

# What You and Your Dog Need to Know Before Using a Professional Field Trainer

By Anne Everett  
Heads Up Kennel

Although most of us would like to be able to train our dogs ourselves, there are often periods in life when we do not have the time, access to land or the expertise to develop our dogs to their full potential. This is the time when the services of a professional field trainer are often used. Sending a dog to a field pro, whether for field trial or for hunt test, is an expensive undertaking. In order to receive the most from your field training dollars, there are some basic canine social and obedience skills that can be developed at home that will make the training process an easier one for your dog and the pro of your choice. These skills may well shorten the length of time your dog needs to be away (easier on your wallet) and elevate the level of performance possible under the tutelage of your field professional.

## What your Dog Needs to Know

### Socialization and Obedience

One of the realities of life at a field professional's establishment is confinement. When not being trained or aired, your dog will be spending its time either in a box on a dog truck or in a kennel run. For a dog that has never been exposed to any type of confinement before being sent away, this can be a very difficult transition. Long hauls to and from trials and tests are common. A dog that is comfortable in a crate and riding in a crate in a vehicle – as well as used to spending time in a run – will have a much easier time adapting to time at training camp.

Dogs that have not been socialized with other dogs or people have a high rate of failure at field professional's establishments.

The puppy that is destined for a pro's truck requires exactly the same socialization protocol as does a puppy destined to be a family companion. The first 8-16 weeks are critical in terms of ensuring that your pup forms a primary bond with a person and gets out with other dogs and people. A puppy class is also an excellent idea. Receiving a pup that is an avid retriever with basic social skills and house etiquette – as well as knowing simple commands such as *sit*, *down*, *come*, *kennel* and *leave it* – is a huge plus to a pro. Nothing is more discouraging to a pro than receiving a young pup that hasn't much interest in retrieving or learning. Leaving a young pup in a kennel run during these important first weeks and doing nothing with it can ruin a promising youngster. Puppies can become more attached to their water bucket or kennel neighbor than people. A puppy raised in isolation has little chance of success later in life and this type of beginning is another major reason for being washed out of a field professional's program.

A final note: Do your dog a favor and make sure that it is reasonably fit when it goes off to school. Field training is hard physical work and sending an overweight, out-of-condition animal off to a field pro is simply not fair on your dog. It also wastes the pro's time as they have to spend time conditioning the animal before any real work can be done.



*When they are not working, dogs often spend their "down" time in kennel runs. Habituating your dog to this type of confinement will make the transition from home to trainer's facility much easier on your dog.*



*Professional field trainers transport dogs in training in trucks with specially fabricated dog boxes and/or trailers. Photo courtesy of Colin McNicol, Windy River Retrievers Ltd.*



*Socialization with appropriately behaved other dogs is critical to the proper development of a puppy.*



***“Tiki” is on the way back with the bumper. Young puppies can be introduced to retrieving and basic obedience as soon as they arrive in their new home. Many breeders start this process as part of their puppy socialization program.***



***Young “Wiccan” is waiting for the mark to be thrown. A hand lightly placed on the rear encourages steadiness. Photo by Sheila Kenny.***



***Maintaining the skills your dog acquires at a professional field trainer’s establishment will result in a life time of successful hunts for you and your dog.***

### What You Need to Know

The main thing is to do your homework when choosing a field professional. Ask for recommendations from people who have used the professional and who have Golden Retrievers. Go and visit the pro, have a look at the facilities, watch them train, and get a sense of the “feel” of the operation. Is the equipment clean, are the dogs happy, are the dogs clean, does the pro like Golden Retrievers? Goldens require more grooming and coat maintenance than Labs. Is that service available?

Once you have decided on a field professional, be realistic in your expectations. Most professionals won’t take a dog for less than an initial three months. Many have a trial period as well. With a socialized pup or young dog that is an avid retriever, one would normally expect after three months that the dog is force broken, collar conditioned to fetch, has excellent basic obedience, is doing land and water singles, has simple casting skills and the beginnings of a whistle sit as well as pile work basics. If the pupil is an older dog sent in for some remedial work or problem solving, then the timeline will be different depending on the issue. The main point here is to not expect a Master Hunter after three months’ work. It will take two to three years of continuous work to get a dog to that level.

Once your little superstar is ready to come home, spend some time with the field professional so that you and your dog are on the same page in terms of commands and expectations. If you are unsure about how to use an e-collar, and one was used in the training program, then spend some time with your pro or a trusted mentor and learn. It is a shame to see a young dog come home from being away training and then sit in the backyard doing nothing. Even if your dog will just be out during hunting season, there are drills that your pro can show you that will help keep your dog fit and its skill sets sharpened up for opening day. Other excellent resources for drills are the Smartworks books and DVD’s by Evan Graham, Mike Lardy’s publications, and *The Retriever Journal*. Think of sending your dog to a pro as an investment. Like any investment, it needs to be maintained and monitored so that it doesn’t disappear.

Using a field professional to help advance the skills of your canine partner in the field can be a positive move on your part and for your dog. To obtain the maximum benefit from your dog’s time away, ensure that you choose the right professional and that you equip your dog with the basic skills required to make the investment in time and money worthwhile.



***Hard work pays off for “Tebow” as evidenced by the blue ribbon indicating a big Derby win!***

*Anne Everett breeds and trains Goldens under the Heads Up prefix. She can be reached at [www.headsupkennels.com](http://www.headsupkennels.com)*

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