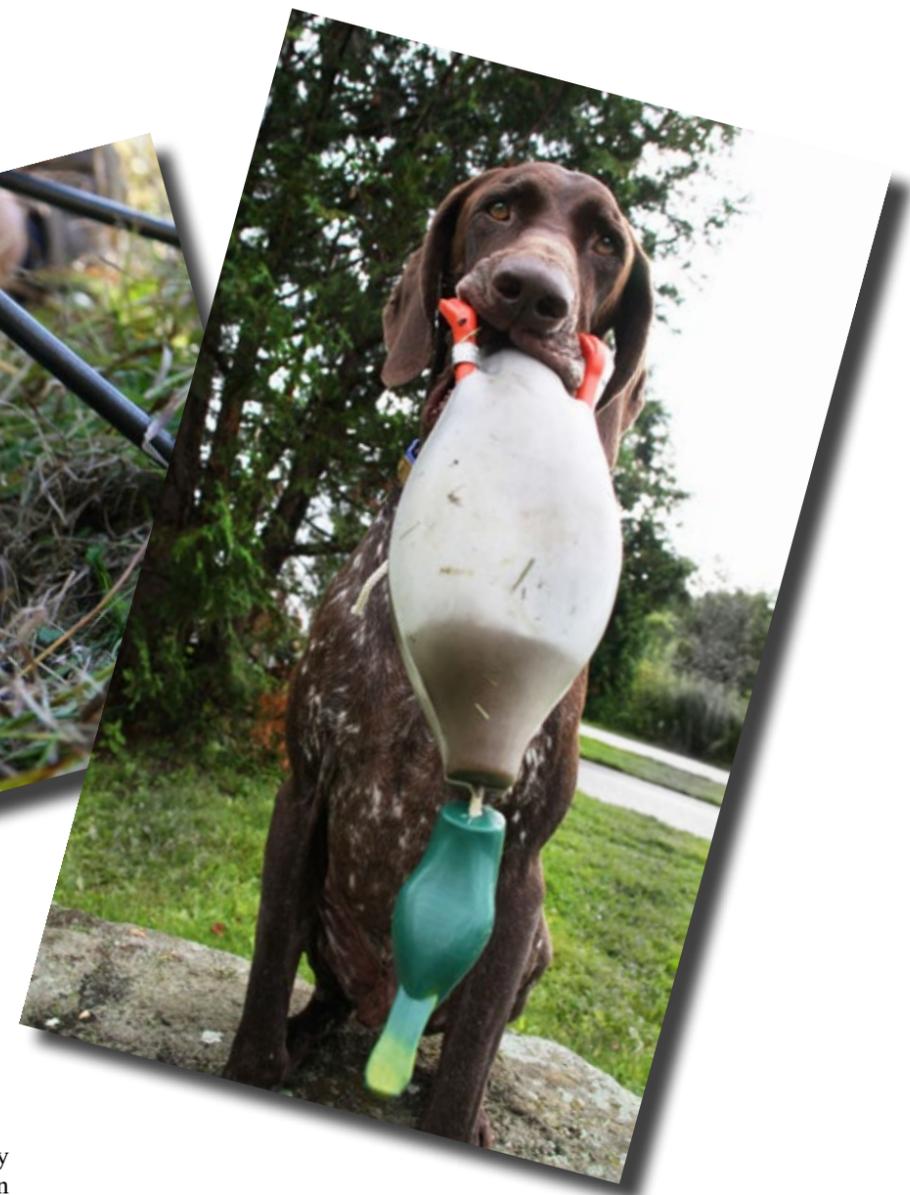




# moments of dedicated indiscretion

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**D**rafting this in my head, I'm laying in bed with a 75 lb. German shorthair pretzeled around my ankles. A snoring wirehair is on my left on his back, legs splayed out towards the ceiling. The petite little wirehair has, as always, turned into a granite Newfoundland in the middle of the bed. My husband is probably in here somewhere, but who knows.

Thirty-five years ago, I should have figured out that my life was going to the dogs, even in our pre-NAVHDA days. I should have had a hunch with the first shorthair. His evening training sessions involved several quasi trainers, fishing poles with quail dangling from their lines, and a bottle of scotch. A big bottle. The closest that dog, Mr. Breeze, came to hunting was pointing squirrels out the back door. Somewhere I have a photo of him frozen on point, gazing across the deck with an empty cardboard paper towel tube stuck on his tail for laughs.

A couple of Labs and a Chessy later, GSP Harley registered another training landmark when he ran away with his first planted training quail. I chased him. I yelled at him. I ran back to the house for the Milkbone box which I rattled as loudly as possible. Harley maintained a 20-yard distance from me. After a half hour, I gave up and sat sweating on the grass, watching him eat the quail from beak to toenail. Then I charged our first e-collar.

Bird dog training inevitably entails enough crazy moments to keep both animal and human behaviorists scratching their heads. Some are situations of domestic foolishness, like having to grab a training chukar out of an unlit fireplace after it fell off the roof down the chimney. Or stuffing four dogs in the back of an SUV in the garage, hatch open, to teach blind manners as we try to pass shoot crows flying over the house. Or trying not to crack up when non-bird-dog-people houseguests open the fridge and screech in horror when they see a stack of zip-locked dead chukars nestled between the leftover mac 'n cheese and a jar of pickles.

Most situations are related to field and water work. For example, good duck search water is hard to find where we live in northern Vermont. The ponds and rivers are either devoid of vegetation or choked too full with leg-tanglers below the surface. So when my GSP needed to practice a duck search for his Utility Test, we drove two and half hours to New York, ran a ten minute duck search, and drove home. That's five hours on the road (and gallons out of the gas tank) to watch a big goofy dog swim circles around a pond sniffing for a very annoyed mallard who just had his flight feathers pulled.

Mike Adrian's acquisition of training birds is another example of the extent to which we go to train...that is, if you're partial to loitering around highways in the middle of the night soaked to your skivvies.

"I don't have a good source for chukars. It was a tough time finding birds this year. Trapping pigeons was slow and not very productive. But I found a better way! Net them off the roost at night. Not only can you get a bunch, but it's quite entertaining," Mike said. "They nest under the highway bridges, so you are waist-deep in the river, in the dark, with a net on a very long pole in one hand, and a flashlight in the other (having a friend helps). Good for a bunch of laughs and very productive – we got 13 last night in about 45 minutes. I don't know how many we missed."



I once saw a handler dangle a dead chukar under his chin and trundle past his dog, crouched over so his head was level with his dog's saying, "My bird, my bird" while teaching the astonished animal to honor another's retrieve.

No kayak to put ducks out for searches? Patti swims the ducks out into Merrymeeting Bay. Retrieve not happening? Matt Lorello grabbed his dog and marched into the bay – no waders or swim trunks, just brush pants and boots. No birds to train tracking? Try hot dogs. Or slabs of liverwurst, a turkey carcass, pheasant poop smeared on a bumper, or the misguided tweety bird that flew into the dining room window then croaked under the azaleas.

We NAVHDA people do some pretty strange things in the process of training and testing our magnificent bird dogs. Come to think of it, our dogs make a few sacrifices for the cause, too.

At a clinic last year, Rich Gay gave his GSP Mica a stern command to stay and wait for release because Mica had been creeping in anticipation of the retrieve. Like many dogs, Mica's compliance included sitting down. The poor guy parked his short-tailed butt smack dab in the middle of a thorn bush, family jewels and all. Stoic, Mica never stood until released. No doubt he's still plotting revenge.

At the Invitational, my Scratch backed patiently while his bramate's handler shuffled and stomped around looking for an allegedly pointed bird. The minutes dragged on. With a quick glance towards me, eyebrow raised of course, Scratch lowered down, took a respectable large dog's poop, then rose back into his honoring position. We did not get extra points for that, however.

One more: Have you ever discovered your spouse stuffing your 62 lb. shorthair out the small crank-open second floor window in his office, so the dog could retrieve a bumper that had been launched too high and landed on the roof? I did. 🐕

Blaine and Patti Carter had a similar adventure netting pigeons under an overpass years ago. Their story didn't have the wet skivvy factor, but did involve a ladder, a roof rack, curious cops, and a large spotlight.

"Picture a Ford Pinto station wagon with plywood on the racks, a stepladder on the plywood, the husband on the stepladder, a smelt net in the husband's hands...and the wife driving," Patti described. "The cops that showed up combed through their regulations but could find nothing illegal. So they turned on their spotlight and helped us catch a pile of young pigeons." (I love a happy ending.)

Then there are the strange methods some of us use to make the training experience as authentic as possible. I was worried that my puppy would have to run Natural Ability in a dirty field. Without extra birds or people to make her training run like test day, my only choice was to prep the field myself. I grabbed a live chukar and took it on a tour of the back forty, swiping the poor bird across clumps of grass and scent-holding mud patches. Bending and swinging and rubbing, the more I swiped, the balder the bird. Time to prep the field: 35 minutes. Duration of practice run: 17 minutes. (Afterwards, apologizing for the entire episode, I set the chukar free figuring it'd had given enough to the cause.)

