

The Wildfowlers Companion



My dream wildfowling dog could be described as such - strong, mid size, good head, strong neck, webbed feet, decent tail rudder. It's character would have to be bold, brave, obedient, and trustworthy. Additional extras would include the ability to swim front crawl with bilateral breathing, night vision, and visual alert on incoming wildfowl. Also non-fidget mode! The icing on the cake would be to have the stamina to swim across the mighty Tay collecting two pinks, swimming back and then safely dropping them into the game bag - job done!

Now the reality. What does the fowler actually require from his best mate? Lets keep it simple because a wealth of excellent information has already been written on this subject. Any duck or goose that has been shot over water or muddy creeks requires to be brought back to yours truly as quickly as possible with the least amount of fuss. Then he or she settles back into non moving position, which then allows for more opportunities. All sounds a bit too easy and those who have tried to reach this standard will have a slight smile on their face on reading this. Humans, animals, and weather combined make this exercise frustratingly difficult, however on a good day it could all go like clockwork.



Committing oneself to training a young dog is a massive task for a working guy or girl. Ideally 3 x 20 min focused sessions a day wouldn't be far off the mark. As training progresses the transition from dummy to cold and then live game would require help from friends, gamekeepers, and land owners who could provide far more opportunities than you would ever achieve on the foreshore. Also the time scale of training would be vastly reduced.



It goes without saying that an untrained and unsteady dog used on the foreshore is a total nightmare and counter productive to putting a bird or two into the bag. Teaching him or her to lay flat without any fidgeting is what you

are after. Obviously a solid dry surface is perfect but not always possible. On the estuary and under the cover of darkness these areas are not always available due to the state of the tide. Steadiness is required when geese are lifting, any movement will give you away, leaving you admiring a spectacular flight with birds passing out of range and too far for a shot. Remaining undetected is key to success.

Conditions on the foreshore require you to use your common sense when selecting the breed of dog. Early on in the season there are many mild mornings and evenings that will allow the more delicate and less hardy breeds to be used to great effect. However as the weather becomes colder it does make sense to go with the hardier characters. There is nothing more unpleasant than a companion sitting beside you whimpering and shivering - add to that the reduction on the dogs life span, even with a neoprene coat.



The premier league of fowling dogs would probably be headed by the Chesapeake of which in the last 40 years I have seen very little. Next is the Labrador which I guess would be the most popular. That's all I am going to mention here as I've witnessed the smallest of cockers retrieving Canada geese to hand - enough said!

JM TVWA Secretary