

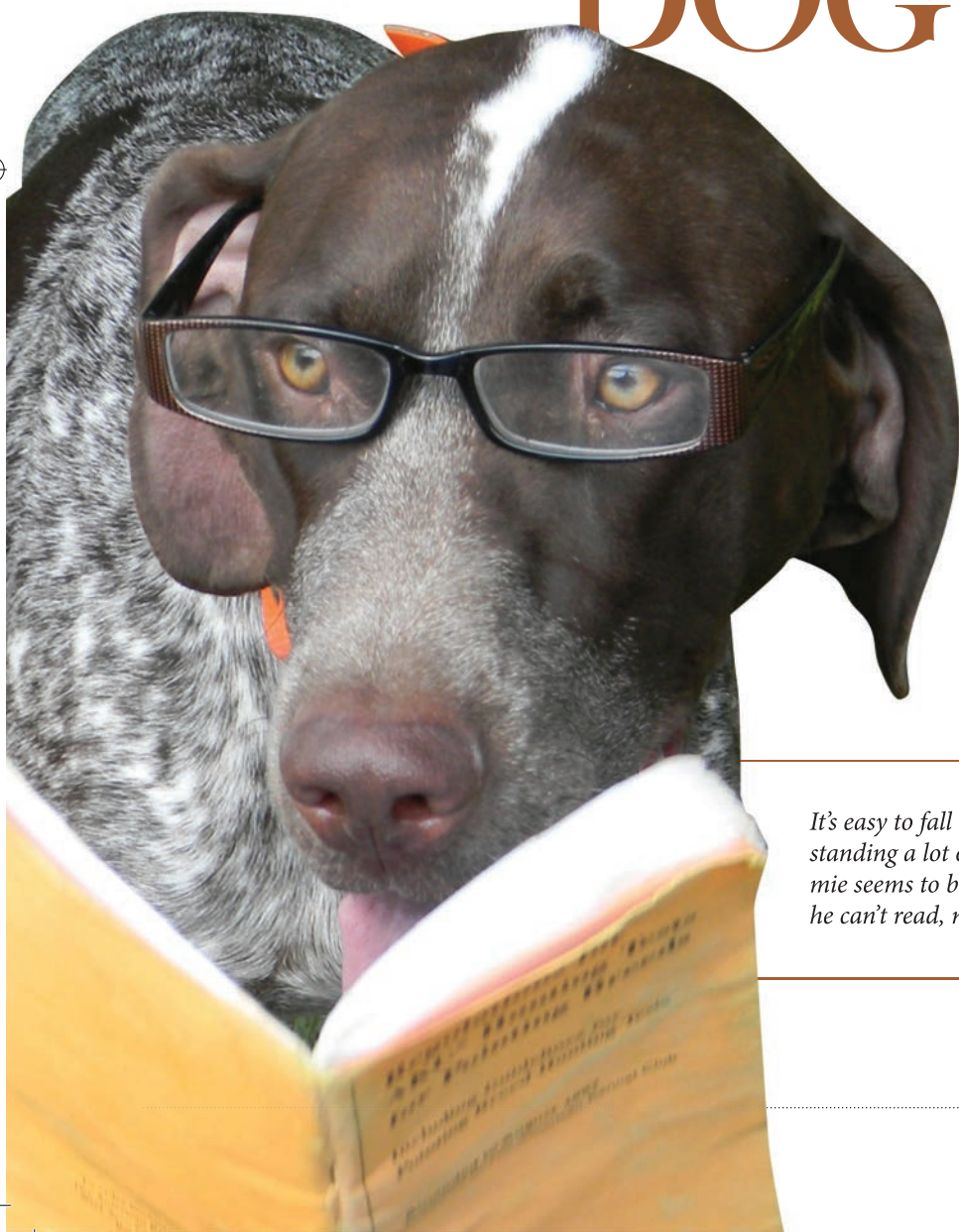
Purely Dogs

By BOB WEST AND LISA PRICE

DOG SPEAK

WHEN IT COMES TO DOG TRAINING, BOB AND I AGREE THAT IT'S WRONG TO CONFER MOST HUMAN EMOTIONS TO OUR DOGS. FOR EXAMPLE, A DOG DOESN'T TEAR UP A CRATE PAD TO "GET EVEN" WITH THE OWNER FOR REQUIRING CRATE TIME. DOGS MAY DESTROY CRATE PADS OUT OF FRUSTRATION, BUT THEY DON'T CARRY IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL OF THINKING, WHICH IS "NOW THEY'LL BE SORRY THEY PUT ME IN HERE."

It's easy to fall into the trap of believing our dogs are capable of understanding a lot of language. Here the German shorthaired pointer Jamie seems to be reading about the AKC rules for hunt tests. Of course, he can't read, nor can he understand complicated spoken sentences.



If we think a dog has the mental capacity to plan revenge, we are overthinking things. And although we shouldn't confer human emotions to our dogs, teaching a dog does have its comparisons to teaching children.

Recently in the Sunday newspaper, I read an interesting parenting column that I think illustrates this. A parent wrote to the columnist with this question: "What suggestions do you have for disciplining a 7-year-old girl who argues with every single thing her parents say?"

The columnist responded: "I don't have any suggestions, but I have a solution. Children argue because parents explain. Giving explanations is an example of bad advice from parenting experts. When the child whines, 'Why?', you should answer with, 'Because I said so.'"

Here's a scene I witnessed at a training session: A bunch of us had parked together, and many dogs were crated in the backs of trucks and SUVs. Six of the dogs, German shorthaired pointers, were from the same litter.

Two of them, owned by the same man, turned maniacal whenever they remained crated and other dogs and owners headed afield, to the point where conversation was impossible near the parking area. Even with hundreds of yards between us, we could still hear them yelping.

Each time we returned, the dogs' owner would walk to the back of his truck and say something like this, and I am not making this up: "Now look boys, you know that it upsets me when you act this way. We've had this conversation many other times, and I know you remember. Next time I walk away, I want you to behave like gentlemen."

Each time, the dogs would stand as statues, listening. And each time, as soon as he stepped away, they erupted in their crates. What the dogs were learning that day was, whenever we bark and bang around in our crates, our guy comes back and talks nicely to us. This behavior is working for me, so I'm going to keep doing it.

The way to reason with a dog, so that lessons make sense, is not with complicated sentences. We have to teach the dog that if it is obedient, things will work out in a mutually satisfying way. Don't we both, hunter and dog, want a bird to be shot and retrieved? Yes, so let me teach you what to do.

One of my training mentors is Rick Paine, who ran his boarding kennel and training facility for many years in western New York before moving to Georgia. Rick said that as dog owners and trainers, we should conduct ourselves as though we are "benevolent dictators".

In other words, "Why?, Because I said so." And corrections are delivered clearly, kindly and fairly. But when working with a young dog, preparations for field training can and should begin long before you go to the field.

Huh?

"When you can't get to the field, you can still work on other aspects of the dog's development," Bob West said. "For example,



Photos by Lisa Price

you can expose a young dog to the neighborhood while getting him used to walking on lead or working on heel training."

Socialization of the pup should include socializing with other dogs, crate time at home and during travel, and introduction to game birds and gunfire as we expand the dog's world from home to training and hunting fields.

The two ill-behaved shorthairs I described earlier had been taken on many walks at game lands, but had not been exposed to the training atmosphere with lots of other dogs, the scent of birds, and the sounds of distant gunfire. They were continually working themselves into a hyper-excited frenzy and had no previous training on basic commands. And yet, their owner had expectations that they would perform brilliantly in the field following his detailed instructions.

"In that type of situation, it's foolish to expect the pup to be attentive, able to focus or capable of learning because there are just too many exciting things, all unfamiliar, possibly even scary, but in every case distracting," West said. "That's why it's critical to expose our pup to as many different scenarios as possible."

We both believe in the importance of having a written training log and plan. That said, it's also important to remain flexible and adapt the plan as needed to the dog's progress. Having certain aspects of the plan etched in stone – such as, I want him to be an AKC Master Hunter before he's two years old – can lead to skipped steps and frustration, with neither thing good for you or your dog.

"Decide where your pup is in the process of becoming acclimated, what has and hasn't been covered, where you need to build and what your next step should be," West advised. "Keep notes, especially after training sessions, when you can make note of progress and what you want to work on in the next session."

When the pup is acclimated and socialized, it's time to lay in the basic commands that will support advanced work, such as "No, Whoa and Heel". When the pup understands those simple commands, you can both carry those concepts to field training, where the pup is ready to learn with a relaxed and ready mind. ♦