

RETRIEVERS

This tip is from Bobby Stewart of Stewart British Kennels, 8 County Road 4015, Oxford, MS 38655; (662) 234-1288; website www.stewartbritishlabs.com; e-mail blstewart@dixie-net.com. Bobby has been training various breeds professionally for 40 years, but for the past 20 years he has specialized in British Labradors for hunting and hunt tests. He breeds British Labrador retrievers.

Training With Birds

"I start using birds very early in a puppy's life," Bobby said. "I start with a duck wing. Then I go to a bumper with a duck wing attached. Next I use frozen doves because they're small and easy for a puppy to handle. Then I introduce small frozen ducks.

"Why frozen doves and ducks? To prevent the puppy from chewing on a

dle it.

He pointed out that an over-used dead duck can lead to hardmouth. It will also ride very low in the water and may even sink.

Bobby said that with his British Lab puppies he doesn't have to go to extremes in force-breaking. Even so, to avoid confusing the youngster, he discontinues all retrieving during that process.

"To introduce a youngster to a new

and frozen or partially frozen birds. He finds the launchers equally effective for land and water marking tests. They make consistently good throws, and they can replace human helpers in multiple marking situations. He sets them out at different distances and has them throw at different angles.

Because he can control how and where launchers throw so precisely and because he can set them up for such a variety of tests, he has found they help him develop a dog's marking ability. They also encourage a dog to use his nose when he gets to the area of a fall. Bobby uses launchers especially during the steadying process, because they allow him to focus entirely on the dog, even more than he could with human throwers.

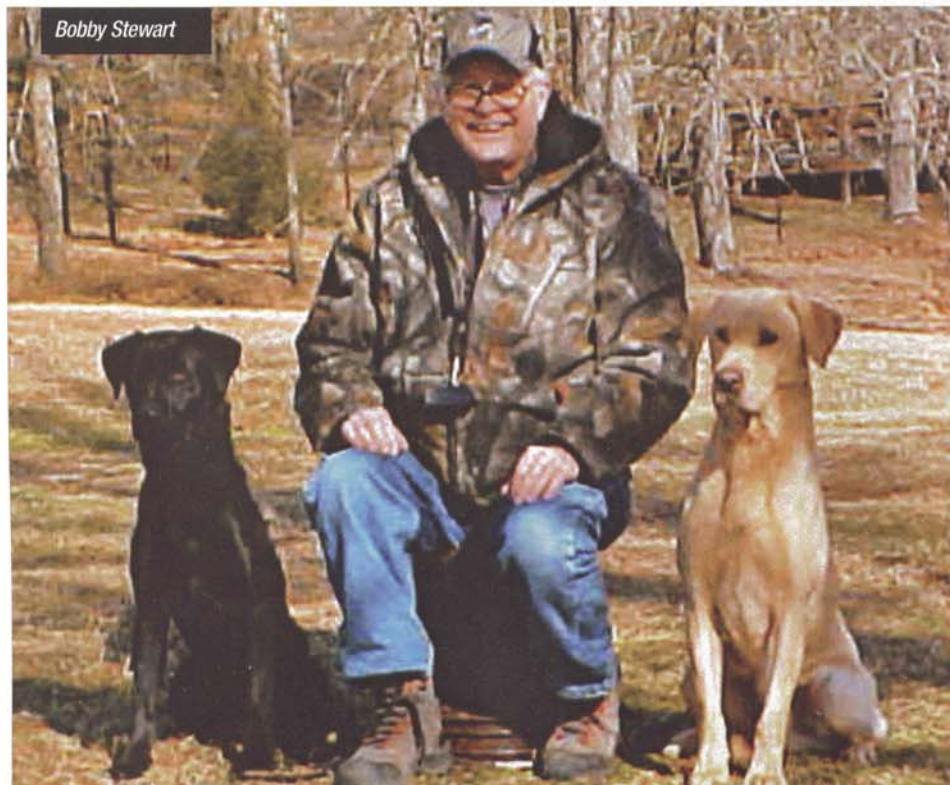
He said he uses bumpers or dummies in a variety of sizes and colors. But he also uses lots of frozen ducks and partially thawed ducks. He has found that they prevent hardmouth quite effectively. They also motivate a retriever more than dummies do. A retriever will concentrate more when he sees a bird fall and will therefore mark it better. Bobby feels that too many dummies will bore a dog and lead to sloppy marking.

"When preparing for hunt tests," he said, "I use mostly ducks, and I use them until they get in pretty bad shape. At hunt tests the birds get 'bad' quite often, so a dog must get used to picking up and carrying 'bad' ducks without chewing on them.

"When preparing for hunt tests, I also give the dogs plenty of fliers. After all, at a hunt test they'll see them

while under judgment, and fliers tempt a dog to break more than dead ducks."

He added this final and insightful thought: "Then, too, while hunting, the dog will see nothing but fliers, and everything we do in training should be directed toward successful hunting. Right?" *



bird, which would lead to hardmouth. Later I go to thawed-out ducks before using fresh-shot ducks."

To make frozen birds last longer, Bobby wraps them in newspaper before putting them into the freezer. How often does he keep thawing and re-freezing a bird? Until it becomes so "ripe" that he no longer wants to han-

kind of bird," Bobby said, "I get him pretty excited about it, and then toss it for a short retrieve. I keep the retrieves short until the dog is running out quickly, snatching the bird up and returning with it happily."

Bobby uses remote launchers quite extensively in his program, for throw dummies, simulated (plastic) ducks