

Lez works full-time as a dog behaviourist and gundog trainer

A walk in the park?

Last month, gundog behaviourist Lez Graham explained how to introduce boundaries and be a better leader – now it's time to take these lessons outside

So we've spent the last month instilling good manners around the home by demonstrating effective leadership, taking control of doorways and feeding time, only giving our dogs attention when they're sitting, and introducing some basic boundaries by training 'go on your bed' and 'not you'. It's now time to look at how we can extend these good manners to our walks and the training field.

Walkies...

There's no such thing as 'going for a walk' to a dog. Going hunting, reinforcing territory boundaries and migrating, yes; going for a pootle because it's a nice day and the birds are singing, no.

For a wild wolf pack, hunting is a very ordered thing with each wolf having its own role. In a dog's world, it's not as ordered because, just like with captive wolves, we supply the food. However, if you watch a pack of dogs in the park or at home, there is still very much a pecking order with lower ranks deferring to the stronger, more senior dog.

It is tapping into this innate hierarchical response in our dogs that will make life much easier for us and our walks much more enjoyable.

Let's go hunting

All dogs get excited at the prospect of an excursion, however the excitement can easily give way to jumping up and screaming the place down. To help alleviate this, all walks should start from behind a door or a gate so that we can use our

'doorway manners' to get our dogs paying attention to us and establishing a good relationship prior to leaving the house.

Pop your dog's lead on indoors and insist on calm behaviour before leaving the house; if there is any kind of jumping around or whining just stand still and tell your dog to sit. If they really are 'over the top' tie them up to the banister or similar (not on a standard slip lead as if they pull against it they'll choke) and leave them for a minute or two to calm down. Taking control prior to leaving the home will really set you

up for success... and remember to stay quiet (unless you're giving your dog an instruction) as talking will only feed into the excitement, or your dog may interpret your chatter as praise.

Getting where you want to be

Never miss an opportunity to train your dog. Most of us either walk our dogs for pleasure, or walk to the 'training area' or pop our dog in the car to drive there. 'There' being the most important part of the walk – the training ground. Correct? Nope.

Although the training ground, as such, is an important part of the activity, especially as we're potentially training our dogs for the shooting field, what happens between leaving the home and arriving is just as important, more so if you have a pet gundog.

We have so many opportunities to improve our dog's behaviour, but for the most part, we miss them as we're so focused on 'the training':

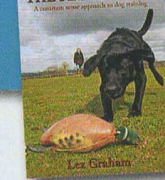
- Leaving the home (sit for attention and doorway manners)
- Leaving the garden (doorway manners)
- Walking on a loose lead (attention, focus, sit, whistle recall to heel on lead, come and sit in front)

Don't miss out on prime opportunities to train your dog before you even start your training session. The period of time before you reach the training ground – getting ready at home, during the journey and when you first arrive – is full of chances to reinforce leadership.



PICTURES: NICK RIDLEY / REBECCA GREEN (FAR RIGHT)

Once you reach the training ground, your dogs should remain steady and wait for instruction before jumping out of the car



is author of The Pet Gundog series of books and DVDs. Visit www.thepetgundog.co.uk

'It is tapping into this innate hierarchical response in our dogs that will make life much easier for us and our walks much more enjoyable'

- Picking up after your dog has toileted (sit-stay)
- Leaving the home (sit for attention and doorway manners)
- Leaving the garden (doorway manners)
- Getting in the car (sit and wait)
- Getting out of the car (steadiness training with the boot open)

By taking control of the walk, and applying a bit of leadership getting to and from the training ground, not only do we end up with a really well-mannered gundog that we can take anywhere, but we cut our 'training' time right down to dummy work.

Meeting and greeting

What do you do when you happen across another dog either at the training ground, at the park or on the way to them? Well, as this is all about leadership, if you've said 'take control of the situation' you'd be absolutely correct.

When you see a dog in the distance, regardless of whether you're in the middle of a training session or just pootling in the park, call your dog to you and pop him/her on the lead. Not only is it good canine etiquette to do so, but hopefully the other owner will take your lead and do the same with their dog, plus if you're consistent about it then your dog will look to you for instruction when you see a dog out and about. And, you get to work on recalling your dog around distractions.

Hopefully by this time you will have trained an excellent sit-stay, which you can use to your advantage should the loose dog become a nuisance; at that point, put your dog on a short lead and spin the remaining lead between your dog and 'the nuisance' as it will make them back away. Not only excellent training for your dog but you are also demonstrating to your dog that you will protect them, making them look to you for leadership even more.

If you do decide to let your dog go and play with other dogs in the park, ask yourself these questions first:

- Do I really want my dog to learn to hoon around? (Or am I bowing to peer pressure?)



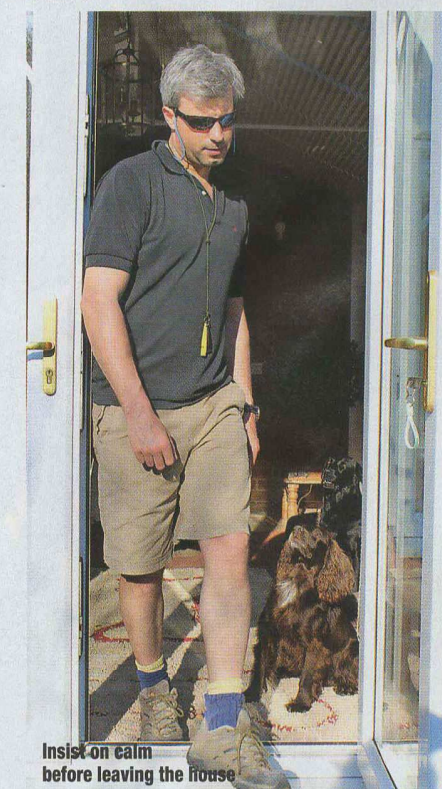
Instilling leadership on walks, and to and from training sessions, will pay dividends on the shooting field

- Do I have a good recall?
- Do I know the other dog?
- Is the other dog safe?

If you answer 'no' to any of these then keep walking as nothing is worth destroying months of recall training. If the answer is 'yes' then go for it, but not too often – the last thing you want is for your dog to decide other dogs are more important than you, as not only will they become 'the nuisance dog', but they'll be a pain in the proverbial to train in a group and a nightmare on the shooting field.

On the other hand, if you know the owner and the other dog and you have a great relationship with your dog, there's no reason not to let your dog have a bit of fun on walks, but it's at your behest, not your dog's, and certainly not at the other person's.

So there we have it – a few simple steps that you can take to become a more effective leader and improve your dog's general manners at home and during training... all of which will translate into a better behaved gundog in the field. For further reading and viewing on this subject, take a look at Lez's series of books and DVDs, *The Pet Gundog* – go to www.thepetgundog.co.uk



Insist on calm before leaving the house