

# Trainer boards, teaches hunting dogs

By Karen Krien

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On the Cheyenne-Sherman county line is Ringneck Country, the home of Rex and Sandi Murray, but better known for holding Kansas State Pheasant Championship hunting tournaments, as well as holding the National Upland Classic Series for National Kennel Club.

The Murray farm also is home for about 50 dogs each year who are boarded and trained by Rex. While he raises vizsla dogs — a red breed imported from Europe — he trains all breeds to hunt and even sold a couple of dogs that were going to a Texas elementary classroom.

"I have never met a 'bad' dog, but some are better than others," he says.

His love for each dog is evident as, even after several years, the dog recognizes him and works for him in the field just like the day it did when it left the Murray farm.

Murray said he never hunted without a dog. He traded a hog for his first vizsla and, from that dog, has raised many to sell and train.

He has been training for about 25 years

When the owner brings his dog to Murray, he said, he determines just what the customer wants — obedience or training to hunt.

The dogs can be at the farm anywhere from 30 to 60 days. Some stay much longer, depending on how extensive the training is.

Murray said he works 10 to 20 dogs each day. If he is on the road to a hunting competition, he takes the dogs with him in a special trailer or a dog carrier on the back of his pickup truck.

Trips take him much longer this way, as he and his wife stop to exercise the dogs and, often while competing, Murray uses one of the dogs he is training.

He says winning isn't as important as the competition, but it is a chance to work and show the dogs.

The exposure at the shows pays off, he said, as he has dogs he has raised as well as trained in most of the states and two foreign countries.

Murray likes the dogs to come to him at 10 months but he will take them at any age. He said he prefers high-energy dogs.

It takes two to seven days to bond with the dog and earn its trust, he said.

Then training begins with exposure to the gun and game birds. The dogs are trained with live birds year around, but he finds it more difficult to train in the summer because of the heat.

The owner may want his dog to be trained to flush a bird, point and hold steady to flush.

Flushing training is the easiest, he said, with pointing and holding the point becoming increasingly more difficult, but Murray says most dogs can be taught to hunt.

Holding the point may seem difficult, but even more difficult is training the dog, when there are two, three or four hunting, to stand back when the first dog points the bird. This is called "honoring" a point.

If the customer wants, Murray can teach the dog "steady" to wing and shot, when the dog stays until he is told to retrieve the bird.

"Hunting dead" training teaches the dog to downed game. Dogs are taught to watch hand



Thumbs up! Rex Murray had only good things to say after working this dog in a recent tournament. — Photo by Sandi Murray

signals, and when there is more than one bird down, it will go for the first bird, then the hunter will blow a whistle and direct the dog to the area of the next bird.

He trains the dog to "the quarter," where it works a certain pattern at a specified distance in front of the hunter. The dog's job is to flush out the game.

When the hunter gives the command, the dog goes to the area it is directed.

"Quartering" depends on the type of game and the terrain, he said. Pheasants run off while quail will sit and the dog will need to go farther to find game.

The final training, when the dog's owner personally works with the dog with Murray's help, is video taped for later use.

The customer usually visits to watch the training but Murray said there are times when he never sees the customer and they are able to work with the dog with the video.

"If a dog has a problem, it can generally be fixed," Murray said.

He said most problems are "man made," where a dog has been frightened by the gun or has been hurt.

"Sometimes these problems take the longest to fix," he said.

Murray said he owns about 15 dogs and they are not for sale. However, he does sell two to three litters of eight to 10 pups a year. He now has four generations of vizslas alive on the farm, which he said is unusual, and he uses that as a testimony to the health and good genetics of the dogs

He said he has dogs in 40 states and three foreign countries, Canada, Costa Rica and Holland.

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