

(seminar presented to the Lone Star German Shorthaired Pointer Club by Dr. Janice W. Price, DVM in Spring, 2000)

THE HIGH COST OF PENNY PINCHING

(OR, HOW TO HAVE & KEEP THE GUNDOG YOU ALWAYS WANTED WITHOUT SHOOTING YOURSELF IN THE FOOT)

GOAL: to choose, raise, train, and keep a German Shorthaired Pointer who will be a top-quality, healthy working gundog from his first full season through his twelfth.

To reach this goal, we need to consider the building blocks that, in total, form the competent working gundog:

- the urgent desire to hunt
- a sound, healthy body to hunt with
- the maintenance of both

The reason these three items are important is simple:

**BY THE TIME YOUR GUNDOG CAN WORK HIS FIRST SEASON,
YOU'LL HAVE \$2,000.00+ TIED UP IN HIM, ASSUMING NO
ACCIDENTS OR INJURIES OCCUR!**

Got your attention?

The math is simple:

- \$300 to \$500 to purchase a gundog prospect pup at 8-10 weeks
- 4-6 months of training at \$300.00/month
- assorted training equipment to keep him “tuned” at home, \$400-\$600

More bad news:

**EACH ADDITIONAL HUNTING SEASON WILL COST AN ADDITIONAL
\$600.00 TO \$1,200.00**

More math:

- 1-3 months of “tune-up” training to ready him for the season
- the veterinary bills associated with the accidents and injuries inevitable in a hard-working gundog

Worst news of all:

**THE AVERAGE GUNDOG IS WORN OUT/USED UP AT AGE 8,
ALLOWING A TOTAL OF 7 HUNTING SEASONS AVERAGING \$900.00
EACH**

HOW DO YOU PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT?

PICK A HUNTING PROSPECT PUPPY FROM A LINEAGE KNOWN FOR SOUND, HEALTHY BODIES WHO DO NOT WEAR OUT PREMATURELY, AND THEN PROPERLY MAINTAIN HIM!

Item 1: The urgent desire to hunt

I'll leave the delicate task of sorting and evaluating litters of gundog pups to the experts.

Item 2: A sound, healthy body

The number one cause of a hunting dog losing his physical capability to hunt is CANINE HIP DYSPLASIA. CHD is the congenital (from birth) malformation of the dog's hip joints. Hip joints are designed to be a tight-fitting, stable and strong ball-and-socket. Dysplastic hips are shallow, loose, and allow the thigh bone to slap around in the socket. Dogs with CHD expend greater energy to run, because the instability of their hips requires compensatory musculature exertion in their back and lower hindlegs to stabilize the wobble, therefore having reduced stamina. Excess wear and tear in the lower back, stifles and hocks leads to secondary arthritis in those areas in CHD dogs. The hips of CHD dogs lose their articular cartilage, form bone spurs and heavy scar tissue around the joint.

Facts of life about CHD:

1. Dogs with CHD are doomed to chronic pain and thereby reduced quality of life. Many seem to lack desire to hunt, or seem lazy--but in reality hurt too much to hunt.
2. Depending on how severely the individual CHD dog is affected, his useful working life may end as early as two years of age, or as late as 7 years of age.
3. Medical and surgical management of CHD is available, but is significantly expensive.
4. CHD is a genetic disease, involving at least 4 (yes, ***FOUR***) sets of genes.

There is no guarantee method to avoid this heartbreak, but the following **SIMPLE** and **INEXPENSIVE** steps will help keep you from throwing your money (and time and effort and emotional investment) away:

- buy your puppy from documented CHD-free parents WITH A GUARANTEE OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND IF HE TURNS OUT TO BE AFFECTED!!
 - look for O.F.A. numbers in the certified pedigree
 - look for PennHip certification
 - regard "x-rayed clear" with suspicion: who xrayed? who read the xray?
 - one exception: written opinion from board-certified radiologist

- before you send your pup off for training, have his hips xrayed at 6-9 months of age
 - this is commonly called “prelims” or “scout films”
 - typical cost is \$75.00 to \$100.00
 - make sure your vet routinely handles this type of xray evaluation
- have your dog formally certified as CHD-free at 2 years of age, BEFORE you use him for breeding
 - progeny of certified individuals are worth substantially more
 - certification reassures you that the dog is worth the continued investment, and will be a durable hunting dog

Item 3: Maintenance of urgent desire to hunt and sound, healthy body

Again, I'll leave training issues to experts.

Given the very significant investment of time and money we have in these gundogs, skimping on their maintenance seems illogical, **BUT THIS IS THE MOST COMMON AREA WE DESTROY OUR INVESTMENT!!** Maintenance of the sound, healthy body of a gundog is not difficult, but, unfortunately, involves extensive use of common sense. The canine athlete needs 3 basic maintenance items:

1. Proper exercise and conditioning to keep all the body parts supple and in good working order.
2. Appropriate nutritional fuel to provide the building blocks for body repair and maintenance, and energy for working.
3. Prompt attention and medical care for sports-related injuries, to minimize actual damage and prevent collateral damage.

Many gundogs live in chainlink runs in their owners' backyards. Their usual body condition cycle goes from thin & poor at the end of the season, to fat and flabby before the season. The cause is simple: inadequate exercise/attention between seasons with overuse of out-of-shape body parts during the season, coupled with inappropriate nutritional choices. Gundogs' running gear will sustain significantly less wear and tear if they are kept in lean, muscular condition through appropriate exercise off-season, and put on a sensible legging-up program 2-3 months prior to the season. This involves a small daily commitment of time on the owner's part, to insure the dog receives adequate exercise and people-time; unfortunately, most dogs get approximately 30 seconds, just long enough to put out a new bowl of food, check the water supply, and hose body wastes away.

Gundog owners are **NOTORIOUSLY** skimpers and penny-pinchers when it comes to feeding their dogs. Gundogs can't repair wear & tear, and leg up properly, if they aren't fed correctly. To make the situation worse, their stamina is hugely reduced with the wrong nutrition. What's sad is the motivation behind this is the misguided notion to save money; sadly enough, most gundog owners never realize that their dog's nutritional maintenance is the **LEAST** of their expenses.

How do you choose the correct dog food? This is a tough question every dog owner must face; the answer is far more complicated than the time-honored answers of “whatever’s cheapest” or “whatever he’ll eat the most of.”

For example, consider your dog’s station in life:

- a puppy needs to fed so that he can grow from 8 lbs at 8 weeks to 60 pounds at 52 weeks, or net growth over daily energy needs of 1 POUND PER WEEK. Since dogs are about 72% water, like us, that’s a net increase in bone, muscle, and sinew of almost 15 lbs!!
- a working gundog needs to maintain that 60 lbs of lean hunting machine, which includes repair work to muscles, joint cartilage, ligaments, as well as brain food for “tune-up” training.
- gundogs between seasons need nutritional maintenance, but without causing a heavy deposition of body fat.
- a breeding bitch, in the space of 63 days, has to produce 10 pups at 12 ounces each, 12 placentae at 4 ounces each, a uterus to handle it at 3 lbs, and breasts ready to nourish those pups at 4 lbs; net increase: 17 to 20 lbs, and the pregnancy will strip her body of any reserves. To make matters worse, she’s responsible for growing those 10 pups to 3 pounds each by 3 weeks of age, when they can start taking supplement. Net increase: 30 lbs.

Conclusions to draw from the above facts of life: you don’t put diesel fuel in a sports car and expect it to perform properly, so don’t feed your high-performance gundog the same as your mother-in-law’s pug.

Choosing the right dog food for your gundog:

1. Learn how to translate pet food labels, so you KNOW what you are buying.
2. Learn how to compare the absorption and bioavailability of ingredients, so you can logically compare the VALUE of the ingredients.
3. Learn how to calculate cost-per-feeding, so that you can calculate the relative COST of different diets under consideration.

The primary rule to keep in mind with regards to feeding your gundog:

IN GENERAL, YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

Corollary to the primary rule:

PROPER NUTRITION WILL EXTEND THE HUNTING LIFE OF YOUR DOG; EACH ADDITIONAL SEASON BEFORE YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE/BUY/TRAIN A NEW ONE LOWERS YOUR COSTS SIGNIFICANTLY!!