

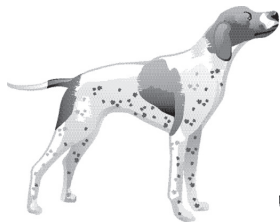


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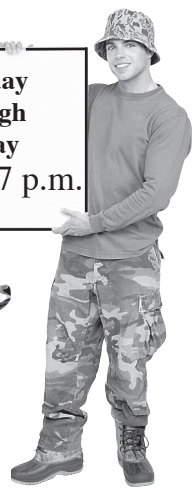
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J.J., a hunting dog owned by Melvin Crow, obeyed a "hold" command from one of the 31 young people who participated in the sixth annual Youth Skills Day at the Randy Bellamy farm south of Goodland this fall.

— Photo by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

Dogs still trained to hunt alongside owners

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
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The history of hunting dogs can be traced back for centuries, and it's believed that the first hunters to use dogs probably trained some type of domesticated wolf.

Articlesbase, an online information directory, says dogs are capable of tracking and finding prey, and when well trained they can let the hunter without alerting the prey.

Melvin Crow of Goodland says he trains all kinds of hunting dogs to carry out prescribed duties for their master. Crow says the best time to start training is with a 6-month-old puppy.

"Actually, as soon as a puppy is able to run around and play and carry things in its mouth is a good time to begin," he said.

He said the No. 1 most important thing to teach the puppy is obedience and to be on a leash.

"They need to learn 'whoa' in the beginning, too," he said, "and can catch on to that command in about seven to 10 days," Crow said. "Whoa actually teaches them to stand still and point."

Crow said he has 10 training fields, all with different cover for upland game birds such as quail, prairie chicken and partridge, plus pheasants.

He said training a dog typically will cost from \$1,100 to \$1,500, as compared to buying a "finished" hunting dog that will run around \$2,500 to \$3,500, so it's less out of pocket to have a puppy to train.

He said he likes most breeds, and has trained a variety. German shorthaired pointers and pointing labs are two he works with a lot, even though he has trained beagles, brittanies and many others.

He encourages owners who want their dog to retrieve to play fetch. He said the more fetch you play, the better the dog will return what he has in his mouth, and to always have the puppy return what he's carrying to the owner's hand.

Crow said it creates a bad habit if you let the puppy drop the object before putting it in your hand.

"If the dog were to drop a bird," he said, "the bird might fly off, so encourage puppies to bring you their toys."

He said dogs that are perceived to be gun shy are victims of a man-made trait. They are not born that way, he said, adding that about 70 percent of them can be fixed.

"Come" is an important command, too," Crow said. "If a dog won't come when you say to, then they're not ready to go to the field."

"Dogs need boundaries, and when they're given a command to come, it doesn't mean to stop and chew on something en route."

Crow said pheasant numbers are good for the fall hunting season, the cover is good, and it's fun and less work to hunt with a good dog.

Dogs have played an important role in the development of hunting history, and any avid hunter has his favorite loyal dog to take with him to the field.

Different breeds do different tasks. Pointers or "setters" stand still and assume a pointing posture when they encounter a flock of birds. Retrievers can be trained to swim into the water or run across the land to find birds or other small prey after they have been killed and carry them back to the hunter, and they do it without mangling or eating the prey. Beagles are fast and are known for hunting foxes, especially for royalty. Even the basset, one of the most calm and relaxed dog breeds, was bred to be a hunter, with his strong short legs and its keen ability to sniff out and dig for badgers.

A dog has long been thought of as man's best friend, and whether its hunting, or pleasure, dogs are considered by some as being next to human. However, they don't appear at the top of the list of favorites for commonly owned pets. Cats head that list, fish are second, with dogs filling the No. 3 spot according to Answers.com.

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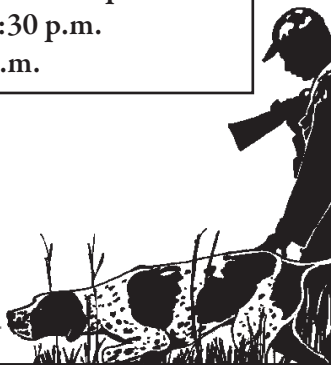
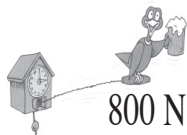
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Melvin Crow let his hunting dog, Mickey, sniff his gun while out in the field (above). The Crow's hunting dog J.J. (below) took point during a quail hunt.

— Photos by Julie Crow



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