



Try to 'get inside your dog's head' to understand what motivates him

THE RELUCTANT RETRIEVER...

Patience, consistency, psychology – the art of teaching to retrieve is subtle, writes Lez Graham

The most common problem that people have when training their gundog is delivery to hand. It can go wrong for so many reasons: inconsistent handling, allowing the dog to drop what's in his mouth as he's padding around the house, taking the dummy out of the dog's mouth too fast and because too much pressure is put on the dog to deliver "excellence" too early in training.

Delivery to hand causes so many owners so much angst, with runners up on the list being the dog not wanting to pick up the retrieve or simply losing interest. The other issue that many handlers have is the dog messing around with the retrieve and not coming all the way back with the dummy.

This last issue, while frustrating, is more of a recall issue than a retrieving problem per se – the dog knows it doesn't have to come back, so it doesn't. If this is an issue you're experiencing with your dog, it's a case of going right back to basics and training a really good recall before reintroducing your retrieve.

If your dog is turning his head away, it may be that at some point you've pulled the dummy sideways out of his mouth

rather than taking it from the front. It's not a pleasant sensation for the dog to have a dummy dragged lengthwise from his mouth and after a couple of times he'll start turning away from you.

The faster you pull (snatch) it out of his mouth, the faster the dog will turn his head in avoidance. The solution is to be gentle with him and not to make such a big deal of

delivery to hand – give the dog a stroke to take the stress away and then quietly take the dummy.

Dogs not picking-up, losing interest or spitting out the dummy all stem from the same basic cause. A dog that is not motivated to retrieve is the typical "reluctant retriever", regardless of breed. None of these problems are insurmountable: time, patience, consistent handling and "getting inside of your dog's head" are what is needed.



Take the retrieve out slowly and gently from the front of his mouth

Using natural habits

First things first, let's take some pressure off our dogs and stop expecting a perfect sitting delivery. Focus on getting him to put the dummy in our hands and then telling him to sit. It won't take long for him to sit automatically as he gives you the dummy, if you are being consistent.

Most dogs, gundogs or not, like to bring something to you the first time they see you after a time on their own, especially in the morning. Exploit it! When you have a reluctant retriever that does this, it's time to make that trait work for you. Lift up the toys or leave a couple of chew type ones if he's a chewer, and have dummies placed around the home but out of reach.

When you come downstairs in the morning and your dog is looking for something to greet you with, give him a dummy to carry – just remember to take it back and make a fuss of him before he drops it.

When you're out and about training, go into your morning routine when your dog picks up the dummy, and take the pressure off him.

To treat or not to treat?

I never give a dog a treat from my pocket for retrieving something for me, and I never use treats for retrieving unless I'm working through a problem. Most puppies and young dogs are motivated enough by the owner. It's once they hit adolescence and the "Kevin" phase that it starts going a bit pear-shaped.

Why not from the pocket? Because a dog



Don't expect too much 'excellence' while he's in training

"Most dogs like to bring something to you in the morning. Exploit it!"

Don't give him treats from your pocket – he will drop the retrieve



is clever enough to realise that if you have a treat in your hand, they can't eat it when they have something in their mouth, so out comes the dummy.

I've worked with a number of dogs that simply haven't wanted to pick up anything – toy, dummy, ball, rabbit ball... not a thing did it for them. And then we threw a packet of treats for a dog to retrieve. She brought them back and the owner picked them up (not to hand initially) and gave her a treat from the bag.

Getting inside your gundog's head

It was then that I started using something called a "prey dummy" in training, which is like a pencil case that you fill with treats. Some dogs, however, would crunch them or pick them up by the end and give them a shake – not desirable behaviours.

It was a direct result of working with these dogs that the Retrieving Roll was created. It's a canvas wrap that can be rolled up tight and used on its own or wrapped around a toy, a ball, a dummy, a slipper – pretty much anything, including small birds. The beauty of the Retrieving Roll is that it has a little pouch which you can put a treat in. The only way for your dog to receive the treat is to



Lez Graham works full-time as a gundog trainer and behaviour practitioner and is the author of the *Pet Gundog* series of books. For details of her training days, visit www.trainedforlife.co.uk.

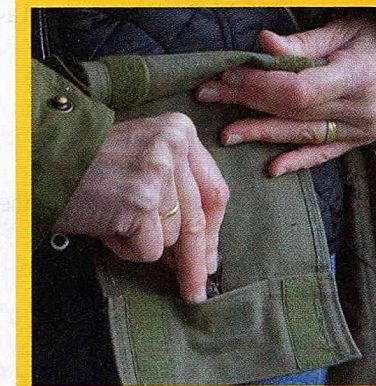
Got a question for Lez?

Contact her by emailing sportinggun@timeinc.com

bring back the retrieve, helping to make him more proficient and confident.

Because you're tapping into the dog's innate "what's in it for me?" attitude, it has a reason to return it. Once he's got the hang of bringing it back, it's a case of not giving him the treat until he puts the dummy in your hand. **SG >>**

The Lez Graham Retrieving Roll is available from www.gencon-allin1.co.uk/



NEXT MONTH:

Next time, Lez will look at transitional training