

Training a Retriever Puppy

By Bill Hillmann

What could be more exciting than getting a brand new puppy? You have studied the bloodlines, made countless phone calls, talked to breeders, examined the consequences of genetic health issues, looked at photographs of the mothers and fathers of various litters. You have made a decision on whether you wanted a male or a female. A lot of time and effort and planning went into the project and today the new puppy is in your home, you have him, he's yours.

You've made sure you have the right puppy food, a complete assortment of puppy toys and his little dog bed. He is home. This is a very exciting day! You hold him, pet him, take him out on the front lawn and try to get him acquainted with his new surroundings. But wait a minute - what comes next? What about teaching him things he will have to know? Will I be able to train him myself? When can I start training? Will I have to send him to a professional trainer, and if I do, what should he know before he goes?

Years ago, experts were convinced that no training should begin until the puppy was a year old. The thinking was that they could have their spirit crushed and confidence ruined if early training was attempted. We know today that it is easier to start a puppy early in a very gentle way than it is to try to undo bad habits and undisciplined behavior developed by waiting too long to start the training process. So whatever age you get the puppy, that is the age to begin training.

There are three basic components to each training session:

#1 Chase something

#2 Learn to walk on a rope

#3 Learn to sit

Each day, during the training lesson these are the three things to work on.

Chasing something is what creates excitement. Start with a little squeaky toy, develop great excitement, act silly and get the puppy to go out of his skin. Try to get him to retrieve. It doesn't matter if he brings it back; just get him to chase the toy.

Next, put a small collar around his neck - just a little puppy collar - attach a very light six foot line to it and let him drag it around for a while. Then take hold of the line and get him to walk with you. Don't worry about getting him to heel, this will come much later. What is important is that he begins to learn that where you go, he is going to go. After walking on the line for a while stop and kneel down next to the puppy and start the process of teaching him to sit: hold onto his collar, push down on his rump and tell him to "sit." After you try this a few times get up and walk some more then stop and work on sit again..

Finally, grab your toy, and get silly and try to get him to go into orbit with excitement. Repeat this routine every day while trying to keep a balance between excitement and learning the sit command. Be consistent and in no time you'll have a puppy that is started well, ready to begin new commands and will already have the right attitude to learn more.

In summary, you can begin training at whatever age you get your puppy. Be kind, gentle and keep him balanced by applying in a careful way the three main principles of beginning training: chase something, walk on a line and learning to sit.

Bill Hillmann

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715 Wood Duck Lane Caldwell TX 77836

Phone: 979-567-0277

hawkeyemedia@yahoo.com