

## Dissecting the search

For many, a strong, stylish, intense point is the highlight of the dogs' time afield. It is something even the novice can appreciate. The fact is; however, that without a quality field search, the point may never come. There are a number of important criteria that determine the quality of a dogs search, mostly: Productivity, Purpose, Coverage and Drive.

Productivity is relatively simple; if it finds birds, then it is productive. Yet there may be a dog that finds birds, and is "Productive", but has been led by the handler to every bird. This is no better than a dog that covers great tracts of land yet produces nothing. Neither is adequately searching the field (nose, desire and cooperation issues notwithstanding). They may be simply stretching their legs or exploring, but not hunting.

Beyond whether the dog is productive, there must be definite purpose in the search. If the dog doesn't know why they are out there, the other parts will not likely fall into place. This should not be confused with either the big runner that covers every hill hither and yon or the critical analyst that takes methodic coverage to a laborious end. The dog should know its task, keep to it, and not rely on the handler to maintain focus towards the task at hand.

Coverage may be incorrectly pinned on breed style. Surely a Pointer will likely cover a greater quantity of ground than some of its closer working counterparts but it is quality that we should be looking for. Once we have left a certain area, we should feel relatively certain that we have found what birds were there. There are a few different ways that a dog may go about this, primarily; seeking objectives or more of a wider ranging coverage by quartering an open field. Regardless of the type of coverage, if the hunting party is able to put up as many birds as the dog, the dog is doing little service to the handler.

Finally there is drive. I am not referring to the dogs desire, desire is more of how determined the dog is to perform its given task, think of drive as what moves the dog through the field. Basically there are three main things that can get the dog around the field and the ability to isolate what drives the dog will help in making unfair comparisons between breeds based on style. First there are "Wheels", the fast mover (not necessarily the big runner) this is a dog that covers ground, and happens upon the birds scent. The dog may carry the head either high or low but is often marked by quick changes in direction or head carriage with a sudden (sometimes called a pretzel) point. Another type is the handler driven search. This is often the least productive and most laborious to watch. Often the dog will cover little more ground than the hunter himself and other than retrieving, serves little purpose. This type of dog usually requires repeated coaxing from the handler. Finally there is a nose driven search. This is always a pleasure to watch and most likely to be productive. This often encompasses intelligent use of the wind, abbreviated by varying head carriage based on wind speed and contour of the land and whether the dog is picking up a track scent versus an air-born scent. The dog will be seen utilizing air currents to move them through the field therefore dictating their coverage. As they move through the field you may notice the dog opening and closing its mouth. The concept is similar to dogs that line track, in that they are catching their breath by

opening their mouths then reestablishing the scent currents by breathing through their nose, failure to do this would cause the dog to tire quickly.

Dogs that exhibit quality searches are often considered the most comfortable to hunt behind. There are fewer commands needed by the handler, and often more game will be safely harvested. Everyone has their own personal preferences of style and coverage, but it's hard to fault a dog that's finding birds in front of you and not watching them fly away from behind.

Producing game is the answer to the equation, how it gets there is vastly more complex and a better understanding of how the dog is working will give greater appreciation for the bird in the bag at the end of the day.