

STARTING THE HUNTING PUP

(from *THE BRITTANY: Amateurs Training with Professionals*)

By

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The moment you've been dreaming about has arrived. You've picked-up your new Brittany puppy---your future hunting partner. You've begun to socialize him and to introduce him to the crate. Both are key to raising a well-mannered adult, but he's going to be a hunting dog, and you're excited about starting him in the field.

Training can begin within the first couple of weeks of bringing your puppy home. The first lesson is to get him accustomed to the cover he will be hunting. For instance, if you plan to grouse or woodcock hunt, begin by taking him for walks in the woods. Be careful to keep these sessions short with a young puppy. He is learning to feel comfortable in the hunting environment.

Walk slowly behind him and let him lead the way. As he explores climbing over logs or busting through brush, he is also learning to be forward (to be in front of you). A hunting dog must work in front of you, and these little walks teach this valuable lesson. He may not know where to go, but, eventually, he learns that the direction your body faces is the direction you want him to go. As he gets older, he learns to go in the direction of your voice if he can't see you.

On these walks, you want to teach the puppy to pay attention to you. You do this by being quiet. If you are quiet, he has to pay attention to where you are. Occasionally, kneel down and call him to you. When he comes to you, stroke him from the top of his head to his tail. It's all right to give him a treat but be sure to pet him first. Do not run him with another dog because another dog will divert his attention from you.

A hunting dog has to depend on you, so you teach him in a manner that encourages dependence rather than independence, but, first, you build his confidence. Each pup is different, so let the pup's actions be your guide. Build your pup's confidence on these walks by

- going to the same area
- walking the same course
- following behind him

As he learns the area, and as he leads you around, he may run farther out. This is because he's more confident, and confidence builds independence. At some point, your pup may run too far out. If he does, your job is to take away some of his independence by hiding from him. Pick a time when he's farther away from you than you like. Duck behind a bush and hide. Eventually, he will come looking for you. He

may even get a little frantic. This is fine. Be still. He will find you. When he does, pet him. This works best before he's 5 months old.

When your pup reaches the stage where he's not checking in, it's time to take away some more of his independence. You do this by taking him to a new area but this time, you do not follow him. When he takes off in one direction, you start walking in another. Don't call him. Now, stop and wait for him to come find you. When he finds you, praise him, and continue walking. Again this works best at a young age. If the pup isn't looking for you when you take him to new grounds, he may be interested in deer. A pup that's looking for deer usually runs with his nose on the ground. If you suspect this problem, stop running him until you can break him off deer. Consider seeking professional advice if this is your first hunting dog.

As your pup gets older, carry water with you if the weather is hot. Call him in and give him a drink rather than letting him find water on his own. If there's snow and he gets ice balls between his pads, call him to you and pull them out. Show him you're his best buddy, and he'll want to be with you.

Up to this point, most puppies come when you call them. Clapping your hands, kneeling on the ground, or offering a treat is usually enough incentive for them to come to you or , at least, to go with you. Every Brittany pup is different, but there may be a time when your pup no longer waits for you. He may ignore you when you call, or he may be increasingly difficult to pick-up. When this happens, it's important to stop running him. You may continue to walk him on a leash or check-cord, but once he stops listening or paying attention to you, do not let him run free.

The next step is formal training and begins with yard work. In yard work, your dog learns the basic commands of "here," "whoa," and "heel" on the check-cord. The e-collar is introduced, and the pup is corrected each time he disobeys a command. Yard work firmly establishes who's the boss and is introduced once the pup is about a year old. You may want to teach your pup some basic obedience around the house but hold off teaching "here," "whoa," and "heel" in the field. This might seem late, but it's important not to teach these commands until you can enforce them. For now, let your pup mature, and let him have fun. Enjoy the world of excitement and curiosity through your pup's eyes. Savor this period of innocence because it never seems to last long enough.

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