

The guide looks at gundogs not as pets, but as skilled predators



Sympathy notes

David Tomlinson is impressed with a follow-up guide to gundog training that emphasises canine psychology as a means to a more effectual dog

Though I like to describe my pair of English springers as genuine workers, the truth is that if I only worked as much as they do I would be a very poor man. They are only really busy in November, December and January, while their annual holiday begins on 2 February and extends to late September or even October. As much as I dislike the term "pet", it is a reasonably accurate description of my dogs and the majority of so-called working gundogs. So don't let the title of Lez Graham's latest book, *The Advanced Pet Gundog*, put you off. Subtitled *A common sense approach to gundog training*, it is exactly that. It is also concise and easy to read, as well as being attractively illustrated with Nick Ridley's excellent photographs.

This is the successor to Lez's first book, *The Pet Gundog*, which I previously reviewed here (*A novel approach*, 22 December 2010). I commented then: *The Pet Gundog is the sort of book that anyone selling a working gundog puppy into a pet home should give to the new owners when they collect their new dog. I've no doubt that pet gundogs belonging to owners sensible enough to have read this book are unlikely to need rehoming.* This new book is the natural follow-on, for Lez notes how many owners of gundog breeds, once they have given the basic gundog training,

become interested in not only what their dogs are capable of but also what they were originally bred for.

Lez began as a pet gundog owner with no interest in shooting, saying that *even the thought of picking-up a dead bird used to fill me with dread*. However, she notes in the introduction that *I've found for myself, and also the people that I train, that the more we are involved in the shooting world and go shooting, the more we want to be involved in the shooting world and go shooting. There's something very primal and satisfying about the shoot.* She now works her dogs regularly through the season and runs training classes for gundog handlers — while her master's degree in canine behaviour and psychology makes her unusually qualified to write a book like this. Thus she looks at gundogs not so much as pets but more as predators that see, hear and smell things in a totally different way from us. The skill required by the trainer is to get the dog to *ignore its instinct and not chase the bird on the ground until permission is given, to not slink off under the tree with a tasty snack in the shape of a freshly shot bird.*

Lez's approach is quite simple: it's to work with your dog sympathetically, but at the same time ensuring that you understand how it thinks, how it behaves, and how best to get it to work for you. You won't be surprised that she has no



Lez assumes your dog can already deliver simple retrieves

sympathy for harsh handling, nor that she believes in the use of food treats as training aids — something frowned upon by the majority of professional trainers. She is also writing for the gundog owner whose dogs live in the house rather than the kennel, noting that training a pet gundog who lives indoors with you is a world apart from training a kennelled gundog.

Beyond the basics

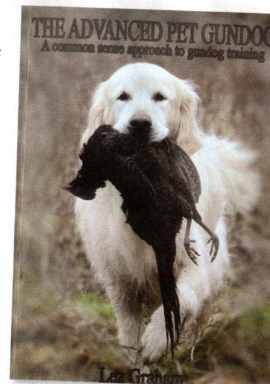
As its title implies, *The Advanced Pet Gundog* takes things on a stage from Lez's first book. She assumes that your dog will do all the basics, such as sit on the whistle, come back when recalled, stay in one spot, leave things when told to do so and deliver simple retrieves. As we all know, it's remarkable how many "trained" gundogs are deficient at several, if not all, of these basic disciplines.

A series of chapters takes you through the exercises and training sessions that will prepare your dog for its eventual debut in the shooting field. I like Lez's way of acclimatising a dog to bangs: she notes that most gun-shy gundogs weren't born that way, but became so because of handler error. Lez believes that when a young dog hears its first bang from a starting pistol, it's wise to have treats and toys to hand, as well as a more experienced dog to show that there's no reason to be afraid. She also insists that you need a dummy thrower to help you, *as you won't be firing the pistol anywhere near the dog.*

There's also sensible advice on how to persuade your dog to retrieve from water without dropping the dummy (or duck) in order to shake the moment it reaches dry land. I've always wanted a dog that shakes on command; Lez tells you how you can achieve it.

Lez may herself be a relative newcomer to shooting, but the chapter on going shooting is full of sensible advice, plus sufficient anecdotes to warn of the potential pitfalls awaiting the novice handler. She emphasises the dangers of sending a dog you are unsure of on a runner, reminding us that, by doing so, it's quite possible to wreck not only the current drive, but also the next one. However, if you follow her training advice, such disasters should be very unlikely to occur. ■

The *Advanced Pet Gundog* is available direct from Lez at £14.99 plus £2 postage. Visit www.trainedforlife.co.uk, or tel 07927 420049.



Gundogs

By David Tomlinson



Abuse from fellow handlers has no rightful place in the gundog world

This summer the Kennel Club (KC) revised its Code of Conduct, setting out its expectations for all those taking part in or attending events under its jurisdiction along with general guidelines on the use of social media. Thus the guidelines are directed as much at the show enthusiast exhibiting a mastiff in Manchester as a spaniel handler competing in a field trial in Sussex.

Though that may be the case, much of the wording includes the word "show". For example: *Abusive or aggressive behaviour towards anyone at the show — including the judge, other participants, show management or other officials — will not be tolerated under any circumstances.* I've no doubt that the words "test" or "trial" could be substituted for "show". I wasn't surprised to read that *sparring between dogs is discouraged*, while the fact that *dogs are not permitted to wear muzzles of any kind whilst being judged* definitely doesn't apply to gundogs, as muzzled gundogs don't make satisfactory retrievers.

Harassment is clearly a subject of major concern to the KC, which promises a zero-tolerance approach. It defines it as *causing alarm, distress and anxiety and fear of physical violence or other threat, offensive statements, verbal abuse and threats.* Fortunately harassment is rare, if not unknown, in the gundog world.

Harassment is a major concern for the KC, which promises a zero-tolerance approach

By far the most important additions to the revised Code are on the use of social media. The KC insists, quite rightly in my view, that *if the content of your message would not be acceptable for face-to-face conversation, over the telephone or in another medium, it will not be acceptable for a social networking site.* As a writer who is unafraid of tackling controversial subjects, it's hardly surprising that I've been attacked and insulted many times on Internet gundog forums and similar sites. The comments are typically anonymous, or written by people hiding under a pseudonym. It's something all journalists have to get used to and not get too upset about. Anyone who wants to contact me directly can do so, as my email address is printed below, but critics are rarely brave enough to do this.

On one occasion an avalanche of criticism was heaped on me simply because the instigator hadn't bothered to read properly what I'd said in the first place. However, one of the funniest comments I've seen followed an article I had written on English springer spaniel conformation. One of my detractors wrote on a gundog forum: *That bloke Tomlinson doesn't know a thing about confirmation.* It's true: I was never confirmed into the Church of England, so it's not a subject I have any expertise in! ■

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Next week David recounts the unusual story of Fish, a half-show-bred, half-working Labrador that recently won its first field trial