

VERSATILE HUNTING DOG

A Publication of The North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association • Volume XXXVI • No. 3 • March 2005

Diary of an Apprentice:
day two

Eclampsia

*to shoot or
not to shoot*

Starting Young

VC Shooting Starr's Zack
German Shorthaired Pointer

Chapter Activity: Introduce Backing with the Circuit Drill




starting

young

In the fall of 2003 I decided my next dog would be a hunting dog.

I came from primarily a waterfowl hunting background with an occasional ruffed grouse hunt thrown in. I wasn't interested in a Lab or Chesapeake, I quickly found myself in the versatile dog arena. I wanted one dog that could do it all, and do it well. After researching several breeds, I constantly ended up back with the German wirehaired pointer at the top of the list. After two weeks of scouring and researching on the web, I decided that my next companion would be a GWP.

There was one breeder whose web site I found myself going back to again and again. I noticed his dogs were NAVHDA prized and also had a Hunting Retriever (HR) title from the UKC. I decided to send an email to Dennis Carey of Chump Change Wirehairs. Dennis was quick to respond to my inquiry. He answered all my questions, and I had a lot of them. He was very accessible through email or telephone, and was unlikely to disappear once I picked up my pup. Dennis seemed genuinely interested in my hunting and getting me a dog to fill my hunting needs.

I not only researched breeds of dogs, but how best to train them. I decided to join NAVHDA International; there wasn't a local chapter in my area, so this was a great place to start. I got my copy of the "Green Book" and read it cover to cover several times before getting my pup. During this time I started to look for pigeons to train with. By total fluke, I got the name of a guy who belonged to The Manitoba Pointing Dog Association. Here were a bunch of guys participating in NAVHDA-style training, without the testing. I would have access to birds, equipment and experienced handlers to train with.

When the big day finally came in May of 2004, I decided to drive down to Wisconsin and pick my pup up. Dennis was going to choose the first pick male for me. He assured me that he'd gained a knack for picking out great pups. I drove to Three Lakes Wisconsin, and Fancher Kennels where my pup was being raised.

The next morning I met Dennis Carey and Kathy Fancher at the kennel. I watched as "Brewer" ran all over the yard investigating everything. Dennis said, "That is a bold pup, that is what you want."

With a training tips worksheet from Dennis in one hand, and the "Green Book" in the other I was ready to train my new pup. I started training Brewer a couple days after we got home. Once he got comfortable, the first thing I did was to put him on a three-foot chain. Man, did he ever fight it; he finally laid down with his head up, with a little slack in the chain. It turned out to be one of the best things I would do. He was also taught the basics of obedience: 10-minute training sessions 2 or 3 times a day. He took to the training like a real champ.

His exposure to birds started at 10 weeks, retrieving a frozen pigeon in the backyard; He wanted to play with it, but I would walk over, put him back on his feet and coax him towards me. Soon he was retrieving that pigeon to me, out and back, out and back. His first scent point came at 12 weeks; by the end of that day, he was holding point. Later during the summer, chukars were also introduced.

Dennis' best advice sounded like this, "Water, Water, Water, you can never do too much water work. Any dog will hunt on land, it is the good ones that can take it to the water." I made sure I had Brewer around water daily during our summer training sessions and walks. Water was just going to be part of Brewer's world. Having Brewer

around water constantly only made him bolder as he grew. The water advice would pay big dividends come hunting season.

During the summer I would take him out on a daily walk in the fields, or to a water site, or both. Our first encounter with a jackrabbit was really neat. During a walk I literally kicked up a rabbit. Brewer did not see the rabbit run off. So I directed him to the where the rabbit had run. It was like turning on a switch. Brewer went from pup, to a hunting and sniffing machine just like that. The rabbit ran a friendly route of about 100 yards straight away, and then took a 45-degree angle for another 100 or so. Twenty minutes later Brewer had tracked that rabbit up for the second time. He was suddenly a totally different dog with purpose. Brewer was giving me a glimpse into the future!

In mid-August Dennis suggested that Brewer was doing everything it would take to pass his NAVHDA Natural Ability test, he suggested I enter him in an upcoming fall test. That idea caught me off guard. I wasn't planning on testing Brewer until the following spring. He was pointing staunchly though, and he was entering the water without hesitation.

The only thing left to train for in the test was the track. Dennis suggested I show the bird to the dog, get him fired up, and then put Brewer away, lay down the track, then bring Brewer back out to track. The next day I took a dead chukar and did as he suggested. I dragged the chukar around the corner of the house and brought the dog out. He tracked it all right, retrieving the bird to me at a quick trot. During the next two days I would do similar drags with a dead pheasant after our walks. Two drags with the wind at his back, of about 50 yards, and Brewer nailed both of them. I didn't have time before the test to get a live pheasant to track, so we wouldn't get to train with a live bird before the test. Brewer was already associating the feather pile with a bird at the end, so I hoped he would do fine on test day.

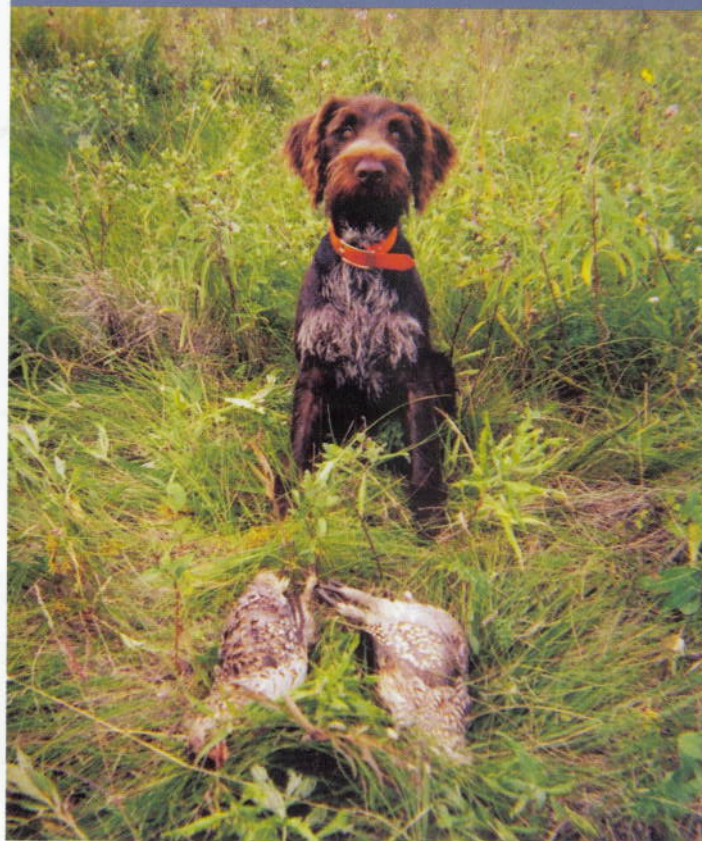
Before testing Brewer, I really wanted to get out and hunt him first. So I volunteered to participate in the Manitoba youth hunt mentor program. I got together with a buddy and we took two teenagers hunting in the marsh. One of the boys shot at and dropped a duck at about 40 yards. Brewer was sent for the duck. He swam out grabbed the duck, and returned directly back to me with his prize. His first "real" retrieve was a green winged teal. The second bird downed by the boys was a blue winged teal that fell at about 40 yards. As Brewer approached the duck, it dove on him. Brewer spun around in the water looking to see where his prize went. As he did, the duck surfaced right in front of him, and dove again. This time Brewer dove after it! We all sat looking out at the marsh, no duck and no dog in sight. Suddenly Brewer surfaced with the duck in his mouth! Brewer had caught the duck underwater! There were "holy cows" all around in the blind. In total the boys shot five ducks that day, Brewer made all five retrieves.

I left Thursday morning before our Friday Natural Ability test, and drove seven hours to Bismarck, North Dakota. On test day Brewer was running 8th out of nine dogs being tested. When our time finally came, the senior judge stressed that if I had any questions at any time, to ask. I walked with the judges as Brewer worked the field. He went on point some 50 yards in front of us; I asked if I could hold the dog's collar while the judge flushed. The judges wanted to see me flush the bird, and to observe how the dog reacted. The whole time Brewer remained on point. I went in and flushed the bird, Brewer chased. As he got close to that bird again, he stopped on point again. Not being able to contain his



Brewer and his new admirers after a successful youth hunt.

Some rewards of a fun first season.



excitement, he busted those two birds. It seemed birds were flying all over the field! The judge asked me to call Brewer in from all the excitement and water him. I hadn't watered Brewer out of a bottle before. The judge took the dog by the collar, asked me for my water bottle and showed me the proper way to water him. In total Brewer would make contact with seven birds in the field. He pointed staunchly on five of them.

Next was the track. I asked that they show Brewer the bird before bringing it out to the judges, just as we'd done in our training. A few minutes later we were called out to track. I grabbed the dog by the collar and led him to the pile. Brewer had his nose to the ground and was pulling away from me fast. I let him go and he kept that nose to the ground, right to the edge of the bush and into it. He chased out a bunny! He then went right back into the bush. The judges then asked me to get my dog; his tracking was done.

The water portion of the test went exactly according to plan. Two quick retrieves like we'd done countless times during the summer. The test was complete. The judges tallied the scores; the handlers sat anxiously awaiting the final scores. On this day seven of nine pups would prize. The judge announced Chump Change's Crooked Halo, and began reading his scores: 112 points and a Prize I. Brewer had done it all at 5.8 months, and with a rookie handler!

I'd like to thank all the volunteers at the Central Dakota Chapter for putting together a great event. Everything went exactly according to plan.

It was well organized and very professional, and it was done because they love to do it. The judges put in a long day and did a great job. With such a great first experience, we look forward to the time when we are ready to run in a Utility test.

With the onset of hunting season, Brewer had grown to feel very much at home in the marshes of Manitoba. He learned to sit quietly watching the sky for birds, and quickly spring into action when there was a bird to retrieve. As the waterfowl season progressed, he began to show signs of the experience he had gained. He was learning to wait to be sent, and that "fetch" meant there was a bird out there for him to retrieve. By waiting, he began to mark birds, and I didn't need to carry rocks in my pockets anymore.

We also had a lot of fun in the uplands. On opening day I was able to shoot to sharp-tails over him, at just six months of age. He is showing signs of experience in the uplands as well. He no longer tiptoes through the pasture, overwhelmed by all the scent there. He now ranges out in search of birds. I have never had so much fun hunting as I've had this first season with him. I'm looking forward to many years of hunting with my versatile German wirehaired pointer.

Special thanks to Dennis Carey of Chump Change Wirehairs, for providing the high desire pup he promised; and for his continued training and hunting support. And thanks to Kathryn Fancher of Fancher Kennels, for doing everything right before getting my pup to me.