

## **Introducing Dogs to Gun Fire**

By David Molyneaux

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How many times have we seen pups tied to a bench at your local skeet range? Or, how about the fellow who has a complaint regarding how his new pup has been determined to be gun shy. He simply fired a shotgun over the pup to test his response and reaction.

There are many ways to acclimate young gun dogs to loud noises. Many owners start with having metal cans and dishes for litters to play with, getting the pups accustom to the constant clanging so sounds are virtually ignored. The proper way to introduce a dog to the sound of a gun report is with a distraction. When done correctly the pup will not only accept the sound of gun fire, but also relate it to birds as a good thing.

We want to begin by creating a bird crazy dog. Pigeons are inexpensive and seem to take to being roughed up by a pup quite well. Take a bird and cut the wing feather short on one side only to prevent it from flying away. Tie its two feet together so as to stop it from running away. You now have a bird that will not intimidate even the most sensitive or soft pup.

The inexperienced dog should to be on a check cord so we have complete control of the situation. The object is to get that pup as excited as possible using an enthusiastic higher pitch voice and lots of strokes of encouragement. Throw and toss the bird only a few feet at a time so you are right next to your dog when he mouths the bird. Do not show any emotion if the dog happens to get too rough with the pigeon. For if you rush in all excited trying to save the bird, the dog will read your body language and begin to shut down, reducing his bird drive. The very best out come we can observe is your pup actually picking up the bird and carrying it around. This will reflect the ultimate in his interest and prey drive. This is important for two reasons. It will take a lot of confidence for a pup to pick up a struggling pigeon, which obviously we are making progress. Secondly, to be completely distracted to gun fire, we need a bird crazy dog.

Let us go about taking your pup out into the field to introduce him to a gun report. This will take two people so put some distance between the dog and the gun. You can initially start out with larger gauge shotgun but it is not advisable. Something of a smaller gauge or starter gun is to be stationed at least 60 yards from the dog. As the handler begins to work the dog and bird together, the gunner will be signaled at the appropriate moment. Like all training, the timing is critical when the signal is given. The gunner is to shoot the firearm when the bird is thrown and is at the apex, being the highest portion of the ark, as the dog is

running for the bird.

It is important for the dog handler to read the dog's reaction correctly. If there is any apprehension then the report is too close. It is up to the handler to guide the gunner to move in ten-yard increments either closer or back.

There is a great advantage to this method of introducing a pup to the sound of gun fire. You not only are able to accustom a pup to the sound but you are also establishing the correlation that birds and gun fire go together. These are the dogs that go nuts at the sight of you grabbing your gun and hunting clothes.