

SIX WEEKS PLUS

March 1967

Last month in the article, "Animated Red Sausages", we started from the time the puppies were conceived, delivered, and supplemented their feeding until their mother weaned them. They are a lot of fun from about three weeks on. I remember how I kept trying to determine the one I would keep from my litter. If you remember all puppies start using their brain at three weeks of age. From then on, they really develop into characters. There was Tippy, so named because she had white tips on her two front paws. Later she was named Tipsey because she always got "hiccups" after eating, like she had tipped too many. She is still Tipsey and belongs to the Dunlavys, our members in Denver. There was the most active one that hopped on his hind legs and we named him Peter, for Peter Rabbit. There was the rough and ready, bold Irish male that we named Jocko. He is now Shannon of Redwood, belongs to Stan Smith and a bold runner he is. An active short-coupled female had a sharp little face, and she was named Mrs. Snippy. She is now Mac's Lady Bird and belongs to Harold McNeil. There was the bitch that I decided to keep, and the only distinguishing mark on her was a few white hairs in her crotch, so we named her White Crotch. Later she would sneak up behind one of her litter mates, nip it on the hind-end and when it would turn around she'd sit down like a little old lady, look real innocent and the one that was nipped would assume it was one of the other puppies. He'd start fighting with the nearest one and White Crotch would sit back and enjoy the wrestling. As she became older, she would knock herself out trying to gain the attention of prospective buyers. She would dig in the water pan like it was dirt, if it was empty she would get into it and jump up and down to make noise so they would look at her. I have a low table on the patio that I place them on to pull cockleburs out or comb them. She would jump off of it for attention, not down, but up and out until I was sure she would break her front legs landing on the concrete. She ended up with the name of Wild Gael. These are the things that make a litter of puppies more fun than T. V.

During this time, you are watching the puppies to decide which one you wish to keep. You will watch for aggressiveness, which one gets out of the box first, which one goes to the back of the yard first, which one asserts itself most with the litter mates, the one that notices the birds and butterflies first, or airplanes flying overhead. There are a thousand things you will be watching for that will indicate the type of bird dog it will eventually become. You will put a quail wing on the end of a fishing pole to see which will point first, and the one with the highest tail on point. All puppies carry and point with a higher tail than they will when matured. You will want the one whose tail goes beyond the ninety degrees, and angles over the back. Should you be interested in conformation, darkness of coat, etc., these will also influence you on the one you wish to keep.

If you are a field trialer first, and can afford it, you will make arrangements to place the whole litter with a farmer so they can run wild after they are a few months old. In a few months, you will be able to tell which ones are the most independent. The young pups that will go out and hunt on their own, stay the longest, day after day, are the dogs that you are interested in. If you are too kindhearted, like me, you cannot stand the thought of them getting lost, run over by a car, and must hover over them like an old hen with her chicks, then you will have to make your decision from observations made in the back yard and running them in the field. If you are not going to keep them all until they are about one year old, then you must decide when to sell them.

The best time to sell or buy a puppy is between five and six weeks old. It is less shock for them to be taken from their litter mates and placed in strange surroundings. It is the time before they learn to fear. It is the time before they become dominated by another litter mate or become a bully. This is before they become attached to a litter mate. They should have been weaned and eating their dry food by now. Now all they wish to do is eat, sleep, play and please their masters.

How to housebreak them? One way that worked very well for me was to move them into the pen after they are three weeks old. They were born in a whelping box in the basement and at about three weeks, the weather permitting, were placed in the kennel. The first thing in the morning, they were let out of the kennel to run in the yard, and again in the evening when I returned home. It will surprise you how soon they will wait to do their duties in the yard. Basically, dogs are very clean and within a week or two, I would have maybe one stool or one wetting to clean out of the pen. Of course, this means you must clean up your yard two or three times a day, but they have learned to use the ground to relieve themselves. If moved into the house, they will try to wait until they are outside. The pup that is to be kept in the house should be taken outside every time it awakens and after every feeding. Soon they will scratch at the door to get out, and before they learn the way out of the house, they will often run in circles looking for a place to relieve themselves. Pick them up and carry them outside. Praise them as soon as they have used the yard. At this age, they really wish to please. One of the best places to keep a puppy in the house is in the kitchen. The floor is easy to clean and it should not be for a very long time.

A puppy should be fed four times a day until it is eight to ten weeks old, three times a day until it is three months old, and then twice a day until it is six to nine months old. They have a very small stomach and require a great deal of food for growth and exercising. Personally, I prefer a dry food moistened with hot water, consomme, meat juices or goat's milk. Your better dog food companies have spent thousands of dollars developing the complete dog food. Let us say, what you add to it will not hurt the food, but I doubt you will be helping it any. One way to judge the food is by watching the stools. The better the food, the less stool you will have, because it is digested better and there is less waste material in it. If loose stools persist, then the food is not agreeing with the dog, you are adding milk instead of cottage cheese, or the puppy has worms.

You might as well say all puppies are born with worms. After the bitch is two to three years old she develops a resistance to worms, and their eggs become dormant until the bitch is pregnant. The Roundworm and the Hookworm can go through the placental barrier and enter into the puppy's circulation. This is the reason we say all puppies are born with worms. Roundworms are the most common, and I like to use Piperazine syrup in their supplemental feedings when they are three to four weeks of age. Take a fresh stool specimen to your Veterinarian for him to identify the worms, and he will prescribe the proper medication.

Play with your puppy. You can play train him until he is three months old and then really train him. A dog's mind is as mature at three months old as it will ever be. All he lacks is training and experience. The Irish Setter is a peculiar dog. I believe he is a little smarter than most dogs, combined with the independence and humor of the Irish People. Once he loves you, he will do anything in the world for you. Do not mistake his sense of mischief or independence for pigheadedness. I do believe that they are a little slower to mature, but they are a long-lived dog and one you can enjoy for many years. Gain his love and respect and you will have a companion and hunting partner for many pleasurable years.

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