

## HOW TO TRAIN FOR NOVICE LEVEL POINTING TESTS

By Elena Smith Lamberson

Take pup, wearing a flat buckle collar, into a large low cut field (obviously, I am talking about a safe place with no traffic). You use a low cut field because young pups will not run in heavy cover. They will run ahead and range better in low cut fields. We will start with the **FORMAL CAST OFF**. Hold him by the back of his collar and EXCITEDLY ASK "ARE YOU READY, HUH, ARE YOU READY, BOY (GIRL) ??? READY TO FIND THOSE BIRDS???" They; beep your Acme Thunderer whistle - TWO QUICK BEEPS means RUN! there are BIRDS out there!! Then you and the pup take off running and continue at a brisk pace for about 15 minutes (shorter for younger pups). Practice these walks in low cut fields so that the pup gets used to RUNNING AHEAD OF YOU when you give your "beep-beep" signal.

***DURING THE RUNS, DO NOT CALL PUP BACK TO YOU AND DO NOT TALK TO PUP WHILE HE IS HUNTING. WHEN HE COMES BACK TO YOU, GRAB HIM BY THE COLLAR AND GIVE HIM A FORMAL CAST OFF AGAIN. DO NOT PRAISE HIM OR SPEAK TO HIM WHEN HE COMES BACK TO YOU. YOU WANT HIS ENTIRE INTEREST TO BE FOCUSED AHEAD OF YOU HUNTING YOU WANT HIM TO RANGE OUT IN FRONT AND HUNT OBJECTIVES.***

We end these happy walks with the **FORMAL PICK UP**. Using multiple quick beeps with your Whistle, kneel down, call pup to you and snap his lead on his collar. Praise him and go back to the car.

The next step is to purchase 5-10 quail - the best are FLIGHT CONDITIONED BOB WHITE QUAIL. Quail breeders can be found by asking at your local feed and seed stores; quail generally cost about \$3.50 each. Later, you should practice with another person and their dog. However, in the first few lessons, run the dogs separately so that they direct their interest to finding birds and not on each other. This is NOT play time. You will find that after they catch on to the routine and are finding birds, they will be far more interested in birds than in each other and you can then run them as a brace. Remember to try to keep your dogs separated and working independently from the other dog.

You want to use flight conditioned quail because you want them to FLY when the pup finds them. Just forget trying to use them more than once. Before you take pup out of the car let him smell a live quail. Tease him with the bird briefly and say "BIRD,BIRD". Just enough to get his interest sparked. Do NOT let him jump around and snatch the bird out of your hand. Leave pup in the car and walk your usual course, with a burlap bag holding the live quail. Dizzy each quail by tucking his head under a wing and swinging your arm around about 10 times to put him to sleep. Then gently place the quail in brush along the EDGE of the field or within hedgerows or dried grass clumps. Do not plant quail in the middle of an open field. Quail do not stay out in the open because of hawks. However, if there is a nice clump of bushes/dry grass in the middle of the field you can plant one there.

I like to do two sessions of maybe 3-5 birds each. Let pup rest and get some water and think about what he just experienced. After about 30 min, go out and plant your birds again IN THE SAME SPOT. Pup will remember that spot and will go looking for his bird there. Once he does this, next time find different places. I also like to use bright orange surveyor tape to remind me exactly where I planted the bird so I can maneuver him into the right wind conditions (downwind from the bird).

When all the quail are planted, go back to your pup and start your walk with your FORMAL CAST OFF whistle signal "beep-beep." When he finds the first bird, give him lots of praise and encourage him to chase the bird and sniff where the bird was sitting. Then praise him. Give him the Beep Beep and cast off again, and each time after he finds a bird, formally cast him off again with your whistle. The point is now to ASSOCIATE THE WHISTLE WITH FINDING BIRDS. Eventually, he will discover that in order for him to be able to get close to the bird, he must slow down and creep/point the bird when he strikes scent or the bird will flyaway! Note here: if you use birds that will not fly, or fly poorly, your dog will learn immediately that he can catch them and there is no need to slow down and point (he ain't dumb!)

After he has found, chased, caught, or pointed all the quail, run him a little longer and then use your whistle for your FORMAL PICK UP. Snap a lead on his collar, praise him to the heavens and go back to the car. Forget trying to catch the quail, unless you have a quail recall pen. DO NOT WEAR HIM OUT. ESPECIALLY WITH PUPS - KEEP THE HAPPY TIMING TO NO MORE THAN ABOUT 30 MINUTES (YOUNG PUPPIES NO MORE THAN 15 MINUTES). You should be stopping just as his interest is at it's highest!

Introducing gun fire is an important step. Indiscriminate use of gunfire to a novice dog may ruin him for life by making him gunshy. ALL GUNSHYNESS IS MAN MADE. IT IS NOT INHERITED. Use a blank .22 pistol. At a good distance from your pup, and while he is running ahead of you, fire the pistol BEHIND YOUR BACK AND POINTED TO THE GROUND. If he stops and looks back to you, ignore him and continue as if nothing happened. Repeat several times. After a couple of times he will also ignore the gunfire. Then, begin firing after he chases a bird. Each time use lots of praise when he finds/and or chases a bird. He will eventually begin to associate finding a bird with gunfire and love the sound of a gun.

At this point in his training, remember, NEVER PUNISH OR SCOLD YOUR DOG when he is making bird contact. If he catches the bird, eats the bird or whatever, do not scold him. Just try to do better next time. He should always be praised under all circumstances whenever he makes contact with birds. If he catches the bird, encourage him to bring it to you, GENTLY take it from his mouth, praise him, place it in your pocket and start another FORMAL CAST OFF, directing his attention to finding another bird and forgetting the one he just caught.

Whistle commands are very useful because dogs often cannot hear you when they are out in the field a distance from you. But, they can hear your whistle. The sound of your whistle can be recognized by your dog.

Here are some common whistle commands:

two short beeps – GO find those birds!

one short beep – I am turning – look at me to see where I am going

one long blast – STOP DOING THAT! (bumping another dog, rolling in deer poop, etc)

multiple short beeps – come to me

Whatever whistle commands you decide on, you MUST be consistent so that your pup will understand what you mean.

A few of these practice sessions will prepare your dog for the AKC Hunting tests and he will pass will flying colors - or NSD and qualify for a "leg" plus win a beautiful blue ribbon or an orange rosette!

The Weimaraner Club of America is your national Club and has about 40 local clubs all over the nation. Visit the WCA at [www.weimclubamerica.org](http://www.weimclubamerica.org) and click on Local Clubs. Find a Weimaraner Club closest to you and join it. All clubs need help, so please volunteer to help at all field events.