

Appraising your pet's potential

Lez Graham is one of the few gundog trainers whose books and DVDs are aimed squarely at those who own gundogs as pets, writes **David Tomlinson**

You've read the book, now watch the film. So many good novels are made into films that we are all accustomed to the switch from the written word to the visual image. Thus watching the two new DVDs from Lez Graham, *The Pet Gundog* and *The Advanced Pet Gundog*, seemed a totally logical progression, as both share the same titles as Lez's successful gundog training books. A further connection is the fact that Nick Ridley did the still photography for the books, and also filmed and edited the DVDs.

But while the books contain several thousand words, and are enlivened by anecdotes and stories, the DVDs are much simpler, more concise and to-the-point. There's no unnecessary waffle, for these are straightforward instructional films, explaining in clear and simple terms how you too can have a well-trained gundog.

One important point to remember is the fact that the word "pet" appears in the title. Both the books and the DVDs

are aimed at owners of *pet* gundogs. In her introduction to *The Pet Gundog* book, Lez explains that "this book is for anyone who has a gundog breed living at home with them as a pet; you may, or may not, be interested in taking him out on a shoot but want to know more about what makes your gundog tick and how to get the best from him". Lez is convinced that a trained dog is a happy dog, and I'm sure she's right.

The DVDs are not being sold as stand-alone instructional films, but are available as an optional extra for anyone buying the books. Both add an extra fiver to the book price, bringing it up from £17.79 to £22.79. However, anyone who has already bought the books but would now like to purchase the DVDs can do so.

I'm an old-fashioned sort of chap, and find I'm more inclined to learn from a book than a DVD, but there's no doubt that the DVD reinforces the lessons in the book, and I'm sure that for many people the visual instruction

Show-bred golden retriever Angus became a top-class picker-up, and is the canine star of the DVDs

will both strengthen and enhance the written word.

Clear instructions

If I had to sum up Lez's approach to gundog training in three words, they would be "simple, logical and straightforward". There's nothing complicated in her instructions, and there's no doubt that anyone who follows them through carefully will have a sound, well-trained dog that is a pleasure both to own and to live with. Unlike many professional gundog trainers, Lez does believe in using treats to get the results she wants, but as you will see from the DVDs, her use of edible rewards is hardly excessive. There's certainly no risk of any dog getting fat from her training sessions.

By aiming her books at the pet gundog owner, Lez found a vacant niche in the market, as almost every



Above: Lez is a gentle and sympathetic trainer
Left: The approach Lez takes is designed to help owners discover what their dog is capable of

other gundog training book available (and all those on my shelves) is aimed at the more serious trainer who aspires to take their dogs shooting, if not compete in tests or trials. Lez's approach is to encourage owners of pet gundogs to discover quite what their dog is capable of, and if they and their dog are persuaded to go shooting, then so much the better.

As you might expect, Lez is a gentle, sympathetic trainer, and there's nothing in these DVDs explaining how you should discipline a naughty dog. (You will have to read the books for any advice on this.) She does give her dogs lots of praise, and the words "good boy!" and "clever lad!" recur so often in the DVDs that they do become somewhat irritating. However, this is less of a problem if you only watch one chapter of the DVDs at a time, rather than sit down and watch the whole film as I did.

The leading canine star in the DVDs is Lez's golden retriever, Angus. Sadly, Angus died of bloat not long after the filming had been completed, and Lez reported to me that losing her much-loved companion was a bitter blow —

a sadness made more acute by having to check edits of the DVDs. Bloat, incidentally, is a killer I hadn't come across before. In Angus's case he was full of his usual bounce one day, and died the next. According to Lez "it's believed to be caused by strenuous exercise too soon after eating, gorging on water, or due to stress". Quite what brought on Angus's bloat is a mystery.

Angus was a show-bred golden retriever, but he proved that despite his lack of working blood he could be a top-class picker-up, not to mention a terrific demonstration dog. His success was a fine advertisement for Lez's training techniques. He may not have had the speed and style necessary for trialling, but was the sort of steady shooting dog that most gundog owners aspire to. Because of his outstanding temperament, he was used by Lez to help many people get over their fear of dogs. ■

For further information about Lez's books and DVDs, go to www.thepetgundog.co.uk. Lez also runs popular training sessions near Marlborough in Wiltshire.

Gundogs

By David Tomlinson



BLAME OWNERS FOR THEIR UNRULY DOGS

If you're only used to trained gundogs it's easy to forget what a handful untrained dogs can be. We recently had friends to stay with us; they were accompanied by their three-year-old working-bred springer bitch, a delightful dog in every way except for the fact she has only received a minimum of training. She will sit on command, but she would rather do so on the sofa than the floor, and her recall leaves much to be desired.

On the first morning of her visit I took her out with one of my spaniels for a pre-breakfast walk in our field. I made sure that my chickens were nowhere around before letting her off, and all went well until it was time to put her back on her slip lead. She didn't want to be caught, coming within a few tantalising feet of me before running off again. There was no worry about her fleeing completely, but she didn't want to be caught.

This was new behaviour, as when she had stayed with us a year ago her recall had been exemplary. I did manage to lasso her eventually, but it took a long time. When her owners appeared at breakfast, I mentioned her reluctance to come back. "Sorry, we forgot to warn you..." It transpired that almost all her walks are in her owners' fenced, six-acre field and wood, where there's no need for her to be put on a lead.

Quite why these friends decided to buy a working-bred springer remains a mystery, as I've no doubt that they would be much better off with a cairn or perhaps a Cavalier. They like having a dog, and it is well fed and exercised, but otherwise it's largely ignored. Most working-bred dogs thrive on discipline and genuinely like to work.

I feel that children and dogs have a lot in common. If they have manners, then both are a pleasure to have around. Those with no manners can be a pain — demanding, often noisy and invariably irritating. I find it quite off-putting to visit anyone with either dogs or children that fall into the latter category.

Ironically, I had given my friend and his wife a copy of *The Pet Gundog* when they first acquired their 12-week-old springer. Unlike many spaniel puppies, theirs was naturally well behaved, never destructive and quick to learn. Sadly, probably because she was such an easy puppy, *The Pet Gundog* was never read. If it had been, they would have a much nicer pet. Her current poor behaviour, therefore, can be blamed on her owners. ■

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