

Why_wait_to_train_advanced_commands.txt

[Question] I've been reading and watching everything I can to get ready for my new Small Munsterlander puppy. Some of the training methods seem to start exposing the dogs to various conditioning earlier than what I've read in other books. They seem to encourage getting the dog exposed to fetch, recall, hold, drop, ect. while the dog is young and more impressionable. Is introducing these principles before the dog is one year old a bad idea? They said waiting until the dog turns 1 is more "old school." What do you think?

[Answer] Waiting until a puppy is a bit mature (9 months old + 1 hunting season) to start applying "pressure" (nice word for negative reinforcement) is probably old school, but I prefer to think of it as a tried and true method. If you wait, you significantly reduce the risk of your puppy not being able to handle it and causing problems that could have easily been avoided. Dogs that have been rushed are often lacking in boldness and perform with their heads hung and their tails tucked. This is especially true of dogs that are very sensitive and cooperative (which differs from soft). Small Munsterlanders are typically very sensitive/cooperative and require a firm and consistent handler who does not lose his/her temper and does not meet out punishment, but "trains" systematically, patiently and intelligently.

We've had puppies come back for rehab because they were given too much obedience training too young. It took the boldness right out of them and they didn't appear to have any prey drive. Fortunately this problem can be corrected most of the time and those dogs have since gone on to be great hunting companions, but it cost their owners a lot of time and money unnecessarily.

My advice is to use the words so he learns what they mean, but don't apply any pressure for him to comply on his own. Just nicely force compliance if needed. For instance, push down on his butt to make him sit; stop walking while you have him leashed to make him stop for "whoa"; push him into the kennel for "kennel," etc. For any command you are unable to easily enforce, such as "fetch," don't use the command word. Instead of "fetch," say "bring it here," or something similar. Otherwise, if you let him disobey because you can't nicely force compliance, you're teaching him he doesn't have to obey that command. Later, when you are retrieve training and you're able to force compliance using pressure, you'll use the "fetch" command.

"Come" is the one command I teach fairly young, because it can be lifesaving, but also I am able to force compliance without a lot of pressure using the Low Stimulation Method of e-collar conditioning. With this training, at first you're using a long lead to force him to come in combination with the e-collar. Later you transition to just the e-collar, but you are always using the low stimulation method so it's very gentle pressure that's being applied. Even so, this training does not begin until around 5-6 months when the puppy has demonstrated he is mature enough to handle that small amount of pressure. See article at http://brushdale.com/training/Obedience_and_Commands/INTRODUCTION_to_the_LOW_STIMULATION_E-COLLAR_TRAINING_METHOD.html

By the way, I see no reason to teach "hold" in addition to "fetch." Fetch means to pick it up, bring it to me and don't let go until I tell you to. Similarly, if

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you've commanded to "sit," there's no reason to add a "stay" command, because "sit" means to sit down and stay sitting until I release you. With dogs, less is more when it comes to commands.

Joan Bailey's rule of thumb is that a dog should be at least 9 months old AND have been through a hunting season before you start applying pressure to teach advanced commands such as heel, fetch, whoa and wait. The 9 month requirement is to make sure he is mature enough psychologically to handle the pressure. The hunting season requirement is to seal your bond and to instill a true love for hunting before applying pressure that could make him not like you and/or turn him off hunting.