



MID-SEASON CLINIC

At some point every dog that works on a shooting field will unravel, curing it just depends how fast you can spot it and do something about it, says Lez Graham



It doesn't take long for the dog to realise it is a better hunter than its owner

Every dog that works on the shooting field will, at some point or other, unravel. That could be by a little or it could be by a lot, it really depends on whether we see it happening soon enough to do something about it, or if we miss the signs for one reason or another and the extent of the issue only dawns on us when we realise we're out of control.

Why, when we've spent months and months training our dogs and doing the drills does it fall apart half way through the season? Well, during training we spent all of our time teaching the dog that we're the better hunter, that he can trust our judgement as we always know where the dummies are and we always guide our dogs in to the right area. That changes on the shooting field however, as we

invariably end up sending our dogs one way and then, when they veer off for a bird, get praised for bringing it back. It doesn't take very long for our dogs to realise that they are faster, stronger and better hunters than us and providing they bring back the spoils, will get praised for "doing their own thing".



Dropping birds is one of the most common problems that starts a couple of weeks in to the season

Dropping retrieves

Dogs dropping birds at your feet or even a couple of feet in front of you is one of the more common problems that starts a couple of weeks in to the season. Because you're busy watching the field and getting on with the job in hand you tend to not notice that all of a sudden you've gone from reaching out to catch a bird as it "falls" out of your dog's mouth to picking them up off the ground and then to walking out a couple of paces to collect them from our dogs.

It happens to pretty much to everyone at some point and it really is a case of taking a moment to insist your dog delivers to hand, (not sitting, just to hand) and taking a moment before you send him out again on to the field. He'll learn that the sooner he delivers to hand



Have your dog carry a bird for a few paces in between drives

"It's his keenness to work that is making him drop the bird"

the sooner he gets back in the field; it is this keenness to work that is making him drop the bird at your feet so make it work for you rather than against you.

Depending on the type of shoot you're picking-up on, I would keep a bird back and have your dog carry it for a few paces while you're walking between drives and if possible, do a bit of training with it at the end of the drive. If you're using a bird to do a bit of training, remember to keep it off the gamecart as you don't want it going in to the food chain after being repeatedly thrown and picked up. **SG**



Insist your dog takes from your hand and take a moment before sending him out again

LOOKING AFTER YOUR DOG ON A SHOOT DAY

• Pre-shoot meal

Feed at least two hours before you're due to start. Your dog needs food to sustain his energy throughout the day, but needs it to be well on the way to digestion to prevent gastric torsion (bloat).

• Snack breaks

Make sure you take plenty of water with you and a couple of snacks for your dog (I tend to take a three-pack of Natural Instinct's beef jerky).

• Keep hydrated

Your dog will no doubt drink from rivers, streams and puddles throughout the day, but make sure he has fresh water available to him when you stop mid-morning, though not too much as you don't want a water-filled stomach sloshing around.

• First aid

Take a small first aid kit that you can keep in your pocket or bag and make sure there's a more substantial one in your car or the gamecart. As a minimum it should include saline solution, tweezers, a pad and a vet wrap bandage (the ones that stick to themselves and are tearable).

• Keep warm

Take towels and a fleecy coat for your dog. My favourite coat is an Equafleece in the style of a horse blanket rather than the t-shirt style (I've known dogs to pull their front legs in to the sleeve and get them trapped when left on their own in a

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Got a question for Lez?

Contact her by emailing sportinggun@timeinc.com



Take towels and a fleecy coat for your dog to keep warm

sleeved pull-on coat).

• Lunchtime breaks

Give him a small snack during the midday break. My lab will get a stick of beef jerky and my cocker will get half a stick. If they've been in rivers or if it's been raining heavily and is cold, I towel them off and put the fleece on to keep their muscles warm and prevent injury when we start again.

If it's a warm day, then towelling down at this point is normally enough. This is the perfect time to do a quick check for injury or to pull bits of twigs out of fur etc.

• Post-shoot checks

At the end of the day it's time to wash down, dry off, apply Aloe Vera to cuts, pull out thorns and bits of twigs and so on, then they get another bit of beef jerky (one for the lab, half for the cocker) and, depending on the weather, their fleeces back on for half-an-hour or so. Then it's home for a normal dinner and a rest!



Keep a small first aid kit in your pocket on a shoot