



Out and about

This month, Lez and Emrys have been testing their training in different environments, some exciting, some not so exciting, but hopefully all helping Emrys mature into a steady gundog

Most of our walking this month has been with Dante, my eight-year-old Labrador, and Spud, my almost nine-year-old working cocker. I always move my older dogs onto the right side when I first start bringing a youngster out on the walks with us, so that I can focus on the novice dog, keeping him with me and walking to heel – my older boys tend to, for the most part, just pootle along nicely beside me.

We've walked mostly around the village where we live, with Emrys on his own or with the 'big boys' (although Emrys now towers above Spud), and this has involved crossing fields, walking through the woods and being distracted by the local wildfowl population on the little loch round the corner. He's been on lead, off lead, walking to heel, running free, doing Sit/Stays and posing,

both on his own and with Spud and Dante.

Having three dogs to take out can bring its own challenges, but it really comes into its own when you're training steadiness around other dogs. I'm not a fan of letting dogs hoon around with other dogs or letting my dogs run up to other dogs on the walks – you don't know if the other dogs are going to have a pop at your dog or if the other dog is nervous. The main reason though is that I want the walk to be all about me: me and my dog, and what we're doing together, rather than meeting other dogs being the highlight of the walk.

Same but different

We headed across to Lanark Loch this month, which is a much bigger loch than my local one and has so many different terrains over a very

small area – the old gallops as well as scrub grasses, gorse, well-kept short lawns, hills and a fantastic dirt cycle trail running through the woodlands.

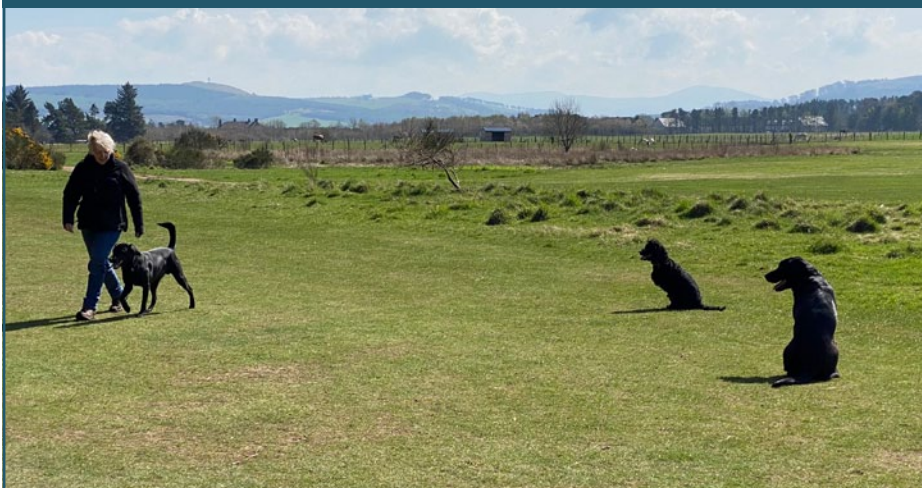
I started off just doing some simple retrieves with Emrys on the short grass then moved onto the hills which have a greater incline than the hill near me. I haven't wanted to introduce overly steep hills just yet as I'm very conscious that he's still a young dog and don't want to put too much pressure on his front end going down the hill or his hips coming up. His growth plates won't be quite closed yet, so after being really careful with his exercise in his formative months I don't want to mess it all up now – there's plenty of time to get him up and down the abundance of Scottish hills.

We then headed around the side of the woods

INDIVIDUAL RECALLS

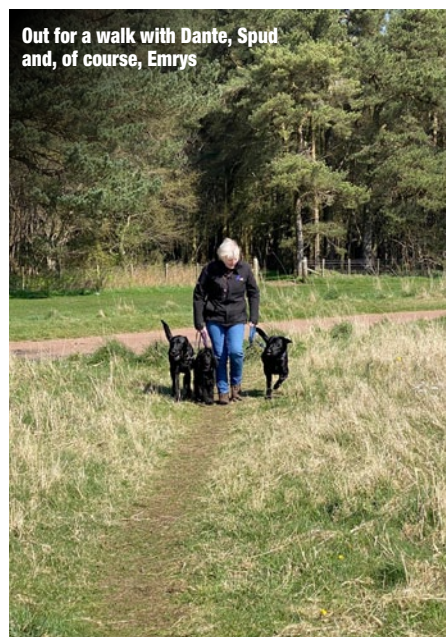


First, sit the dogs in a little circle, and walk around the outside.



Then, call one dog (your least trained to start with) to you and into a heel.

Out for a walk with Dante, Spud and, of course, Emrys



LEZ'S TOP TIP

When going somewhere new or somewhere you haven't been to for a little while, take a couple of minutes when you get your dog out of the car to allow him to recalibrate his nose to the surroundings. In the way that we look around when we go somewhere new, our dogs need a chance to take in the smells of a new environment. By hanging around your car for a few minutes before setting off on your walk or your training session, you're setting your dog up to succeed, as he will have processed the new and exciting smells and will be able to focus on the task in hand easier.

ABOUT LEZ GRAHAM

Lez Graham is author of The Pet Gundog series and a canine behaviourist and gundog trainer. Focused on training the next generation, she runs the Accredited Pet Gundog Instructor programme, which is now its sixth year.

Every book in The Pet Gundog series comes with one-year access to The Pet Gundog Online training app (£19.99, amazon.co.uk)

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Three dogs focused on Lez during some distraction training!

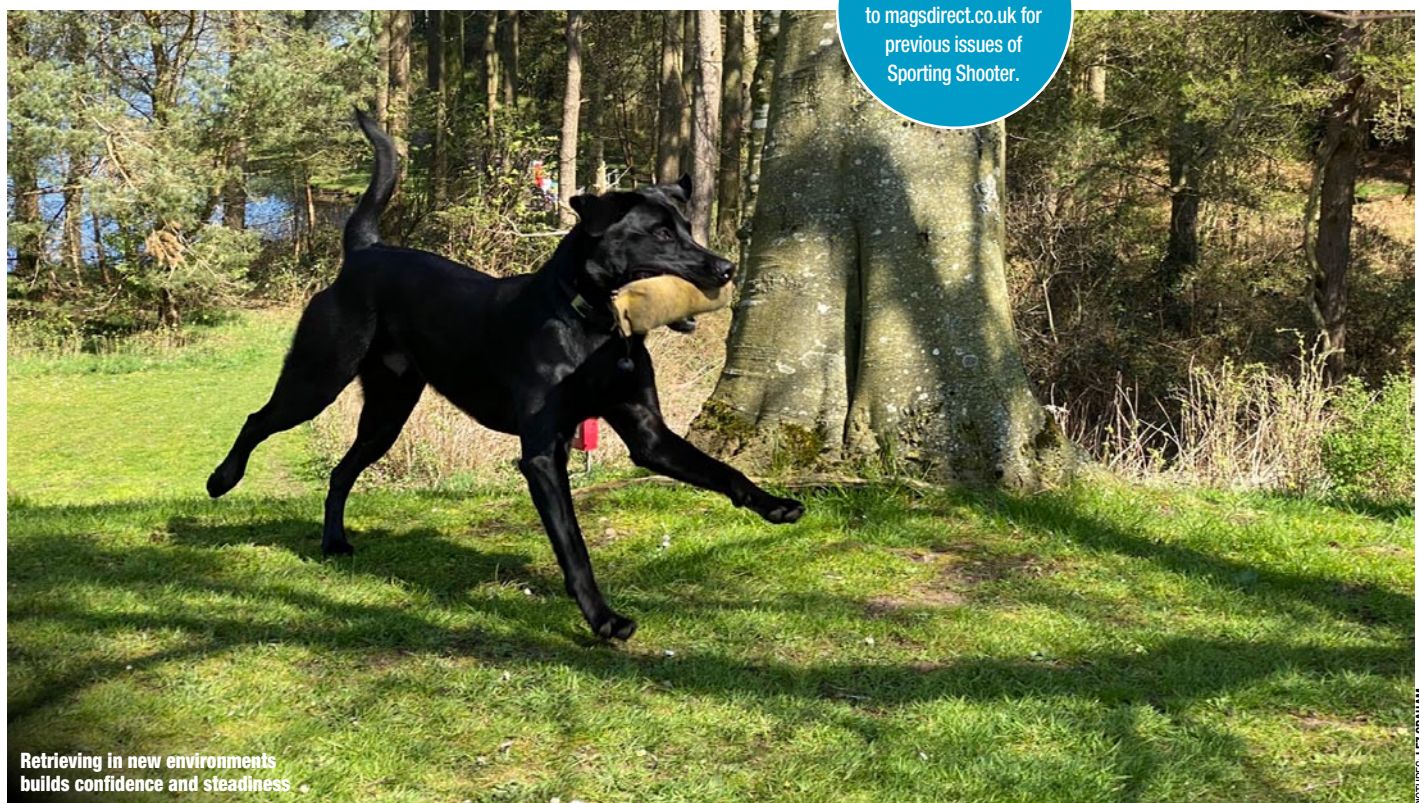
and onto the old gallops where I did a bit of steadiness training with the three dogs as a pack. As well as doing Sit/Stays, where I left the three dogs sitting together, I also did Down/Stays with them, leaving them reasonably close and then walking a circle around them. Down/Stays generally aren't trained in the gundog world, however all our Accredited Pet Gundog Instructors train them as part of the basic exercises in class, as I believe that training a solid down is foundation that every dog should have.

One of the favourite things I teach my pack is to recall past each other and come into heel while I'm walking. Once the dogs have a good Sit/Stay in a group, I start to quietly call the youngest forward, leaving the older dog sitting. As with most of my training, I start this in the sitting room, then out in the garden and then on the walk. Once the dogs are steady recalling individually while I'm standing still, I start to introduce it when I'm out and about, leaving them a couple of paces

before calling one dog and then the other.

What I did here (see sequence images, left) with the dogs was to sit them in a little circle, walk around the outside and called one dog to heel. After a few paces, I did a whistle Sit and then called a different dog to heel... it's a great little exercise as it teaches the dogs to listen out for their own name, ignore the other dogs being called, and to sit steady when other dogs are running past them. ■

Missed the start of Emrys's diary? Head to magsdirect.co.uk for previous issues of Sporting Shooter.



Retrieving in new environments builds confidence and steadiness

PICTURES: LEZ GRAHAM