

Field and Feather

The Retrieving Game

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The things we do for our dogs

When we get interested in performance events, a chain reaction seems to occur.

First, you make sure your next vehicle is big enough for the crates you need to carry. How many of us have gone to the car dealership with a crate and a tape measure? Come on, admit it!

Then, you start collecting training equipment. For obedience, it isn't quite as extensive and expensive as field, but you still have to get all the "toys" to properly train your dog.

With field training, first it is lots of bumpers and a starter pistol. Then some decoys to use on land and water. A holding blind, a training collar, a heeling stick. Then maybe a remote launcher or two. Then you need a range finder to help set up training sessions.

When the spouse gets tired of the dead birds in the house freezer, you get a small freezer just for the dogs.

Before long, you need a bird pen and supplies to care for live ducks and pigeons.

Field work requires boots and clothing for all occasions—rain suit, rubber boots, sturdy hiking boots, winter boots. I have more different types of boots than I do street shoes.

We need sun screen, bug repellent, hand wipes. A favorite hat. Maybe a tie out stake or two for days when the dogs need to drip dry before returning to their crates.

Vacations and family events are planned around the dog calendar. For the seven years I was Hunt Test secretary, my wedding anniversary was spent at the judge's dinner the night before our test.

Remodel projects are scheduled so they don't interfere with hunt test season. Flooring, cabinets and other decisions are based on whether footprints will show, how durable and washable surfaces are. One friend took a handful of Lab hair and dirt to the tile store. She placed it on numerous tile patterns until she found the one that showed the dirt and hair the least!

You develop an eye for ponds—every pond or lake you drive past gets evaluated as a potential training pond, even when you are hundreds of miles from home. You lose whatever shyness you had and knock on the doors of strangers to see if you can train on their land or pond.

The weather report becomes more important than it used to be—figuring out what days we will be able to train and what the weather will be like at the next test.

The reward? Hundreds of hours with the dogs we love, some ribbons and titles to recognize your hard work, and a set of “dog friends” you see every season. If your family doesn’t understand, your dog friends will.

Happy training!

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