

CONDITIONING YOUR BRITTANY

(from THE BRITTANY: Amateurs Training with Professionals)

By

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The Brittany is a bird dog and an athlete. In order to perform in the field—hunting or field trials—a Brittany must be in excellent physical shape. Too often people expect their dogs to hunt half a day in temperatures that exceed 70° F. Do not hunt your dog in such weather unless he has been conditioned. If your dog is out of shape, begin gradually to condition him and don't have unrealistic expectations for an older dog.

In conditioning your dog, you must learn to “read” him—be sensitive to his needs. Being aware of your dog's needs is most important during hot weather. Be sure that you water him early and often. Depending on the weather conditions of your area, you may want to use electric clippers to shave his coat, or you may take him to a dog grooming shop and ask them to give him a “field cut”—a short cut appropriate to the weather conditions of the area.

To hunt birds, a hunting dog needs to be able to work in the uplands for several hours at a time. During the summer months before the fall bird season, the best way to condition a dog is to “road” him—letting him pull in a harness, which is attached, to a moving vehicle (such as an ATV, bicycle, sled, and so forth) or to a horse. Start the dog with ten to fifteen minute sessions twice a week. Then at regular intervals increase the conditioning sessions to every other day. Follow with a gradual increase in the amount of time for each session to thirty or forty minutes.

If you do not have a vehicle or horse for roading your dog, you can condition him by walking him in a roading harness on a check-cord and attaching a length of chain or cable to the roading harness. Use a chain only when you are roading on a smooth surface, such as level ground or a paved area. The chain should weigh about 5 lbs., and the cable should weight about 3 lbs. and be 8 to 10 ft. long. Because this additional weight increases the stress on your dog, you should reduce the time of the workout.

When preparing for a field trial—depending on weather conditions—it is suggested that the following conditioning process be used:

- Road from one to one-and-a-half hours every other day.
- Vary the time of day for roading.
- Lay-up (stop conditioning) two days before the trial.
- When conditioning in the summer, do not overdue it—varying the conditioning to the temperature, doing less conditioning during extremely hot weather.

Piney Run Kennel

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