

**Wildrose Kennels
Training Newsletter
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Delivery to Hand
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A desirable attribute of a good waterfowl retriever is the smooth delivery to hand of downed game which is neither mangled, crushed or partially plucked by our canine hunting pal. Both style and function dictate that retrievers not incessantly drop bumpers or birds on the return. A gundog with a sloppy mouth attempting to deal with a lightly pricked drake mallard or pheasant will interrupt the hunt with an unnecessary frolick possibly culminating in a lost bird. Developing a dog which consistently delivers to hand is largely a matter of conditioning. Some pups will retrieve objects directly to hand naturally, while others bolt away with their prize and still others drop the bumper on the return at your feet. Early on, natural delivery pups need only be encouraged while insuring that WE don't interrupt the tendency with inappropriate behaviors or expectations. The sloppy mouth pups will need a bit of gentle, repetitive, special attention to amend their behaviors before they become too entrenched.

Let's develop that gundog which always delivers undamaged birds to hand, never drops even at the water's edge and makes a stylish presentation upon return. We refer to this training sequence as conditioned delivery. View conditioned delivery as an important part of the training process, not as a piecemeal problem solving activity. Teaching appropriate response to hold and release an object on command is comparable to the importance of teaching sit, stay, or down on command. All are natural behaviors in a dog, yet we want unconditional compliance on command. Conditional delivery training produces desired responses relative to the retrieve on command.

Part I
The Ounce of Prevention

It is far better to never let inappropriate behaviors begin, if possible, in your pup relative to carrying objects in his mouth. A well-bred retriever pup will show natural tendencies to carry and hold objects. It is up to owners to not do anything to discourage this in a young pup. Understand that developing good delivery and a soft mouth in your retriever begins the day your puppy joins your home.

If the pup picks up and carries any item that is not detrimental to safety, despite its value, encourage him to bring it to you. Take it away slowly without scolding and never pursue the pup. You want the pup to want to come to you with his new-found prize. If you don't want him to carry an specific items, limit accessibility. Remind the whole family of these conditions. If an object is of no consequence, such as a leaf or a stick, allow the puppy to continue to carry it as long as he likes.

A few other reminders:

- No chew toys of plastic or cloth. How will the pup distinguish them when introduced to dummies?
- No chasing pup with objects in his mouth or playing tug-of-war.
- Never correct a pup for anything with an object in his mouth. Carrying objects should be pleasurable.

- Likewise coming to you should be a pleasurable experience for the pup. Never call him to you for a correction.
- When retrieving use small, lightweight canvas or fire-hose bumpers. A knotted sock will do. Only toss retrieves in confined areas like the hallway to encourage direct returns.
- When the pup is tired, hot, and panting, don't toss bumpers.
- Avoid repetitive, meaningless retrieves that extend to the point of boredom. The pup will pursue other interests or make a toy out of the bumper
- Never snatch anything from a pup's mouth. Gently encourage a release despite your frustration. Tell everyone!
- Children should be supervised when playing with the pup and keep a close eye on visiting friends. Their misguided interaction may play havoc.
- Don't put your pup on birds too early. One mishap could make quite an impact.

Early Puppy Retrieves

When making 2 to 3 early retrieves per day, crouch down or sit on the floor in a confined area to encourage puppy to come back to you. Upon return, with the bumper, get the pup close into your body. Don't immediately take the dummy away. Let him keep it and share it with you as you lavish praise. Stroke pup under the chin and chest to encourage the hold. Don't worry about how the pup presents for delivery. Stylish delivery will come later. Gently take the dummy and occasionally immediately give it back if he will accept it. Continue the praise. Share the prize. Build the trust while encouraging natural hold. Use the same methods for early retrieving outdoors.

Field Tips for Young Pups

As you progress to the field, consider the following.

1. Keep your training area free of distractions.
2. Never let another dog have the opportunity to "steel" the bumper from the pup when retrieving.
3. If the pup won't exit the water with a bumper, accept the delivery at the water's edge or wade out a few feet.
4. Find a bumper the pup enjoys carrying. If the pup is reluctant to pick up a particular type, move to something more interesting—tennis ball, feather-covered bumper or small Dokken bird dummies.
5. If you have a persistent problem with the pup running away or playing with the bumper on the retrieve, cease retrieving sessions until obedience and recall are instilled.

In the early days of puppyhood, try to develop natural delivery as much as possible and be on guard to not condition something in the pup you must later train out.

Part II
Conditioned Delivery Training
(To be Continued)