

Retriever Training: Do You Need A Pro? What To Expect



By Debra Folsom

As printed in
Waterfowl Magazine

December / January
1991-92

Dog training manuals seem to leave the novice hanging when the training session doesn't go as it should. When your otherwise adorable pup decides the water is too cold to retrieve in today, or that pressed duck is a much tastier meal than dog chow, the idea of consulting a professional, usually comes to mind. Many retrievers are star pupils in the back yard retrieving plastic dummies, but when turned loose in the field with real feathers, real guns and plenty of room to range, they simply run amuck!

The best time to consider consulting a professional is when your retriever is a pup, and not yet developed bad habits. Often a professional can advise you on what your early training sessions should consist of, and address some of the problems you may be having. He can give you a realistic idea of what rate of progress you should expect.

Ideally, we like to get dogs in for training at the age between four and six months for our puppy head start program, and at six to seven months for regular training. That doesn't mean that older dogs, are too old to train. Dogs are easier to train when they are young and more adaptable to new situations and people. It is easier to instill good behavior initially, rather than try to correct already learned, bad behavior and habits. Whether you have a youngster that you would like to properly prepare for training or an older dog with problems, chances are a professional will be able to help



A professional can advise you on what your early training sessions should consist of and address some of the problems.

Retriever Training: Do You Need A Pro? What To Expect

Try to locate a trainer that specializes in retrievers. Give him a call and ask if he could send a brochure or explain his training program to you. You will need to know the vaccination requirements for kennel admittance, and whether or not it is located in a heartworm area, where your dog will need to be on preventative medication during his stay. If the kennel is a long distance away it may be more feasible to ship the dog via airfreight rather than drive him up. Inquire about which airlines service the area, and make the arrangements for shipping and pick up at the airport. If the trainer is within driving distance, set up an appointment to meet him and see the training, and kennel facilities. Take your dog along with his shot records, as you may decide to leave him for training if he is ready, and you like what you see.

A basic level training course usually takes two to four months. Don't expect hand signals in under six months, and that is only if your dog is capable of this more advanced level of training. Many dogs are not. Expect to pay \$550.00 to \$ 750.00 per month for a reputable trainer. The kennel facility should be clean and the dogs healthy looking. A retriever trainer should have bird pens stocked with a good supply of ducks and pigeons or some other game bird that can be used for upland work, if that is to be covered. Ask for a step by step run down of what will be covered during the training period. If your dog is not making satisfactory progress, at what point will you be notified? It would be very disappointing to have a dog in training for four months, if he was not going to make a satisfactory hunting dog upon completion.

Ask the trainer when you will be allowed to visit or call for progress reports. What kind of instruction will you be given on how to work your dog when he is trained? We prefer the owners to leave the dog with us for a month before they come to visit, so that the dog can adjust to us and the new surroundings. Be sure that you make an appointment to visit so the trainer will be there, and allot time to work with you and your dog. Most trainers have irregular schedules due to kennel duties, unexpected trips to the vet etc. If you show up unannounced, you may be surprised to find a locked gate and no one around.

Most trainers will require part of their fees in advance and/or will bill monthly. Sometimes birds are billed extra in addition to the monthly training fee. Expect to pay for medications and veterinary expenses your dog may require during his stay at the kennel. Most kennels will require you to verify the vaccinations your dog has had and sign a release of liability for accidental injury, or death of the dog, during his stay at the kennel.

Professional, retriever trainers often have a few, fully trained shooting dogs available, ready to go hunting. If you don't want to go through the puppy stage and need a dog to hunt right away, this may be the best choice for you. Many trainers also breed good, field quality retriever pups and offer them for sale or can direct you to a breeder. Besides field training, many pros offer boarding, obedience training, field conditioning and stud service. Its best to locate a Pro before you need one. Most dog pros are friendly, informative people that can provide a wealth of sound advice and information, to help you with your retriever needs.