

LITTLE RIVER TOLLING DOGS

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catching it, grovelling on the ground with it, in fact doing all sorts of stunts. I could see he was conscious of the ducks on the water but he made not a sound. It was a fine exhibition for a young dog to make.

Shortly, the ducks began to move slowly towards the shore. First, a couple of birds put their heads up and started towards us. Then more of them became interested and gradually the whole flock seemed to be moving our way in wedge formation, with the apex pointing towards the blind. It may have been an illusion, but the speed seemed to increase as the flock drew nearer to us. In a few minutes they were within gunshot and now came the real test of the dog's steadiness. A wrong movement would have put those quackers in the air at any second and any hopes of a good shot would be destroyed. Rodney had done his work thoroughly, however, and his little red dog gave a fine exhibition of what breeding and training will do for a dog.

Rodney gave me a nudge and whispered "take two on your side of the flock when they rise." Then as we stood up, the birds rose with a rush and roar of wings that was confusing. I just stood there with eyes glued to the centre of that wild scramble to reach a point of safety until the crack of Rodney's gun brought me out of the trance. It was almost too late to get a shot in, but I managed to line up on a single just clear of the main body and was lucky enough to centre it. Rodney had taken both of his birds with a right and left. We could easily have had a back load by shooting into the flock while it was in mass formation on the water or as

they rose into the air, but we were out for sport, not slaughter.

During the time the pup was tolling the ducks, and until she was given the order to fetch, the bitch was a picture. Ears up, eyes snapping, and every muscle of her body aquiver, yet she made no move to go out there and show that impudent pup how birds should be brought to the gun. But when the word was given, she was out of the blind like a shot and hit the water with a speed that caused water to fly in every direction. She and the pup each brought their birds in handily and delivered as all good retrievers should.

Five times during the early morning ducks came in from the salt water or were driven out of some other lake by gunners and made a set. Each time after the birds had been given a resting spell one or the other of the dogs was put out to toll. Each time the ducks came sooner or later to the dog. Once they were very slow in getting started, but when they did start, they came with a rush as a needle will jump to a powerful magnet.

We had ducks enough after the third visit, and shot no more. But we could not get tired of seeing the almost human understanding shown by the dogs in the course of tolling. The bitch in particular would work fast or slow according to the action of the ducks, and never once failed to bring the birds in close. One time she had a flock within ten or fifteen feet of the shore line.

The man who has had the pleasure of shooting ducks over a Little River Tolling dog, still has a thrill to experience and the man who has had that sport always wants to do it again.