



New Column: Notes From the Field

This month we start a new offering for our NAVHDA readers, hopefully we can bring helpful information, tips and ideas submitted by successful NAVHDA handlers. These gracious members freely share their ideas and methods they have found to be successful with the caution that every dog is different and for every rule there is an exception. Take a look at what these people have to say and see if you or your dog could benefit from some of the ideas listed below.

Training the NAVHDA Way: A New Pup

This month we are pleased to present the information provided by two of NAVHDA's more successful handlers who are also professional dog trainers. Each was asked for a short background biography and their thoughts and answers to these three questions about puppies.

Question 1. When or at what age do you introduce commands to a new pup?

Question 2. What is the first thing that you try to teach a new pup?

Question 3. What "tool" do you think is most important in puppy training?

Our first featured trainer this month is Tracy Harmeyer of Cedar Grove, Wisconsin.

Tracy and her family are prominent supporters of NAVHDA, the Wisconsin Chapters, and the Small Munsterlander Club of North America. Tracy has been a NAVHDA Judge for 15 years and a "full time" professional trainer since 2000. She told me "I did not seriously consider training dogs for a living until I was introduced to NAVHDA and learned "the NAVHDA way" of training dogs. It simplifies things and breaks each thing down into small steps, like putting a puzzle together, one piece at a time. Of all the dogs I have had the pleasure to train, my heart lies with the versatile breeds.

Our other featured trainer this month is Alan Burkhart of Byron, New York.

Alan Burkhart has been a training NAVHDA dogs for over 30 years and has been a professional trainer for the last 15 years and is a consistent presence at each Invitational. Alan not only breeds some fine shorthairs, he is dutiful about his support of NAVHDA. His wife Kim has been the Test Secretary for two Invitationals and currently has accepted the position of editor of the NAVHDA monthly magazine, the *VHD*.

When first meeting Alan Burkhart you see a tall suntanned quiet man, his eyes shielded by dark glasses. Behind this reserved appearance of a Secret Service agent is a thoughtful man, quietly watching all that is around him taking in every detail. Taking it all in so that when the time comes for action his movements can be swift and sure, but most of all correct. I was introduced to Alan by some mutual friends, and was then impressed by this kind and giving gentleman hidden behind the dark glasses.



Tracy Harmeyer and Java's Krystal Creek
TTMarie at the 2004 Invitational.
PHOTO ROCA © 2008

Introductions out of the way now we proceed to the answers:

Question 1. When (how soon or at what age) do you introduce commands to a new puppy?

Tracy: As soon as the pup learns it's name (about 9 or 10 weeks), I start to teach it whoa at the food dish. Hold the pup back as you put the food dish down. Put one hand between the front legs and one hand between the back legs, gently pick up the puppy, set back down and say whoa in a gentle voice. Try to drop the hand between the front legs. If the pup moves, put the hand back between the front legs, gently pick up, set down and say whoa. If you can drop the hand between the front legs, then try to drop the hand between the back legs. If the pup will stand there for three seconds then I release with a tap on the head, sometimes I have to shake the food dish to entice the pup to move. I start increasing the time that they whoa, until finally I can come



Alan Burkhart and Skylar Burgess
at a Junior Handler Clinic.

with the dish, hold my hand up, say whoa, put the dish down, walk to dog and tap on the head to release. Then I can take the whoa command and use it before going out the door, out to the yard, etc... The pup never remembers a time in its life when it did not know whoa.

Alan: "I would say 4 or 5 months" but each dog is an individual and as such you need to put your "schedule" aside and observe the dog and let it show you when it is ready. Too many people want to push a young dog too soon and that can cause problems later on. Alan believes that it is normal for a young pup to stay close (indicating a lack of confidence) but when a pup "starts to get out" on his own and starts to display some "independence" that is when he would start commands.

Question 2. What is the first thing that you try to teach a new pup?

Tracy: Besides teaching a pup to whoa, it is important to teach the pup not to be the leader. The human is always the leader. This is an easier lesson to teach at 9 or 10 weeks than when the pup is 6 to 9 months of age. It is easy to hold a puppy down, it is not so easy to make them stay in a submissive position when you let go. The object to the way I teach dominance is to do what the mother does. Put the pup down on its side with head down, try to release the pressure and take your hand off the pup's neck. If the pup tries to pick up its head, put your hand back on its neck and push down. Keep repeating this until you can take your hand off the pup's neck and it stays with its head down. The pup can get up when you walk away. Just like with whoa at the food dish, typically the first time you try this exercise it may take up to a half an hour. Each time you do the exercise compliance from the puppy will happen faster and faster.

Alan: "I like to teach sit first. Sit helps me gain control. From this foundation of 'sit' I (with the help of the long lead attached to a flat collar) can back away and progress to sit, stay. So 'sit leads to stay'. Sit also stops the pup from jumping. I introduce 'sit' on the

ground as well as the training table." This elementary command gives Alan the basis of control he needs when he progresses to the training table for the forced retrieve training.

Question 3. What "tool" do you think is most important in puppy training?

Tracy: The most important tool is a check cord and a strap collar (not an e-collar). I will use a check cord made from lighter rope, so it is easier for the pup to drag it through the grass. I like to use a collar with a buckle on it, as opposed to the quick release collars with the plastic clip. My corrections are always a jerk and release on the check cord, never steady pressure. Some pups need more persuasion than others and a collar with a plastic clip can accidentally release. The pup can do what ever it wants, but if I don't get compliance I will keep up with the jerk and release until my demands are met. Between each jerk and release I will repeat the command. I don't add the e-collar until the pup knows the command I want to use the e-collar on. There is no right or wrong way to dog train. The techniques that I have explained work good for me.

Alan: When Alan answered question 3, he broke the question down into two parts, part A physical tools and part B operational and procedural tools. Part A, Alan's main piece of training equipment (tool) is a 70' long flat lead he calls a long lead and he always attaches it to the dog's flat collar as a means of physical control of the dog. Some call this "the point of contact" but no matter what you call it these have to be a "connection" between the handler and the dog so he can guide the pup towards success. Part B, operational or procedural tools, for Alan they are all combined in one word and process, repetition. Alan trains pointing breeds, retrievers and flushing breeds and is adamant that without consistency, observations, reading and understanding the dog, training cannot progress. For a dog to achieve the level or accomplishment necessary, "repetition is the key to training a NAVHDA dog through all levels of the training process."

Editor's note: If you have training questions you would like to have answered or suggestions to improve the content of your magazine, you may contact me Richard Biby, 918/671-3169 or email your comment to the NAVHDA central office at navoffice.navhda.org or directly to me at bibyinc@hotmail.com.