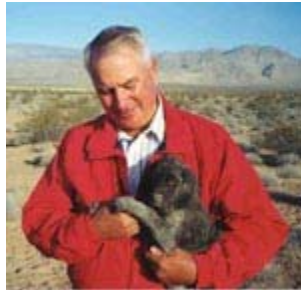


Sensible, Sensitive, Effective Approach to Training Bird Dogs



The Magic Man

By KAROLEIGH K. NITCHMAN

Mike Allison spent a whole summer many years ago learning his methods. He introduced me to [Bill Gibbons](#). We spent a week with him at his camp in Arnett, Oklahoma and were daily amazed at his ability to correct the worst bird dog problems in the gentlest manner. "The Horse Whisperer, gets inside a horse's head; this is what Bill does when he trains dogs-gets inside the dog's mind. [K. N.]

WATCHING Bill Gibbons over several days I saw him perform magic, turn bird dog that I would label "trash" into a statuesque pointer, without ever saying a word other than "good dog."

How did you become this magic fix-it man?

I don't know. I just kind of learned this from [Bill West](#). He was a great influence on me, and still is. Bill is one of the finest trainers that I've ever seen. He's a real dog analyst. He gets into a dog's head. He's the kind of a guy who can take any kind of a dog and improve it in some way. We've been kind of palming around for over twenty years.

My first dogs were Vizslas and they have a trainability problem, a lot of them do. Meeting Bill was good for me because I could take those dogs and first thing you know, I had them coming my way. Being around Bill my dog training improved immensely; Within six months after I met Bill, I started winning field trails. It's been a great ride. He's my best friend, other than my wife. Anyway, he's the guy that taught me all this stuff.

It's a give and take. But first thing you know, it isn't long before the dog is stopping and standing and I can lead him up.

For instance, he sees a bird in the air, I can nick him with the collar or jerk the rope and he styles up. And it isn't long before I can drop the rope and walk away from him. The most important thing is-and I like to use the shock collar-I found out that there are some dogs that don't want you to touch their tail. You go to touch their tail and they squat or want to sit down. That's okay, I don't touch it. If he sits down, I get him to stand up. If he lays down, I start with the front end and give him little short jerks again to get him up on his front feet. I tap him right on the back with my foot and he comes up. I push down on his rear then he resists you. Dogs are like horses-when you push against them, they push against you. When you push on his rear, he pushes against you and you pet him. You don't talk to him.

But you're telling him, "Thank you. That's what I want."

When you stop and give him that little jerk and you

Of course, in the last few years, I've been able to come up with a few techniques of my own, that work for me. But Bill is the kind of guy that can really look at a dog and start working him and, the first thing you know, he's got him pointing birds.

If the dog was laying down, he's got him standing up. If he was gun shy, he's got him over it.

What's so different about your method?

When I started out, and especially when I bought my kennel in 1982, a dog "failing" was not an option. I needed the money and I didn't have so many dogs. It was like, "You can't fail".

There were a few times I had to work for nothing because I wasn't able to fix a dog I was paid to train, so I had the guy give me another one.

But then there was a lot of these dogs, I found out; it wasn't they didn't like birds, They were afraid of something.

Maybe when they were puppies. The puppy worked on a bird and a wing hit him in the face and scared him. Then nothing else was done, and all of a sudden, here's this dog that's nine or twelve months old and a bird comes up and he won't chase it; he shows no interest. You think that he doesn't like birds, but that's not the case. If you'll just work alone with him, I'll even take pigeons and pull the wing feathers out to try to get that dog to get a bird in his mouth.

One of the biggest things, I feel, when you're starting out a young puppy, is to let him catch a bird, He needs to know he's got power over that bird. That bird isn't going to hurt him. Now there's some dogs that are so birdy and so bold that it doesn't matter, but there's some of them that will come up to a bird and stand there trying to decide. "Now, I know I like the smell of this thing, but is it going to get me or what?" Well, once he finally chases that bird down and catches him, then he knows, "I like the smell of

walk around and pet him, you're saying, "Hey, thanks. That's all I want to see you do is just stand there." When you get him far enough down the line you where Mike flushes a bird and he just stands there, I walk back and thank him. After awhile, that dog feels good. "You know what? Old Dad is pleased with me I get to come out here." Then you let point a bird, maybe shoot it for him. You're keeping his interest up and you're teaching him that there are certain times he has to calm down. And those times when a bird's in the air, when another is pointing.

No hollering "Whoa! Whoa!"

I found that when I didn't speak, don't get between the dog and the bird, you get a lot more style out of the dog and there a lot happier. When you go to a trial and you see a nice broke dog handles his birds and looks good-most field trialers know what a dog is supposed do.

The only thing that I find a lot of the time is they forgot to tell the dog what they want. They go out there and the dog isn't doing it like, for instance, if the dog goes out there and moves in on a bird, they start jerking him and setting him back and first thing you know the dog's tail starts curling tight and he starts looking around. All because he's never been taught to stand still. In other words, he's really saying, "Wait a minute. I can catch that bird. Why are you doing this to me?" It has to be a partnership. You have to let the dog know what you want him to do.

One of the great things about the shock collar is you can reach the dog at the very instant he's making-the mistake. And by not talking to him-I've seen more dogs lay down from a guy yelling, "WHOA!" Why would a dog want to stand still? But if he knows if he stands for this one you're going to let him find another one, he's going to do it, isn't he? But he has to understand what you want him to do first.

By not speaking when you use the electric collar,

this thing and I can get him."

Once he does that, then he starts to come along. I've had dogs that would go a month and a half sometimes and then catch that bird. And from then on that dog just came on. It wasn't that he didn't like birds, he just had been scared. Anytime you do something with a dog and something bad happens, you need to try right then, or as soon as you can, to get dog to where he gets over it-not let it become a monster.

Many people believe the way to start a pup is to put him in a bird pen and get him to chase birds. How soon do you begin making one stand?

I have never done that. I just never thought of doing that. I know when I get out here in Oklahoma we have a great opportunity with these johnny-houses where we can take puppies and expose them to birds. They learn how to hunt those birds, learn how to trail them. They chase them and chase them, and first thing you know, they start to stalking them. I would say a normal dog that likes birds and is bold, shoot, by the third or fourth time he should be pointing the tar out of them.

That's one of the things about pups that want to point and like to be around birds. You can start teaching him to stop and stand. You can go ahead and start breaking him. I'm talking about puppies about five months old. I think I could break one that young, but I wouldn't go out there and start making him stand still right away. I'd probably take him and walk with him, run him off horseback, get him into birds, try to kill some birds for him.

I think many trainers encourage puppies to run birds and won't even try to get them to stand. One day when the pup is a year and a half old, the trainer decides, "Now I'm going to BREAK you. WHOA!"

I've broke a lot of dogs and when I say "break", I'm talking about working them around these johnny-

the dog doesn't associate you with the shock? I don't know. You know, I'd love to ask the dog that.



Bill with a young prospect.

Unfortunately, I can't understand dog talk.

Oh, yes, you can! I have to go on what he tells me in his body language. Once he learns that you want him to stand, he gets into a habit of stopping and styling up. If a dog moves six feet, we don't set him back six feet. The dog doesn't know how far he's moved. We set him back one inch and then walk out there and flush. I don't have to say, "Whoa." The dog's command to stop is when he sees a bird in the air. What if he's in a field trial and behind a tree somewhere and you can't see him and a bird gets up? Who's going to tell him whoa then?

When I was running AKC one time I'd lost the dog and someone was telling me what my dog had done while I was out looking for him. He said, "Bill, your dog stopped and pointed and the other dog came in and busted the birds and ran them. He was running all around and your dog just stood there styled up." Of course. That's what he'd been trained to do. And when I got there, the dog is like, "Pop, you should have seen what that other dog did." And he wasn't afraid of me, because he knew he hadn't done anything wrong. He went out, found his birds and

houses. I can get them where they'll point birds and let you flush in front of them. I've done that a lot. By the time they're eight and nine months old they are pointing a lot and you start leading him around and he's excited about being out in the hunting field. When you let him chase birds, he starts loving to be out there. I hear people who say a dog has to be fifteen months old or two years old before you start breaking him. They want the dog to have a lot of this chase in him but then they're too hard on him I get to see a lot of dogs that are messed up and, this is just my opinion, I begin to wonder if the people who trained these dogs really know why a dog points. I think that's real important: why does a dog point a bird and why is he intense on a bird, or a rabbit, or a fly? Why is he intense and why does he lose that intensity? Do you know?

Because he can't catch them.

Right. He can't catch them. He first smells a bird and the bird takes off running or he flies and that dog thinks, "Boy, I'm going to get him." Well, then he doesn't get him. So he finds him another one, and runs him again. He runs him. Boy, he's having a great time. Finally he starts getting kind of a little tired. On a normal situation, it isn't long before he'll smell a bird and freeze. Why is he not just ripping it out and chasing it?

STALKING. Dogs that point are stalking. Everybody's seen a cat moving out in the field and then he freezes. For a long time he freezes. Then he's trying to get close again to pounce on his prey, to catch it. The only thing that's natural to a dog, really, is his desire to hunt, to find something to eat—originally they just hunted for themselves. After they can't catch it, they learn to stalk and when they stalk and stand there real intense, we call that a point. He's pointing out the game. So, you take the dog out to these johnny-houses and he chases and chases and finally he goes to stalking and pointing.

If you can take him at that point in time and take this further, really the bird has taught the dog to point.

did his thing.

What you're doing is behavioral psychology.

Right. And while we're out there with these dogs, we're teaching them to come. Let's say now you've got him to where you can stop him without the collar and he doesn't mind it—he stops and he stands right there for you. Now, going back to the johnny-houses, the reason we like these is that we'll turn puppies loose and let them chase birds because it creates action. We have birds flying everywhere and we can practice with the dog that sees a bird in the air and is being taught to stop. I don't know how many guys I've heard say, "Gee, I need to practice backing. I just can't get any stops to flush."

Well, you're not going to get many stops to flush when you go out and dizzy a bird. So we go out there and turn puppies loose that need to learn how to hunt. I learned a lot using these johnny-houses. I'd take a dog out that was gun shy there. And we have these motts and so I got the idea of putting a stake out inside these trees where the dogs are in the shade. We'll snap the gun shy dogs to these chains. We turned puppies loose and the three of us had dogs that needed to learn how to stop and stand at the flight. The puppies are there making birds fly. So how many dogs are we working at one time? Three guys, we were working seven dogs at one time.

You're excited about the johnny-house. Is this a new concept for you?

Well, I've been using them for some time, Mike told me about them. I'd been hearing about johnny-houses from Ed Husser—we used to train in the White Mountains before I came over to Oklahoma. I saw plans advertised in a magazine and I asked Ed. He said he used them some, but Mike Allison, who was working with Ed at the time, told me they were great, that he used them all the time. This way you can use a quail over and over. I thought that

Because if he goes one more step, the bird's going to leave and it's all lost. So now it's a matter of how can we get this dog so that we can hunt together. I figure I'm feeding him 365 days a year and I like to hunt and I like to shoot birds and I'd kind of like him to help me. I feel up to now he's doing this for himself and I'd like him to include me a little bit. How can we get that dog to go up there and hold that game so I can shoot it?

If he chases enough birds and he points them and you come in there with your gun and shoot that bird, then he's really going to want to point birds, right? Because now you've shot the bird for him and now he kind of looks at you like, "Maybe I can use you in my program'.

That's why you hear a lot of hunters say, "Well, I didn't have to do nothing. I just went out there and started hunting. Yeah, he chased birds at first, then he went to pointing them and, man, he's a good dog. He'll stand way out there five hundred yards until I get to him."

Why? Because that dog knows he doesn't get nothing until he lets you come and you're going to help him. You've become a team now.

Well, that's all fine and dandy, but maybe he decides that he's really going to cover the country, and you're not finding any birds real close to you so he decides he's going to go on the next treeline over the hill and, all of a sudden, he's on point and you're saying, "Where's my dog?" So now you start hollering at him, Well, he isn't going to know to come back to you-you've got to get to him. This is where the rub starts.

I feel that at that time when he points, put him on a rope-we call it a check line and a spike collar-and the reason why we use a spike collar is to keep the dog from abusing you, from jerking you around. And lead him around. And what I like to do at that point is to teach the dog to come, one of the easiest

sounded pretty neat.

So I had an older gentleman I was helping with a German Shorthair at the time and he offered to build the johnny-houses if I would buy the materials. In a few days I had one, and by the end of the summer I had him make me another one. We were so successful with them that by the end of the next summer, we had eight of them. There in the White Mountains we didn't have any birds, so what I got to doing was I put chukars in one, then quail in the next. I had two courses, four of those houses one and four on the other.

Bill West saw that, and being the resourceful, person he is, he built him one and it opened up a whole new world of possibilities for us in breaking these dogs. Now, when I get over here to Oklahoma, I'll work the dogs on pigeons for maybe two weeks because the minute I get here, I get my birds and I leave them in the house for maybe a week, then start letting them out for, another week. I start working them on a limited basis the third week. So going into the fourth week we can really start working them hard.

You've seen now how we get the dog to stand when birds are in the air. What we were the most afraid of was dogs creeping on their birds. So the dog has learned to stop when birds are in the air. Next you teach him to stand when he smells the bird.

When he stops and smells a bird, you give him that little nick with the collar and you can see him thinking, "Oh. I have to stand here when I smell a bird too. Oh, I see." It's all a matter of dog psychology, of getting into the dog's head. The dog whisperer, huh?

Well, maybe. And I've found out-you know I'm a big fan of John Lyons, even though I've never been to one of his seminars, I've got some tapes of his and his book-and I'm a fan of Tom Dorrance 'cause I love horses and Monty Roberts, The Man That Listens To Horses" and it's the same thing we're

things to teach a dog



Bill, in Arizona, hunting and training on wild quail.

I guess there are some areas of the country where you can go and find a lot of wild birds, but in our country in Arizona it's hard to get your dog in enough wild birds-well if you're in business, probably someone is not going to be patient enough to let you have that dog for a year to break him on wild birds, so we use planted birds. Knowing that the reason a dog points is that if he takes one more step the bird is going to get away, how are we going to get this done on pen-raised birds?

If we use pigeons, we go out and dizzy them up, put his head under his wing and put him in the bush. We take the dog up there, he smells it, wants to run in on it, but we pull him back and command that he stand there. If you were a dog, and somebody did that to you and you were pretty sure that you could walk in and grab that bird, why would you want to be intense? Now if you see a rock sitting there, you just walk out there and pick it up, don't you?

Now if I went to pick up that rock and it jumped over to the right, then I reached for it and it jumped again, what do I have to do? Stalk it to get it. That's the same way when you train dogs on planted birds. Bill West figured that out-how can we get control of the planted birds and still allow them to fly?

And, of course, in our part of the country, pigeons are cheap.

doing. You know, John Lyons has three rules and number one is: when you're working with a horse the horse can't get hurt and you can't be hurt. You try not to put yourself in a position where you can be hurt. And rule number three is that whenever you're done with him, he has to be calmer than when you started.

What are we doing with the dog? We can't let that dog hurt us, so if we're jerking him around and he bites us, well, that's no good. Or if we're beating on him and he gets injured-that's not an option. We don't stomp and hurt and slam on the ground. We make sure the dogs are happy when we put them up. We let the collar do the work. We show them what we want and when they choose not to do it, that's when we step in with a gentle reminder. I like the collar because I think the dog blames it on the rope and the spike collar.

Because when he stops, even if I've had to nick him with the collar and set him back that one inch, I "thank" him for stopping even though that collar did it. And he looks around at me like, "You know, Dad is always nice to me. He pats me. But when I go to chase that bird, I don't know what happens but I don't like that." Of course he knows that I'm involved because I'm hanging on to the end of that rope.

Pretty soon what he'll do is go up and point that bird and you go out to walk in front of him and he'll kind of roll his eyes at you. It's like he's saying, "Here's the new plan. Why don't I point them and you flush them." And I say, Okay, I'll go along with that." That makes me feel good because now I'm involved. He's going to let me into his program so that I get to participate. So, as time goes on, I don't have to do anything; he points, I flush. Don't ever get mad at him. If he messes up, nick him with the collar to remind him or set him back that one inch and go on. It works.

Once he understands and is happy about pointing his birds, you can turn a puppy out and when he's

They're trap birds, they're very flighty, very wild. So he came up with this idea of putting an eight inch square of cardboard attached to his leg with cotton twine or knitting yam. So that bird can fly out in the brush and land-we'll put out two birds, sometimes three.

Now what happens is that you've dizzied this bird, the dog goes out, he wants to move in on it and you set him back, he moves in on it again and you set him back. Finally the dog figures, "Well, it looks like I'm going to get my rear end kicked if I jump on that thing. I really like the smell of it." So he starts loosening up and is kind of relaxed like, "Hey, here's the bird. I know I don't want my rear end kicked." So he's minding because he likes his master, but a good bird dog likes birds more than he likes you anyway. That's just the way it is.

So Bill came up with the idea of letting the dog put up the bird. We didn't try to make them stand still-they'd run around on the end of the rope and when they'd put up the bird, we'd just stop them. We'd go to the next one and the dog would smell the bird and run at him, then we'd stop him. If the dog was especially gun-ho, maybe we'd give that rope a little sharper jerk. But when I had Vizslas, you didn't jerk them very hard. They wanted to run them up. I'd have an assistant with me. What I'm getting into now is, I've already let the dog catch a few birds, so he knows what birds are and he's not afraid to have them in his mouth. And I've already broke him to the gun. While he chased the bird, I fired the gun and I got him to where I could kill a bird for him without scaring him.

So now, I'm going to teach him to point. When that dog is on the end of the rope, we don't talk to him because we want this thing to be between him and the bird. I don't want to step in on the thing.

You're not yelling, "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!"

You never want to talk to the dog at this point, in my

pointing, let that pup flush the birds. That dog doesn't care who flushes the bird. He just wants to go out and find birds, maybe have you kill one for him and let him mouth it-even if he doesn't retrieve. A lot of times if I want them to be steady, I'll shoot the bird and go get it and drop it at his feet. You know, there's little tricks you can do to keep them from chasing a bird. That's basically it in a nutshell.

To back up a little bit, whenever I've got the dog working behind other dogs and birds are flying and he's standing, what I've found that works pretty good is maybe take one or two sessions with him and go out and turn him loose and teach him to handle. Make sure that when you call him, he'll come to you.

Because some of these big running dogs, you turn them loose, all they know is to go. Hack him around and get him to where he'll stay around you. And do that with the collar first because a lot of times when you call him and he doesn't listen and you hit him with that collar, he'll freeze and stop. You call him and he won't move. Well, he's getting confused.

Because that collar means for him to stop and stand. That's why I let him drag a rope. That way I can go up to him and put a little movement on the rope, saying, "Here. Here," and his name.

He'll run to you and you pet him. If he freezes I give him a little-nick with the collar and a little jerk on the rope and he'll come to you. In just one or two sessions, he'll handle easily. This is where he gets voice commands. I don't speak to him around birds. What I want him to do is stand when he sees a bird in the air, stand and point and stand when he sees a handler flushing.

I was in Assunpink one time and it was a national amateur championship, Vizslas. I was riding in the gallery and a friend of mine was running a dog and over in one of the tree lines the gallery rode over and the guy got off his horse. Well, our dog stopped and backed. The judge actually asked, "What is he

opinion.

He's going to chase at the birds and finally point them. He'll be on a rope about fifteen feet long, and I'll get right up on him before he starts to want to creep-I always have an assistant right there with me. It's all prearranged and the minute that dog points my helper is supposed to go right up there and flush the bird. I'm holding him on the rope and he's jumping around as the bird flies and they shoot it and then I let him go get it. When my helper shoots, I just let the dog go.

When you repeat that a number of times-he runs the bird up, when he points it, we shoot it- we're doing the same thing we'd do with wild birds only we're using pigeons. I think when we have flagging dogs, and dogs laying down, like that-you've got to understand why dogs do certain things. Finally that old dog will get to where he wants to point that pigeon because, again, he's like, "I'm running this bird up and that old rope stops me and my old neck's a little sore. Gee whiz. But if I point it, he shoots it. And I get it! This is big stuff! I'm going to point it!" It's kind of like, "Hey, Dad, I've discovered something. How about if I point it and you shoot it?"

And I say, "Okay. That'll work for me." Because I'd kind of like to be included too and he's starting to include me in his program now. As you go on, when a dog will kind of flash point like that, then I like to work with a group of people. You know, you were out today and we worked the johnny-houses. We were all out there and it looked like a three-ring circus.

There were six of us out there. Birds are flying everywhere and we had puppies chasing birds. When birds fly, that dog has to stop and watch them fly. All of us would make our dogs stop to watch the birds fly without force. We're just stopping them.

You're not breaking him, you're training him. That rope stops him but it's his idea, now, to point the bird. I like to have about three people out. And I

doing." I told him he was backing the situation.

Dogs learn a lot more than people sometimes give them credit for.

I've never seen anything like what you've been doing the past few days.

BILL WEST is the guy who figured it out. I had a friend who had an eight-and-one-half-year- old dog he had hunted all his life but not been actually broke. My friend asked me if I could break the dog and I couldn't see why not. And so I broke him in three months. So it's not so much the age of the dog.

Now I'm not so sure about taking a dog that's three months old and starting to put all that pressure on him. He needs to develop; he's not strong yet. But you can work him near the johnny-houses on a rope or let him chase birds. This repetition gets the dog into the habit of doing it the right way. He doesn't know he's broke, just all of a sudden, he is. It just evolves. It's a form of obedience but we've done it without taking his intensity away. He loves to be out there. The reason he's so intense is because he's thinking, "Boy, if I take one step, that bird's going to leave."

Once you put the dog through this program, he never forgets. If he comes unbroken I can work him for ten minutes and get him back standing. Why? Because I've laid the foundation.

You really should think about running a clinic for dogs and their handlers. You are good at identifying the dog's problem or M.O.

I love to give seminars. It's especially beneficial to give a half day seminar and then run a clinic, taking dogs with problems and prescribing a cure. Bill West has given clinics also. Bill's made a video too.

I've been involved in dog training for over twenty five years and I've learned more watching Mike and you in the past few months than I have in ten

might say, "Hey, Mike, do you need to work your dog? Go ahead and work him on a bird. I'd like to work behind." What I'm talking about is, now my dog is starting to flash point and I want to start making him stand still because the next step to me is-he's pointing real good, he's intense, he loves to be out there-and I'm saying, "Now there's one more thing I'd like you to do for me. I'd like you now, when the bird's in the air, I'd like you to stop. At any time, when there's a bird flying by, I just want you to stop. I don't want to yell 'Whoa!' at you. I don't want to interfere. But that's your command. When the bird's in the air, you're supposed to stop.

So, how do we accomplish that. That's where Mike comes in, and Joe and these other fellows who are out there. I'll lead this dog around, he's real excited. A dog points, a bird flies, and I just hold him there. At this time, I may even have the shock collar on him. When another dog points, I stop the dog-I never like to take him around behind the dog. If you take the dog around the dog pointing, what you're teaching him is to point the bird behind the dog. He's not really backing.

Backing means when they honor another dog's point.

If I've been messing with a dog and I see that Mike's dog is over there pointing a bird and he's getting ready to flush, I'll stop my dog right there-even if he can't see the dog-because dogs have, the ability to know when you're flushing. It's because your posture changes, your demeanor changes.

You stop him and hold him there. And we have these little jerks that we do, there's nothing complicated about it. He's all excited, but he's seeing Mike-the way he changes and goes in to flush that bird. A lot of times a dog that wants to lay down, when you stop him, he wants to go backwards. Because they don't want to stand still. They might move sideways or might jump up and down. If they lay down....

Boy, everybody's scared of that!

years.

I've worked with a lot of fellows around home in Arizona and taught them how to break dogs. It's really great to see them teaching other people this method. And that's really the best pay I can get-if they learn how to work a dog and they go show somebody else. And I never felt it hurt my business because they'll be appreciative and mention my name to somebody who maybe doesn't have the time to do it himself.

You are so generous with your time and knowledge.

I'm really proud that I've been able to teach the method to guys who are passing it on. I seem to have all the dogs I need. But I always tell the guys that if they go to another part of the country they won't see dogs like this. Listen, there are great dog trainers that do great jobs and do a lot more winning than I do.

But your way seems so sensible, so simple without taking anything out of the dog. What's next on your agenda? Are you ready to back off a little and take it easier?

I think I've won four American Field championships and I've won the Vizsla National four times, won the Wirehair National once, had the number one Weimaraner one year, finished about thirty dogs in AKC, won six NGSPA championships. And then I had a Brittany that I trained one time that won the National. I think that no matter what the breed of dog he is, if he's a good dog, he's a good dog. And we're all looking for the same thing.

The good dogs have all got the same nature about them. They like birds. They're calm dogs they eat well. When it's time to perform, they perform in all types of weather. And those are the special dogs that you want to breed to.

WHEN Bill West came over from California, he

I've seen guys with shock collars on their bellies. But anyway, I'm talking about a dog that doesn't have a problem, he just doesn't want to stand still because he doesn't know "stand still" yet. This is what you're teaching him. So, in that point in time, if he leans forward, you just give a smart little jerk to the rope until he'll just stand there. And then I move on and let him have a little fun. And then I'll stop him again.

But my dog is excited because he knows there's birds out there. It's a place where he's found birds before, he's chased them. I don't like to work dogs at the house, what they call yard training, because you're in a place where there's no birds, he's never seen birds in your backyard. It's like he's thinking, "What are you going to do to me now? You're going to make me do things, you're going to get after me, you're going to hurt me." Why would he want to hold his tail up and be excited.

I wouldn't want to be excited about being in the backyard. I like to do everything out here in the field where we're training. That's why I like people around.

Mike is creating excitement for my dog. And I'm putting pressure on him-I don't talk to him-I give him that little jerk where he'll stand still. Then I pet him and I'll comb his tail up a little bit-I don't like to go into a big love affair-just pet him real easy. Then I'll tap him on the side and say, "All right," and move him. Maybe if he's really excited, I'll use the lowest intensity of the shock collar instead of the jerks. When he's really pulling on that rope, I'll just start nicking him and, all of a sudden, that head comes up.

It may scare him or it may not. If it scares him, I'll back right off and pet him. After awhile you can stop that dog with barely a tug at the rope. It won't be very long until when your dog feels that little tug. That will be his command to stop and style up. I feel that that is the most important thing to teach the dog to stand still and be able to walk all around him, pet him. I don't just keep doing it and make them stand

was training setters. He was an amateur, then turned pro. What would he get? Dogs from all walks of life. They may be half Weimaraner, at that time, and half Australian Shepherd.

It's the dogs that don't have a lot of talent that you have to kind of be easy with and get into the heads. That's what makes a dog trainer out of you. It's not the gun-ho dog with all this natural ability. There's lots of people that can train one of them.

I'm one of the luckiest guys in the world to be in the dog business and train dogs with Bill West. He knew that you just take anything that comes along and adjust yourself. When things aren't going well with a dog, you've got to be able to back up and say, "Whoa, this isn't working." Our method really works and it's fun. It's nothing to go out here and break these dogs. I don't care if it's just some little old dog that's a guy's hunting dog. I try to keep my mentality as that's going to be my next national champion right there and I've got to figure out how to break him to look the best he can look.

I try to keep my standard the same for all the dogs whether it's a field trial dog or foot hunting dog. I've had trainers ask me, "How do you work a meat dog? Do you work them differently than the t trial dogs?" Of course not. Why would you? The only difference is that with the hunting dog you're not working on their range. But on your bird work, you want the dog as happy and good looking as possible. I think that's why I've never lacked for business. I get all the problem dogs and I keep my mind set on "Something has really hurt you. You're afraid. What can I do now?" You've got to adjust yourself to the dog.

I probably break sixty, seventy, eighty dogs a year. And you learn to just recognize certain things without even thinking about them. You become very sensitive. But I know that if I goof up and get the dog to where he's not liking being out there, it's going to take me three times as long to get him back. Then I have to be careful breaking him

there for ten minutes-I think that's abusing a dog. When he stands still and you're satisfied, get him moving again, get him to having fun again.

I can't emphasize enough that you've got to watch that dog. If his ears come back and his tail starts dropping and he has that scared look in his eyes, he's telling you that he doesn't understand, or maybe he doesn't want to do it. Most times it's "I don't understand. Why are you doing this to me?" Then you need to go back-maybe let him point a bird, shoot it for him, and get him all fired up again. Because if the dog isn't having fun out there and if he doesn't want to do it anymore, then you're dead in the water.

because you've got that little scar. Why not just teach him what you want.

It's just like an artist throwing paint on a canvas. You look while he's doing it and it doesn't look like much. But, all of a sudden it's done. And it's a masterpiece!

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