

ment is when the foot ends its forward or rearward travel and pulls or pushes off (thus propelling the dog forward) as close to the ground as possible. True, we look for good forward reach and rear drive, but it is the *endpoint* of the forward reach or rear drive where the foot hits the ground that counts. Feet that continue past this point offer no usable propulsion, so the “flying feet” represent wasted energy and are faulty.

As always, your comments are invited.

—Jeffrey G. Pepper, Salinas, Calif.;

jg.pepper@hotmail.com ♦

Labrador Retrievers



Parlor Tricks

In our household we usually teach each of our dogs a parlor trick or two. Tricks make for great public relations. The average person is far more impressed with a dog who barks on command than one who has a list of accomplishments that can't be demonstrated during a brief street encounter.

While I used to think that trick-training was primarily for the benefit of people, I am revising that opinion. I have seen how well a repertoire of tricks can work as an ice-breaker for a sensitive dog who has inhibitions about strangers. People love feeding dogs, but given the opportunity to have an animal perform tricks for them, they often go out of their way to make a connection. Success breeds success, and a reticent dog will often learn to really enjoy interacting with strangers after being taught a script they can use with comfort.

Behaviorist and author Ian Dunbar suggests that specific tricks are particularly useful for socializing. “Shake” or offering a paw is an appeasing behavior in dogs and can be used to reinforce the human's alpha status. There is also nothing like practicing a bow to get the dog in the mood for play. Many trainers also advise teaching tricks as an aid in correcting undesired behaviors, such as training *speaking* to facilitate training the negative *shush*.

One might argue that trick training



detracts from time one could spend working on “serious,” competition-oriented drills. However, dogs don't know that tricks aren't competition lessons; they just know that they are a means to a treat or praise. Since tricks are usually simple to teach, they make great mind games for a dog who is not ready for more exacting lessons. Trick training addresses the very important matter of the dog's “learning how to learn,” without the danger of getting either party too frustrated. These mind games are also fabulous for a dog who is on restricted exercise. A dog who is forced to go cold turkey from his regular exercise can still get the stimulation he is used to through low-impact tricks.

Many conformation exhibitors refuse to train in obedience for fear their dog will sit in the conformation ring, and the same thought process leaves some performance competitors reluctant to add tricks to their dog's repertoire. Indeed, it is easy to see how a dog might offer a trick at an inappropriate time in competition in a desperate attempt to relieve tension. There have been some pretty charming behaviors offered in the heat of the moment in the obedience ring and on the pause table during agility trials! Of course, the way to avoid such confusion is with thorough training. Serious competitors can also refuse to work on tricks when they are working competition exercises.

However, by doing so, they miss out on the great tension-relief that familiar and simple tricks offer.

Lastly, parlor tricks are a superb way to increase dog tolerance within the family. I am sharing our new puppy with my 8-year-old daughter. I have charged her with all the trick-training and do the more competition-oriented work myself. She delights in showing off the tricks to her friends, who immediately want to experiment with the tricks themselves. I don't have to interfere. They aren't going to ruin any of the “important” work, but they can still experience the rapport with dogs that we are all seeking. —Lee Foote, Seattle, Wash.; thelabradorclub.com ♦

Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retrievers

Tolling With a Toller

Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever is sure an unwieldy name for a spritely little dog. It's ironic that the littlest of the retrieving breeds has such a long name. The name is sort of a reflection of the breed's versatility. When it was chosen, folks wanted to emphasize the breed's uniqueness with respect to the other retrieving breeds. This is more than just a retrieving breed from Nova Scotia; the little package comes with a little something extra. They *toll*.

Huh? What exactly is this tolling business, anyway? *Tolling*, in this case, means enticing or luring game to



approach. From a hidden location, usually a duck-blind or cover of some sort, the hunter encourages the dog to play fetch in plain view of rafting ducks. The ducks get curious and then swim in closer to investigate the dog's animated actions. The dog is expected to ignore the birds and continue fetching. When the birds are within gun range, the hunter will stand, and as the birds attempt to fly off, shots will be fired. Hopefully, birds will then fall and the dog will be sent out to fetch the downed game.

What? Tolling is just playing fetch? In a manner of speaking, yes, that's what it is. But the business of tolling is a little more complicated than that when it comes to passing a field test. The U.S. club's field-test regulations describe tolling this way:

The tolling retrieve is not necessarily a direct retrieve, and the dog may momentarily stop and play with the tolling object. Occasionally the dog may lose the object, which is acceptable, and the handler may throw a different object ... It is equally acceptable for the dog to make a more conventional direct retrieve without penalty.

The Basic Retrieving and Tolling test, or BRT, serves as a really good introduction to tolling. This test is an instinct test,

which also serves as an additional requirement to qualify dogs for a NSDTRC(US) club championship, in conjunction with the AKC conformation title.

For the BRT, a non-titling field test, the tolling component occurs between the land-retrieve series and the water-retrieve series. What happens is the dog goes from two short retrieves of birds on land, to six short tolling retrieves, fetching an object of some sort along the shore, to two short retrieves of birds in the water.

This is an instinct test, but that doesn't mean that pups can pass this test without some training. Sometimes the birdier dogs will fail this test—not because they won't retrieve birds, but because they won't toll. Sometimes when a really birdy dog knows that birds are available for fetching, he doesn't want to perform the tolling part of the test.

To a non-Toller owner, tolling would seem to be the easiest part of this particular test. After all, it's just fetching a toy or a stick. However, for some dogs, focusing on a tolling object after the joy of fetching a bird can be very difficult.

—Phyllis McDonald, Tyrone, N.M.;
tollerphyllis@comcast.net ♦

English Setters



Diversity, the Spice of Life

What if dogs did not exist, and we decided to invent them for the very first time? What would we create? The most convenient dog for today's busy world might be one who does not need a lot of land to exercise on, does not require a lot of grooming, and just wants to watch TV on our lap—but how boring it would be if all dogs were bred for this “convenience” standard.

Most historians agree that something like 10,000 years ago, dogs evolved from “friendlier” wolves that scavenged around human camps. Over the ensuing millennia, humans practiced selective breeding to isolate and intensify specific, useful wolf behaviors that benefited humans, while reducing or eliminating other behaviors, such as attacking. Breeds of dog were developed that could hunt, flush, and retrieve birds, but not eat them; find, by

sight or scent, and chase down speedy mammals, but not kill them; herd or guard livestock; pull carts or sleds; and perform other specialized tasks.

English Setters were originally developed to locate upland game birds, hold them in their position, and bring them back to the hunter (rather than “stealing” the bird). Developed to work in colder climates, English Setters have long, protective hair and furnishings. Hunting upland game birds requires a medium-sized, fast dog to cover sufficient ground to find the birds, a trainable dog who will hold a point, a tractable dog who will be steady to wing and shot, and a dog having a fairly large mouth with squared flews so as to hold the bird softly while retrieving.



The trainability and intelligence of English Setters transfer nicely to activities other than hunting. The breed's ancestors must have been mellow and affectionate, because those traits are innate in modern-day English Setters, but fixing these traits was probably not the main goal of breed developers.

These days, hunting is mostly done for sport, if at all. We have furnaces, so we don't need long hair on our dogs to keep them (or us) warm on “three-dog nights.” A small rather than a medium-sized dog fits better into today's more crowded world, especially when we travel.

As for so many breeds, the original purpose of the English Setter is no longer crucial to society's survival. Some traits that support that purpose, like the long coat, large, saliva-flinging flews, bird drive, and need for exercise, are somewhat inconvenient in today's world.

English Setters don't know bird hunting is no longer job one. It's a testament to their resilient nature that they have adapted so well to a world where hunting is not their main function.

We who breed and own English Setters love everything about them. Their looks, including their skeletal structure, size, head shape, and coat, are directly evolved from their origin as bird dogs. We wouldn't

change anything about them, even if we now buy chickens at the supermarket instead of serving wild quail on the dinner table.

As with people, diversity in dogs is the spice of life. Though society has changed drastically since breeds of dogs were first developed, the breeds still demonstrate the genetic coding that was established by their original function. Would you change that? I certainly wouldn't! As breeders, we treasure those wonderful people who appreciate the unique character of our breed and want an English Setter to love (and to love them), just the way it is. —Jill Warren, Santa Fe, N.M.;
Esthete.es@comcast.net ♦

Gordon Setters



Diagnostic Testing: How Much Do We Really Know?

“Clear, no cancer—great news!” said the vet's voice on my answering machine. “The needle biopsies were negative.”

Multiple needle-biopsies, as many as four, on each of her mammary tumors, had been done on my 11-year-old bitch. She had had similar benign tumors on the right mammary chain removed years ago; I was hopeful that the newly growing tumors on the left side would be similarly benign. I was trying every noninvasive diagnostic test available to determine whether these tumors were cancerous. Putting her under anesthesia to take an actual biopsy seemed dangerous. (With any diagnostic procedure, including the

needle biopsy, you run the risk of spreading cancer cells.)

My vet and I had been monitoring these



tumors for years. They remained small. Then suddenly they started growing, and one blossomed, seemingly overnight, into a huge, angry abscess.

My bitch had also been on Palladia, the new oral chemo drug for mast-cell tumors, for about a year because of a mast-cell tumor in her mouth. For this