

Q. At NAVHDA training yesterday they were pushing that a dog that isn't steady on birds shouldn't have birds shot over him.

A. The "rule" is that you shouldn't shoot a bird if the dog doesn't point it (with an exception for wild flushes). That is definitely good advice. Not shooting a bird if the dog isn't at least steady to flush also definitely has merit, but probably isn't too realistic for a pup's first season. It's not a good idea to shoot a bird that a dog has tried to "take out" (catch), because you are rewarding him for poor behavior - he gets the bird. I'd say if a pre-first-season pup will point and hold as you approach to a point where you are almost next to him, it would be OK to shoot the bird. The reality is that most pups of your pup's age are too young (under 9 months) and inexperienced (not having a first hunting season under their belts) to be put through steadiness training. So you pretty much have to go with what they will do naturally their first hunting season. Many pups are quite steady naturally if they haven't caught birds. If you have a pup that flash points and charges in on birds, you definitely don't want to be shooting those birds. So, for some handlers their pup's first season of hunting is more about giving their new pup experience than about bringing home the bacon. I'd say use common sense when it comes to shooting this season. If your dog's all about trying to catch the birds on the ground, don't shoot. If he holds point reasonably well, reward him for it by shooting the bird. Generally speaking, we want a dog's first season to be mostly about finding birds and having the birds fly away from him if he moves in too close. He'll be having a great time as well as learning to be careful and cautious, which we hope will bring on a nice, staunch point. In training, you might want to use pigeons that have been "set" in cover (not dizzied or put to sleep) so they are very flighty. If you lose a bird or two, consider it a cost of training. Let him find and point the birds and briefly chase them. Then call him back. Don't worry about shooting anything during training. Make that training about his recall on birds and nothing else.