out shooting are really family pets, with the exception of those belonging to gamekeepers and professional dog trainers. Their dogs go back into the kennel after the day's shooting, and don't enjoy the luxury of curling up in front of an Aga or log fire.

I may not like to call my dogs pets, but they are companion animals. They come to work with me every day and have beds in my office. And though they do have a kennel that they go into after walks, they live in the house and spend the nights in their beds in the kitchen. They have to abide by rules, such as not sitting on furniture, but they have an enviable lifestyle.

One difference between pet gundogs and true workers is that the former get taken for walks at least once a day, while the latter usually have to make do with an exercise paddock or yard. Each year, the average British dog owner clocks up more than 500 miles walking their pet, covering an average of 7,415 miles in the dog's lifetime, a report in *The Times* showed. I suspect that most owners of working (pet) gundogs do far more miles than that. I certainly do. However, according to the Kennel Club's website, "most of us could spend a great deal more time enjoying the great outdoors with our four-legged friends, which make the perfect walking companions". I enjoy walking my dogs, and find the need to take them out twice a day is good discipline. Last month, the biting wind made the dogs' walks shorter than usual, but as the days get longer, so too do the walks. Perhaps that labels me as a typical pet-dog owner, but who cares? ■

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Next week
David looks at what's on the agenda at the Kennel Club's Field Trials Liaison Council meeting

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