

Field and Feather The Retrieving Game

©2003, Meredith Kuhn

The tools of the trade

It seems like each year I collect more and more training equipment and supplies. It is like a bad habit that keeps growing!

When I first started this game, I had six training bumpers and a whistle. They were the big, 4-inch diameter, hard-as-rock kind. I relied on the people in my training group to have the dozens of bumpers and birds needed to train successfully. Slowly I started to purchase more bumpers—the large, soft kind with air valves—and I had some dead birds on hand. My husband's initial reaction to dead birds in the freezer was not a positive one. He didn't like it one bit, and he even insisted on wearing gloves if I asked him to throw for me.

Apparently he is wearing down. Now it seems that the only thing in our freezer is dead birds! He no longer feels the need to wear gloves, although we do always carry the wet wipes in the truck for quick hand sanitation --when we remember to use them. I can't count how many times I have eaten my lunch with "duck" hands. I figure if it hasn't killed me yet, it must have bolstered my immune system.

Now I have dozens and dozens of bumpers --the small, two-inch diameter in orange and white --for yard work like "three-handed cast," "double-T," "back to the pile" and the other handling exercises. I have a starter pistol and an electronic collar. I have a long line for reeling in young dogs. I have boxes of popper shells for our shotguns. There are multiple "megawhistles" strategically placed in the glove compartment of the truck, my "dog bag" and in the kennel. Nothing worse than going out for some blinds and realizing you have no whistle --or worse yet, showing up at a test without one!

I broke down and purchased two remote controlled launchers when I no longer had a training group. They help keep my dog thinking about multiple marks when I don't have any one to train with. The launchers I have can quack, cackle like a peacock or have human voices shouting "Hey, Hey!" You can attach a human silhouette --in white or camo --to make it look like a gunner out in the field. Some people have very strong opinions about these devices and there are repros and cons of using them. But for those of us who train alone, we have to make do and this is the only way I can have multiple marks for my dogs.

I also have a pair of rechargeable two-way radios. They come in handy when my hubby is helping me train --that way I can talk to him on the radio rather than giving hand signals!

I have lots of 5-gallon white buckets used for hauling bumpers and ducks. I made a holding blind (the only sewing I have done in 20 years!). We have camo chairs, camo umbrellas and camo umbrella stands. We have tie-out stakes and leads for the dogs so they can dry off before getting back in their crates. Orange flags and orange tape are always in my dog bag, used for identifying blind locations. There is a white jacket I use when training on blinds, to make sure that the dog can always see me. Even though hunting tests require camouflaged clothing, a white jacket can be handy in training. Before you can correct a dog, you must be sure the dog saw your signal and understood it. Training with a white jacket can help ensure that your dog sees the signal.

Flexi-leads, flat collars and a slip lead are always in the dog bag too. There are a couple of duck calls and lots of shells for the starter pistol and the dummy launchers in the bag.

Don't even mention all the different types of boots I need! There are the lace-up warm-weather boots, the lace-up, rubber-foot with leather uppers insulated hunting boots, the knee-high rubber "wellies" for really wet conditions...

Then there is the assortment of pants and shirts appropriate for hunt tests. Short-sleeved, camo or dark shirts, long-sleeved dark shirts, vented hunting shirts with sleeves that convert from long to short, briar-proof hunting pants in tan and brown... you get the idea. And everyone needs a good rainsuit!

I have a dog first aid kit that is always in the truck, and a human kit too. The water jug has gone from a one-gallon jug to a large, flat jug with a spigot that can hold several gallons of water. And don't forget a bowl or bucket for the dog to drink out of.

This spring, I bought a range finder on sale. It's a neat way to see the distance of the marks and blinds you set up in training. Often it is surprising how incorrect you can be. Of course, if you are on hilly terrain, the range finder value is "as the crow flies" so the dog may be running more yards than the range finder indicates. Still, it gives you an idea of distances and what you are setting up.

What's next? Well a bird pen so I can have a steady supply of live birds would be nice... but then it would be nice to have a bird wrangler too! The resident foxes would probably finish off the birds faster than I could use them up, so for now, I will have small numbers of birds in the extra dog run where they are safe and easy to care for.

If I think about it for a while, I am sure I will think of something else I just HAVE to get!

Happy training!

##