

Gibbons/West Training Method

Summary of articles from KGCA newsletter

By Carol Ptak

Question: So when should I start training?

In our last board meeting, we decided it would be a good idea to start a column dedicated to training. Since we are building our club the rest of the board voted that I should start the column. The intention of the column is not that my way is the only way to train a griffon. We would love to share what is working or not working in your training program.

I train for a variety of events (agility, obedience, rally, tracking, conformation) but in this column I will stay focused on field training since that is my number one priority. My dogs teach me daily new things about field training. At the risk of alienating people, I view the NAVHDA green book as a “How NOT to” manual. It is my opinion that this approach is far too hard on the dog. I used that book and several seminars as my bible training my first griffon. To the day that dog died he never did recover his pointing style. The method negatively affected my relationship with my dog and I knew when I got my second griffon that he would never take the abuse I heaped on my first dog with whoa posts and breaking tables. Thankfully I was introduced to Bill Gibbons. Bill Gibbons is considered the Magic Man of field dogs. Bill is best known in the American Field circuit and learned on Vizsla – another tough breed to train. Generally my approach is the Gibbons/West training approach – a very soft and quiet approach. The Gibbons/West approach is a complete approach for field training. I leveraged the knowledge of other people to learn the other training approaches for things like duck search.

In this first column the subject is when do you start training. I have been fortunate to get two puppies from a breeder that starts the puppies at 5 weeks old with pheasant wings. Both of these puppies could point before I brought them home at 8 weeks old. That being said, I have also had the privilege of getting a retired brood bitch over 6 years old who had 4 litters (total of 44 puppies) and had been hunted using just natural ability with little formal training. That last puppy is now one leg shy of earning his AKC Master Hunter Advanced (MHA) and the brood bitch needs only 2 legs to get her MH (you need 6 legs when you skip senior).

I don't write this to brag but rather to show that a training method like the Gibbons/West approach works for a dog of any age with remarkable results. The goal is to have control without yelling and screaming and keep all the style that is natural to the breed. The idea that you will lose style in the steadying process is really quite outdated.

I have watched this remarkable process routinely steady dogs under a year old and work as effectively with older dogs that have washed out of other training approaches.

The short answer to the question posed in the title of this segment is - it doesn't matter how old they are when you start. The most important thing is the method, not the dog's age.

A requirement in either AKC MH or in NAVHDA UPT or UT is that the handler should be quiet. Yelling and screaming “whoa” will cost you in points but more importantly it will cost you birds in the field. Pheasant and quail have excellent hearing and the quieter you can be in the field the better chance you will have of finding birds.

The Gibbons approach is based on the Pavlov approach. Remember how Pavlov rang the bell and fed the dog. He rang the bell again and fed the dog again. It didn’t take many repetitions for the dog to salivate when the bell was rung.

Another silent approach to training dogs was developed by Delmar Smith. I have had the honor of attending a few Rick Smith seminars. My training approach blends points from both. There are three rules in training dogs:

- 1 – be disciplined enough to be consistent
- 2 – have a clear picture of the expected behavior
- 3 – do not accept less

That is about it! Those three little steps will get you where you need to go in training. Noticed I never said they were easy?

Step 1 in training a bird dog is that the dog must realize they have dominion over the bird. Many dogs will look like they are pointing but looking carefully you will recognize that the dog is actually afraid of the bird. You can tell the difference because of which way the dog is leaning. If they are stopped and leaning towards the birds – the dog wants the birds. If they are stopped and rocked back in their stance, then they are afraid of the bird.

The absolutely worst thing you can do is to pick up that bird and throw it AT the dog. Imagine if you were afraid of something and somebody picked it up and threw it at you?

For this step I use small Tibetan quail. These little quail are great because they flutter and fly a few yards and settle down again. If quail are not available then we use pigeon squeaks. They make really cool noises and can get the most reluctant dog interested. We put the bird down and let the puppy inspect it. Usually there is one of three reactions. One is that the dog will jump on the bird and try to eat it. Great – you are off to step 2.

The second reaction is that the dog will be interested but rocked back. If this is the case then kick or toss the bird AWAY from the dog. Usually they will give chase. Continue this game for a couple tosses. Let them catch the bird if they want. To get out of step 1 the dog needs to WANT the bird. You are better off ending the lesson when the dog still wants to keep going. You will get more done if you quit earlier.

The third reaction is that the dog will tuck his tail and run the other direction. Don’t worry – all is not lost.

At this point get a dead bird. **DO NOT SHOVE THE DEAD BIRD IN THE DOG'S FACE!!**

That is the number one error made by trainers. All you will accomplish with that approach is to make the dog like birds even less. Play with the dead bird by pulling it away from the dog and then toss it a short distance away from the dog. Repeat this game a couple times until the dog starts to chase the dead bird. When this happens then quit for the day. Next time out start with tossing the bird away from the dog. If the dog is still interested then try a live bird. You may be very surprised at a very different reaction.

At this point of the training, be very patient. You do not want to reinforce any fear or introduce any command. Never use "NO" with a dog on a bird. Patience here will pay off later.

We will continue from the last article where the dog was introduced to the bird. It is absolutely essential that the dog has dominion over the bird. Excitement about the bird is what will fuel that beautiful point to come. Personally I use automatic launchers because I live in an area with lots of trees and a fairly small place to train. Bill Gibbons, who developed this method, uses wild pigeons and cards. However, he also trains in hundreds of acres and with the advantage of spooky wild birds he doesn't need traps. I use homing pigeons that allow the dog to get too close so I prefer to use traps.

The big trick to getting a dog to point is to have the bird teach the dog. At this point the dog is on a collar and checkcord. You need to carefully control the circumstance so that you pattern the dog for success. There are three important things to consider. First is to know where the bird is located. Second is to know the wind direction. The third is the most difficult – where should you be with your dog. The dog can only smell the bird downwind. It is really surprising how close a dog can get to a bird upwind. We ran in a hunt test in 40 mph wind and had a bird pop out and hit the dog in the side on the way out before he even knew it was there! It is imperative that you come ACROSS the scent cone and not directly towards the bird. This has to be the most difficult thing in dog training. Helping people train their dogs gives me the opportunity to watch people struggle with these issues.

Bringing the dog straight up the scent cone will teach the dog to run in on birds. Having the dog cross the scent cone so that you can get a good turn of the head allows you to pop that bird exactly when it needs to fly. The dog must also be back far enough from the trap so that they trap will not snap the dog in the nose. That is the most common error when using traps. The traps scare the dog with the noise or the suddenness of the release and then the dog is afraid of the bird – exactly the opposite of what is desired.

When you bring the dog across the scent cone, look for the dog's head to turn and then take one step. I allow the one step and then pop the bird. Once the bird is in the air, then stop the dog and do not allow it to chase the bird. Another key for success is to never ever put pressure on the dog's neck while there is scent in their nose. There is never a correction done when the dog is in the scent cone. The goal is to always have the bird do the correction. This process does take two very important things – many birds and the ability to read the dog.

It is truly amazing how quickly the dog will begin to point. When that first point does happen, then call it quits for the day and go play. Probably one of the toughest lessons to learn is when to stop a training session. That will be topic of the next training column.

So when are you done with a training session?

In the last newsletter we looked at the process of getting a dog to point. There is nothing prettier than seeing your dog on point. The day that my heart does not do a full flip flop when I come around a corner to discover a dog standing or watching that incredible instant stop when hitting a scent cone – well I quit! When our dog starts pointing we want to see it point over and over. However, remember that you are training and it is so important to know when to stop a training session. I have learned this lesson the hard way so many times. We accomplish what we set out to do in that training session and then we push for “just one more time” and everything crashes and now we have to start over, ending the training session behind where we started.

This is where having a plan for your training session is so important. As the old saying goes – plan the work and work the plan! It takes time to plan the work. Develop a written training plan. What are the skills you want to develop in your dog? Is your goal the NAVHDA invitational? Then you need to start training those foundational skills right from the beginning. What is your goal for your dog? Are you going to test and compete? Did you want a well behaved hunting companion? People ask me all the time if I hunt my dogs steady and the answer is absolutely yes. This is for safety. When you are hunting with other people, even people you may think you know very well, you just don't know what they will do when they see their first bird after what could be hours of walking. Having a dog bust a bird is an great way to get a dog shot accidentally. Whatever your goal is for your dog is a perfect goal.

Now, let's use the example of getting a dog to point. As I mentioned earlier we use traps to launch the bird if the dog takes a step towards the trap. Once the bird is in the air, then the handler stops the dog. Pretty quick the dog realizes that their movement is making the bird go away. Then they will stop and point. This can be an easy or difficult thing to accomplish depending on the dog. When they do stop and point our desire is to go to the next bird in the next trap and do it again and again until all the planted birds have been flushed. If your lesson plan for the day is to get the dog to point then when the dog points – STOP! This is really tough for people to understand when they may have driven several hours to get there and then on the second bird out the dog points and you tell them they are done. Remember the goal is to train not just spend time training. It is better to put the dog up with a great experience and wanting more than to keep drilling the dog until they are bored simply because you had to drive hours to get there. Just because there are more birds in the field doesn't mean you have to work them!

We are very fortunate that in our area there is a group of people who train together. This allows us to help each other and solve problems. It also allows us to put a dog away when that dog is done for that exercise but the person can still learn what the next step is. When a dog is just starting to point we may put that dog back on the stakeout chain after one point with lots of praise and leave the dog wanting more. This is so much better than drilling on bird after bird until they get bored of pigeons and start

flagging or blinking a bird. Flagging is when the dog wags its tail while pointing a bird. Blinking a bird is where the dog looks everywhere other than where the bird is located. Both behaviors are directly related to the dog feeling pressure while the bird scent is in its nose. Both behaviors are highly undesirable.

For a griffon this is especially true since they are so incredibly smart. They will try to figure out what you want and then when they understand it don't understand why you keep making them do it over and over again so they offer you a different behavior to see if that is what you want. If you think you won the battle – you may have lost the war. Griffons are incredibly smart.

I made this mistake so many times with my first griffon. We have to drive hours to get to available training grounds and then purchase birds on the way. We had no way to store birds so doggone it we were going to use all of them! I shudder now to think what I used to do to that poor dog in the name of "training". Before I got my first griffon, we had Labs. Labs are a wonderful breed because they are just as happy the 100th time you send them for a bumper as they were the first time. Griffons – well, not so much. Now that I have the pleasure of working with many people with continental breeds I have discovered this is true across these breeds. They can truly outsmart you!

Develop a skills plan for your final goals and objectives and make sure to work on those things that may not be your favorite thing to do. We had a Drent (Dutch Partridge dog) training with our group that loved to retrieve as much as any Lab so we did his retrieving exercises last as a reward. He tended to be soft on his birds so we did those first. Most griffons are the opposite. We start with the retrieving lesson and then end up on birds. We do the retrieving lesson by the trucks and never in the field. Those skills are kept separate until both skills are solid. Knowing when to stop is a key training tool for success. It is far better to stop sooner on a success than to continue to push it until you hit total failure. I have dug many a training hole for myself this way because I was in the mood to train that day and the dog learned the lesson more quickly than I thought. It is always better to stop with the dog wanting more. Just watch your dog when you pull out the training equipment – is he excited and jumping around or does he hide. That will give you good feedback if possibly you are training too long or too many repetitions. It is far better to train shorter durations more frequently than it is to train long hours. Sure an older dog can usually take more pressure but still the goal for every dog is to have all the intensity and all the control at the same time. It should be fun for you and for the dog! Plan the work and work the plan.

The next training column will be about now that your dog points, how do you steady the dog without yelling "whoa". Happy Hunting!!

Steady without whoa?

My first griffon was my learner dog. I regret now so much of what I did to that poor dog in the interest of "training". I had no idea how to train a griffon or any pointing dog. I went to every seminar I could find and listened to all the "experts". I thought they must know what they were doing. I would take ideas home and try them and could see it was having a negative effect on the relationship with my dog. Sometimes we had to take breaks of several months to bring that relationship back. At one point I had

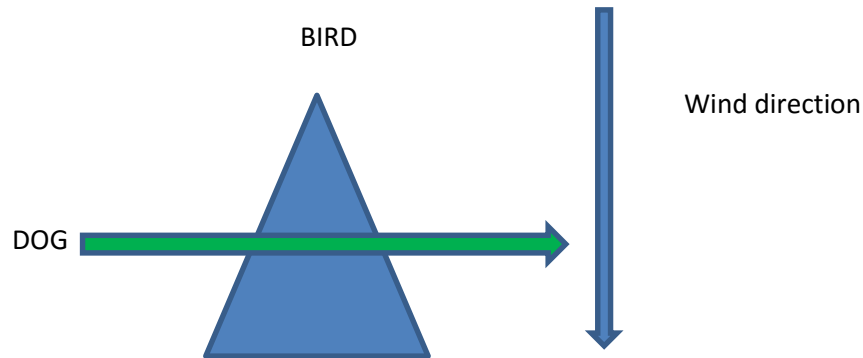
done such terrible things to him for retrieving that when he saw the wooden retrieving article he would flop down and roll on his back. I knew I was doing something wrong. It didn't make sense to me but I assumed I didn't know how to do it. Sure we got through Natural Ability and Junior hunter simply on his natural instinct – thanks to his breeder. The rude awakening came to me when I ran my boy in his first UT test and got reprimanded by the judge for saying “whoa”. At the same time every training session I had been to for the local NAVHDA club and other seminars – everyone said “whoa”! I just could not figure it out – how could everyone train “whoa” and then not use it?

I realized after training my first dog with things like whoa tables, whoa posts, half hitches around his flank, e-collar on the flank and many other similar approaches that there just had to be a different – and better way. Thankfully I was introduced by someone I was training with to the Gibbons/West approach. The Gibbons/West approach does not use “whoa” I just loved Bill Gibbons philosophy that was so different than any other trainer I had seen. Where everyone else expected that you would lose some style on your dog when steadying them but then expected it would come back (it NEVER did on my first griffon – to the day that dog died he never pointed the same) Bill's approach was to not lose the style in the first place. Bill is well known for training Vizsla – a very soft breed – and never lost the style on his dogs. Attending that first seminar with Bill opened up a whole new world. I knew I had found the approach that would work for my second griffon. My second griffon has a much softer temperament than my first. He still had great hunting instinct but I knew I could never do half of what I had done to my first and nor did I want to!

The Gibbons approach is all about having the bird tell the dog “whoa” and not the human. This makes far more sense to me as well. Funny thing it sure makes a whole lot more sense to the dogs as well. Many times when we are hunting my dogs will find a bird and not be anywhere in sight. How could I tell them to “whoa” if I can't see them. It is truly amazing how you can lose a brown dog in sage brush. The dog needs to know their job even if you are not there. The basis behind the Gibbons approach is that the dog likes their birds. Go back to the first article published in the KGCA newsletter to learn how to encourage that bird drive. We have had to adapt the Gibbons method a bit. For example, Bill never uses traps to release a bird. He has a great supply of wild pigeons to train with and uses cards on them so they don't fly very far. We unfortunately do not have that luxury. Also due to our tree density we use automatic release traps to get the bird into the air at the right moment. We just don't want to spend our time climbing trees to free pigeons. Using traps takes extra care. A single bad experience with a trap can quickly ruin a good bird dog. Find someone to train with to help with the timing of getting the bird into the air. This is a job best done by two people.

The approach is to bring the dog crosswind to the bird. This is the most difficult part. No matter how many times you explain it, people have a very difficult time understanding crosswind. Think of a bird as the tip of a cone. The dog can only smell the bird downwind. In the diagram below the bird is at the peak of the pyramid. The scent cone expands as it leaves the bird. You want to bring the dog into the scent cone across the cone – not up the cone towards the bird. This is critical for this process to work. Watch the dog carefully. When the dog scents the bird they will turn their head and most likely try to pounce on the bird. The instant the head turns and the dog moves one forward release the bird. Bill depends on the flightiness of the bird to get out of there naturally. We use homing pigeons so they tend

to be not as flighty as the wild pigeons. The method stays the same. You want the dog to believe that their forward momentum is what flushed that bird. Remember what the dog wants more than anything – the smell of that bird in their nose. A griffon is very smart and it doesn't take long for them to realize that if they make a forward step that bird is going to go away. During this process you do not open your mouth. No whoa. No steady. No command. This is the silent approach which means you need to be quiet! Next to understanding which way is downwind – this is the most difficult – teaching people to be QUIET!! The dog does not need you to be talking all the time.



You should see very pretty points as the dog is really enjoying this work. This is because they know they are right. There is NEVER any pressure on the dog's neck while they have the bird scent in their nose. This is why the bird needs to fly at just the right moment. Once the bird flies THEN you can stop the dog with their collar. For this stage we use a thick leather collar. Most dogs at this point are quite bird driven so we use the collar where there are spikes inside the collar on the underside of the neck. These spikes are flat so they don't hurt the dog. The spike just provide a concentrated point of contact which is much more humane than choking your dog. The reason to use the spike collar is to not be dragged around the field by the dog. If you have a very soft dog then don't use the spike collar. The dog will tell you at this point what it really needs. The other advantage of the spike collar is that you are establishing a point of contact that will be used later in the process.

This process can move very quickly if the handler is paying attention. A frequent question is how long it takes – and the answer is that it takes what it takes. The dog will progress at its own speed. The better your timing the quicker it goes. You will need an assistant to get the bird out of there. The assistant must have excellent timing and move in quickly to flush the bird. Excellent timing moves the process forward very quickly. Poor timing can dig a training hole that can take quite some time to fill. The instant the dog's head turns watch for the muscle on the shoulder to twitch – that means the dog will move. Don't wait for the dog to take several steps. The earlier you get the bird out of there the better. Worst case is that the dog will stop to the flush which is a great skill to have. Griffons tend to drop their head when they are ready to pounce – it is called the Korthals crouch. As soon as you see this get that bird out of there. Once the bird is in the air then stop the dog. This whole exercise is done on a checkcord and collar. It is very important to pet the dog after each bird so that they come to realize that you appreciate the work they have done. Do not do too many repetitions. We work dogs in pairs or

three at a time where the lead dog is working on pointing the bird and the other dogs are working on backing. More about that later. The key is to not overdo it. Look for improvement and stop when you get it. See the last article on when to stop a training session. You are through this step when the dog will locate the bird, point and stop and watch the bird fly away. Do not let the dog chase the bird – make them stand there and watch the bird fly away and then pet them and tell them how clever they are!

Next article will be about how to get ahead of the dog and flush your own bird. Happy training.

Flushing the bird

First - I feel truly blessed to have a training group to train with. One of the members of that training group – Dr. Lily Lo – has taken it on herself to pursue her other calling – one of a videographer. She has done an absolutely AWESOME job creating a series of how to videos on training your own dog. The stars of the show are different dogs in our little group from a variety of breeds. Yes, we made sure to include as many as our beloved fuzzy faces as possible. We will be including this on our KGCA website as a resource for members. If you want to take a sneak peek go to:

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlp4Vyw24DalvBh1f28GZE_BhV0bVbPR

The funny thing was when Lily posted this to the pointing Lab website, the first hit she got was from some griffon people in Michigan – small world!! This is not to say this is THE way to train your griffon – however it is a proven approach that does work well with our breed. The only necessary condition is that the dog likes birds.

Now onto our article for this newsletter. The assumption coming into this step is that you have completed the previous step described in the last newsletter. Your dog should be able to find a bird, establish point and when the bird is flushed watch the bird fly away without lunging or moving. It is at this point you need help from a couple of assistants. This is where training as a group really comes in handy. The goal of this step is to get you in front of the dog to flush the bird. We have conditioned our dogs that when we pass next to them that they should follow us so this is a difficult step. Adding to that motivation is a bird sitting right there. This next step requires you to quarter your dog across the scent cone as before. When the dog establishes point then drop your check cord on the ground. Have an assistant come up and stand on the check cord behind the dog. The reason for this is that you want to remove the person from the dog's sight but at the same time help the dog to be successful and make the right choice. You move forward to flush the bird. Try to not walk directly by the dog's nose. Make a small circle to the bird.

The same rules apply here for the person handling the launcher. If the dog takes a step or moves at all as you pass the dog's nose then the bird should be immediately launched into the air. If the dog attempts to chase it then the person stepping on the check cord will stop the dog. We have people just stand on the check cord to remove the inclination to pick up the check cord and put pressure on the dog's neck. The dog has to choose the correct behavior and with your team you will make this the easy choice. Also hopefully you have been working on overlaying the e-collar with the check cord and you will "nick" the dog with a very low level of stimulation so they understand the desired behavior is to stop

moving. A “nick” is a very short tap on the e-collar. We typically use a level 1. Many trainers think that more is better but in the Gibbons/West world – less is more. We don’t want to lose any of the excitement or style in this step. Think about how reactive a dog is when they are sleeping and a fly lands on them. They do not need to be clobbered with a high degree of electricity to get your point across. We make is a policy in our training group that before you can use an e-collar on your dog, you have to use it on your own neck. A level 1 nick is something that many people can’t even feel on their bare hand and most feel when it is on the more sensitive area of the human neck. The dog has a coat between the collar and their neck – but still level 1 works. Less is more. The e-collar is there as a reminder. You teach with the leather collar.

This overlay technique will be discussed in the next column. We call it working “on” the bird or “around” the bird. Working around the bird provides excellent opportunity to build the contact point and understanding that the e-collar means the same thing as the leather pinch collar.

This can be a critical moment so timing is essential. This also reinforces why pigeons are a great training bird. If you make a mistake at least the mistake is made on a non-game bird. If the dog stands and does not require a correction then give the dog lots and lots of praise. Remember that a behavior that is rewarded will continue. They need to know they are right. When you get this response then stop your training session for the day. You don’t want to do too many repetitions. Griffons are particularly smart. If you continue to ask them over and over again in the same session for the same behavior, the dog will get confused and start offering other undesirable behaviors. Better to have a short training session and build rather than a long one and dig yourself a hole that will take many session to get out of. I know that we all like to see our dog on point but don’t overdo it!

Next article – working on a bird versus around the bird and creating the overlay of the leather collar and the e-collar.

Working ON a bird versus AROUND the bird and creating the overlay of the leather collar and the e-collar.

First I wanted to report that we have included the video series on the launch of korthalsgriffon.com.

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlp4Vyyw24DalvBh1f28GZE_BhV0bVbPR

This is not to say this is THE way to train your griffon – however it is a proven approach that does work well with our breed. The only necessary condition is that the dog likes birds. It is important when working with a griffon to understand that this breed is incredibly smart and yet quite biddable. This is the correct temperament for our breed. There are a group of trainers who feel that the correct training tool is to just turn up the e-collar. I even attended a workshop where the trainer would turn the collar all the way up until the dog screamed in pain and then allowed the dog to comply to the command to turn the pressure off. That process sickened me to watch it. I have watched as other dogs when they see the e-collar come out hide under a truck only to have the handler drag them out by a leg. This is not the answer for our breed – and I am not sure it is for any breed. It is important for the trainer to be able to read their dog and be creative and smarter than the dog. Getting a 100% reliable finished gun dog is

about communication and cooperation and not about turning up the e-collar. Yes, we do use an e-collar in this style of training but it is used to remind and not to teach. It is rare to turn the collar over a level 1 setting. You can put a level 1 on your own neck and barely feel it. If you ever wonder if the dog can feel it, just watch a sleeping dog twitch when a fly lands on the dog – even through all that coat! When I pull the collars out in our house, all three of our griffons go absolutely nuts with joy because they know it means birds. To me, an e-collar is like a seat belt. I put one on my dogs every time we go hunting or training. I never intend to use it but at that moment where it is needed, it can save a life. In the same way, I also always put a GPS on my dogs when we hunt. Not because they range far but because in the heavy brush where we hunt it is too easy to walk right past them. Neither of these collars emit any sound. For my dogs I find that is distracting and they clearly do not like it.

Now onto our article for this newsletter. The assumption coming into this step is that you have completed the previous step described in the last newsletter. Your dog should be able to find a bird, establish point and when the bird is flushed watch the bird fly away without lunging or moving. You have been working at walking in front of the dog to flush the bird. The next step is to be able to drop the check cord and allow the dog to find its own bird and establish point without you on the end of the checkcord. For this we get a short stiff checkcord. You don't want it to wrap around the dog's feet but at the same time you want it long enough to be behind the dog so someone can stand on it if need be. Walk the dog into the field like before but when you are 50 yards or so from the bird then drop the checkcord. If you have taken your time with the previous steps the dog will find the bird and point the bird. Get someone behind the dog to be ready to step on the check cord if need be. You circle to the front of the dog. **DO NOT WALK RIGHT NEXT TO THE DOG!** Quickly flush the bird and have the person behind step on the check cord. If all goes well the dog will watch the bird fly away and stand still. If that happens lots and lots of praise and you are done for the day. Normally a handler will want to do it again because it was so pretty. However remember these griffons are very very smart. If they do it correctly the first time, let them know that. If you make them do it over then they think they got it wrong or they will start to improvise and come up with some very interesting alternatives to what you really want.

In your next training session don't be surprised if the dog takes a step or tries to get the bird. Griffons are very smart and they remembered that last time you were in front and the bird flew away. They will make an attempt to try and get it. Have that person on the dragging check cord ready to help the dog be successful. If the dog gets it right and stands, then go ahead and try it a second time – after praising them of course.

Another piece of the puzzle is getting the dog ready to work with no check cord and pinch collar. To this point you have been training with the dog "fully dressed". The e-collar is right behind the ears and the pinch collar is back towards the shoulders. The transmitter to your e-collar to this point should have been left in the truck. Now it is time to get it out and begin to use it. You have established a point of contact with the use of the leather spike collar. Now it is time to transfer that to the e-collar. Never use the e-collar to teach – only to remind. Start by walking the dog and doing a little tug with the pinch collar. The dog should stop. You should be able to walk around the dog and the dog should stay still. If you can't do that then continue to leave the e-collar transmitter in the truck until you can. Once the dog is reliably stopping on the little tug then turn the e-collar to the lowest possible setting and do the little

tug and hit the e-collar nick button at the same time. The dog should stop and you should be able to walk around them. After that is successful then just do the nick with the e-collar a fraction of a second ahead of the tug on the pinch collar. Timing is critical. You want to give the dog the opportunity to stop to the nick before you do the tug. Some dogs figure this out in one session. Others are more creative in their attempt to figure it out.

Once you have this reliably with the nick then go back out with your training group. The dog that will point the bird is called working ON the bird. You want to be upwind of the bird and have your dog able to see the working dog. When the working dog points then you want to stop your dog with that nick on the e-collar. Keep your focus on YOUR dog. It is very easy to get caught up on what is going on with the bird but stay focused on what you are doing. You want to be able to walk around your dog and have your dog not move a single foot. If they do move then nick with the collar and follow up with a small pull on the pinch collar upwards and in that order.

Make sure that where you stop with your dog is not in the way if the handler of the working dog wants the bird shot. Be where you and your dog are safe that it NOT in the scent cone of the bird. This is critically important. You want to teach this lesson without bird scent in the dog's nose. This method trains very very quietly. There is nothing said and no commands or whistles used. This is usually the most difficult thing for the human side. The dog does not need you talking to them. They don't speak English in any case. I would go to other training groups that are hollering "whoa" and "no" and whatever else they like to yell to work around the bird with them. This helps my dogs understand when they are running in a hunt test that if someone starts hollering that they are not in trouble. If you are not going to compete, then you can skip that step. However it is still a great idea to train in as many different fields and venues as possible so that the dog understands the rules are the same. I heard someplace that the dog has to master the skill in five locations before they understand the same rules apply everywhere. Still, if we are going for a competition I try to get to that location to train before the competition.

Once your dog is stopping when the working dog stops and that you can walk around the dog holding the check cord, then you can start to drop the check cord and do the same thing. Once the dog has stopped drop the check cord and make a big circle around the dog – go both directions. Make one circle going to the rear of the dog first and then make another circle going to the nose of the dog next. Once they have mastered this then switch the order. You want to be 10 feet or so away from the dog. They should be starting to understand at this point that the nick on the neck means their feet stop moving. You still do not use a command like "whoa" or "stay". Remember when you are hunting your dog could be on the next hill and totally hidden from view. They have to take responsibility for their actions because in the real hunting world you are just not going to be there.

Once you have mastered the ability to stop the dog with a level 1 on the collar – and probably by this point the dog is stopping themselves when they see the dog on point – you are ready to go back to working ON the bird. Now drop the check cord when you are 30 yards away from the bird and allow the dog to establish point. You move to flush the bird. If the dog moves then nick with the collar. Very quickly they will learn that the nick means to stop. Flush the bird. The next time out then fire a gun

when the bird is flushed. We start with a blank pistol and then move up to a shotgun firing blanks. The bigger the bang the more excitement there is for the dog. Make sure this step is solid before you start shooting the birds. If you do compete in hunt tests, this will also prepare your dog for the typical level of gunning where most of the birds are missed. Continue to work around the bird as well and reinforce that the dog must stop and stay until the other dog is done. Having a dog that will honor through another dog pointing, the flush, the shot and the retrieve is a joy to hunt over and will save game and a possible dog fight of two dogs going after the same bird. You want your bird in one piece and fit for the table. If you only have one dog then again not a problem but you may want to hunt with a friend. We hunt with three griffons and it is not unusual to have a situation where two dogs are on point and one is backing.

Once your dog can be free from 30 yards from the bird then increase that distance. Do not be surprised if they act like they never have seen a day of training in their life when they realize they are running free. Remind them of the correct behavior with a small nick on the collar. The e-collar is nothing more than checkcord that reaches a mile away. At this point they should still be dragging the check cord to the pinch collar just in case you need to back up. We will cover problem solving in another article.

If you have done the process step by step, you will be amazed at how wonderful your dog looks and how reliable they are on their birds. It is very important that you do not overdo bird contact at this point. Remember that thing about griffons being really smart. Making them repeat something over and over again in the same session will encourage them to start to improvise with some undesirable behaviors. If all is going well at this point then take off the pinch collar and check cord and repeat the same exercise. All this time the birds are flying away with a shot going off. Your dog should be the only dog running in the field when they are at a "green broke" stage like this.

Let's review our progress and where you should be at this point. Your dog should standing steady to the flush and the bird flying away. You can add the sound of a blank pistol with the pistol being pointed away from you or the sound of a shotgun. It is really important that the dog is very steady to this point. Do NOT start shooting birds for your dog until they have learned what you are asking. If you have someone to train with you are also working around the bird and working on your dog standing still when the bird flies away for another dog.

By now you are allowing the dog to run free dragging a checkcord but still in full dress. Full dress is having both the pinch collar on and the e-collar. Use the e-collar to remind not to punish. Never ever ever use the e-collar on the dog while the dog is pointing and the bird scent is in their nose. This is a guaranteed way to get a dog to start flagging or worse to start to blink birds.

If you are at this level then get someone who can hit a bird. This may sound like a simple task but you would be surprised. People who are quite good at hunting can be absolutely terrible when having to hit a bird under pressure with everyone watching. I have been through more than one hunt test where the gunners have missed every bird but I digress. Allow the dog to run free and establish its own point. At that point you walk forward to flush the bird and have the gunner walk forward with you. Have someone stand on the checkcord behind the dog. The dog should be sufficiently steady to allow

everyone to get to their desired position. You should have your e-collar transmitter in your hand set on a low level ready to go.

You never want the gunner shooting over you or your dog. Always bring the gunner forward with you. Watch the wind because the bird will usually take off into the wind. Of course if you are in a gale force wind they will quickly go with the wind. That is yet another interesting hunt test story. When the bird flies have the gunner shoot the bird dead with one shot. Just the sound of the shotgun is exciting for the dog. You have introduced this already. However when there is a shot and the bird suddenly drops from the sky, a dog that has been previously 100% steady will likely forget all about it and run towards the bird. This is where timing comes in. Remember you have your assistant standing on the check cord so that dog will not self reward by getting the bird. If the dog does run forward it will be quickly stopped both by the check cord and by the nick on the neck from the e-collar. If the dog does not run forward to go after the bird then you walk forward and pick up the bird and bring it to the dog and toss it to them as a reward. Keep your finger on the e-collar and make sure the assistant does not step off the check cord. You want to establish the correct behavior.

This is very important that you do NOT allow the dog to run to the bird. Remember for every 10 birds you work around the dog gets to point ONE. For every 10 birds pointed you shoot ONE. For every 10 birds shot they get to retrieve ONE. This will eliminate the anticipation of allowing the dog to get every bird shot for them. Tossing the bird to them still gives them the reward of feathers in their mouth. These are bird dogs – they want the bird. As you toss the bird give the dog an “OKAY” or “GOOD DOG” so that they know they are doing well.

This process usually does not take very long. They pretty quickly figure it out if you are consistent what the desired behavior is and what the reward will be. Again don't overdo it – especially with a griffon. We love to see them work but at this point it is better to leave them wanting more and doing things correctly. Do not deliver failure from the jaws of success! Griffons do not do well with a high number of repetitions. Better to do it once correctly and then quit and train another day. Too many times repetitions will get the dog to do things incorrectly and now you have dug yourself a training hole.

At the same time at home you have been working with your retrieving. Hopefully by now your dog is force fetched and consistently retrieving whatever you are sending it for. Do NOT send your dog for a retrieve at this point. Make sure they are 100% in their job of standing still before sending for the retrieve. Putting the two things together too quickly can really dig a big training hole. If the dog is not fully force fetched or the dog is not fully steady can cause confusion on what the reminder is for coming from the e-collar. Don't be in a big hurry. This is the time to go slow to go fast later on.

Training with a Group?

I looked back to see when the last training article was written. I was so surprised to see that it was over a year ago! With our move to Arizona, I don't have my normal training group anymore and although it may sound really funny, living in the middle of the mountains of Arizona with Gambel's quail running around like bugs, it has become very difficult to train. This article is about the importance of finding and maintaining a good training group.

One of the things that really impressed me when I first got into the breed were the griffon owners from Quebec who got together regularly and trained together. I never realize how important that was until I tried to start to train my own dog. You need many hands and many eyes. We were so blessed when we were in Washington State that we had the location to train and wonderful people to train with. The birds were kept at our place but everyone pitched in to help on training day.

Having a team to train with means that there are lots of dogs around which means lots of confusion and noise. That is a great thing to have especially if you are going to compete. I went through the NAVDHA judging process and saw so many young dogs really get spooked when there were more people in the field with them than just their owner. They did not test to their full potential because they couldn't handle the noise. The same is true for AKC. We had horses on the place and before anyone ran a hunt test, we would hold a mock hunt test. Better to discover your problems early than to pay your \$50 and find out there. As an AKC hunt test judge, I saw numerous JH dogs that were absolutely terrified of horses – they had never seen one!

Having a regular training group is training GOLD. It is important that you find people who have similar goals and objectives to yours. Our group split into a few sub groups because some people just wanted to go hunting while others were training at the VC level. We would publish a schedule a month ahead of time and everyone knew what we would be working on. Come training day we would coordinate what everyone needed to work on – bird introduction, steadiness, backing, drags, duck search, water introduction – whatever. It is important that one person coordinates the effort or the group will stand around and debate about things all day.

The other big advantage of a training group is that you can put the puppies, the shy dogs and the dogs with issues on the stakeout chain. That has to be the most powerful piece of training equipment there is. One of our group had a dog that was terribly gun shy. We just put her on the stakeout chain and worked dog. At the end of the first session that dog had dug itself a hole and was as far away from the chain facing the opposite direction that it could be. Nobody said a word. The owner praised the dog and took it off the chain. The next week, that dog didn't dig a hole but laid so that she looked the opposite direction. Progress! The following week, she laid there and just watched. Another week and she was looking interested so the owner led her on a check cord behind the dogs that were working. The dog's desire for bird overcame her gun shyness. Now we were VERY careful to not shoot in her direction and it took time but she regained her confidence and the last I heard she and her owner were having a lovely time hunting.

That regular training group has to have a common set of values. Our group actually started after Bill Gibbons visited our ranch to do a training seminar. He showed us how to work together and work several dogs at the same time. We took his advice and voila – there was our training group. We grew from 4 people to almost 30 people were involved before we moved to Arizona. Since our move the group has broken into a couple different pieces based on interest level. We had a group of pointing labs and they have formed their own group while the versatile gun dogs came together in their own group.

Training a dog takes a village to be successful. Reach out to a couple people and start small. You may be surprised what it will build to. For me, we are blessed to have the Arizona Pointing Dog Club. They run a field trial in similar format to a NSTRA trial. For us this is perfect. It keeps my dogs tuned up and ready for hunting season. The best part is they even have a competition class that you can run with an e-collar on. After 8 months of failing MH tests before we moved and almost 2 years of not training due to the move, it took only one correction in competition and our Sara saw the light about backing in competition. In April this year, she earned her 5th MH leg. Unfortunately, the next hunt test for us isn't until September. Understand Sara will be 13 years old in October but she is still going strong. She and I are heading up for the next AZPDC trial in June. Our other blessing here is Bill Gibbons lives in Arizona. I used to think that people were crazy driving 3 hours to train with our training group and now I drive almost 4 hours to see Bill. It is worth every minute.

Remember that training should be fun and it is even more fun when you have people around you with common objectives.