

A Dogs Tail by Nick Wareham

You have to be slightly crazy to have three dogs I reckon.

I picked up Moss from Wellington Airport. He flew up from Te Anau as an 8 week old Vizsla pup in 2014. I spent the next 12 months training him under the Deer Dog Blueprint.

Moss and I had some good times and some bad times in the bush. I shot goats, shot deer, shot the occasional porker and broke my ankle having to have it surgically rebuilt, requiring 6 months off hunting.

I enjoy training, and the companionship of hunting with a dog. I enjoy camping and hunting with my mates but I'll take solo hunting with my dog any day.

It takes an enormous amount of time and effort to train a hunting dog, and it took a lot of effort and help from a couple of good dog men, Jason Voller and Tim Gale, numerous YouTube videos, and just good old-fashioned time in the hills to learn the art of training and hunting with a dog.

But it is incredibly rewarding when you learn the dogs body language, when you know that the dog is telling you it is game on, and then when you manage to sneak in on an animal and finish the job.



Unfortunately, poor old Mossy boy was diagnosed with an auto immune condition a couple of years ago, which accelerated arthritis and he was forced to retire from hunting last year. He is now allowed on the furniture (where the other dogs are not) and enjoys his days in the sun just chilling out.



I had completely lost my enthusiasm for hunting last year. I was a bit down that Moss could no longer come out hunting with me, and I didn't really feel like leaving my little mate at home when he was so excited seeing my boots, pack and rifle, only for him to stay have to stay at home with Donna and the girls, howling, crying and creating havoc because he couldn't come out hunting. Thank goodness he's over that phase now.

In January 2023 Donna suggested that I look for a new pup. Crikey that was gonna make it three dogs in the house, Mossy my retired Vizsla, Lexi our pet boxer and a new pup, two dogs was enough to manage but a pack of three, blimey. I decided that this time around I was going to go for a cross bred hunting dog, and we were fortunate enough to locate what I was looking for in a pup from Gracie Bryant an hour or so out of New Plymouth.

I made contact with Gracie, and in January 2023 Donna and I drove up to have a look at the pups. They were fantastic looking pups and exactly the sort of purpose cross breed that I was looking for, the Mother is a Vizsla x Lab (and an excellent hunter) and the Father is NZ Heading Dog x Smithfield Cattle Dog. After a 4 and a half hour drive and an overnight stay in New Plymouth we drove another hour out to the sheep station, met up with Gracie and chose my new pup "Bruce."



The drive home wasn't easy to say the least, we had taken Donna's brand-new car, and Bruce barked and howled the entire trip home. We had him in a dog crate with his kennel blanket, stopping often for toilet, water and food, nevertheless he still managed to crap and wet in his crate. It's always tough when you are bringing a new pup home and needless to say I wasn't the most popular man in the world. As well as turning the stereo up to try and drown out the howling and barking we eventually had to resort to wearing ear plugs for part of the way, it sure was a long drive home.

When we eventually arrived home in Lower Hutt, Bruce had some food and water, went straight into his kennel and fell asleep for the night – poor little blighter was exhausted, but as Paul Micheal's says in his Deer Dog Blue Print “do the worst first.”

I spent the next day kennel training Bruce, and for the next 8-12 weeks I walked him up and down our 70m driveway on a long line until he had had all of his vaccinations, desensitising him to loud noises and bangs and training him with stop, sit, stay. From there on in I followed the Blueprint, training his range and distance from me, and reinforcing the normal sit, stay, wait commands.

I trained him on swing bridges, trained him in the bush, trained him around gunfire, trained him to ride on the quad, set up deer skins for him to ground and wind scent and then 12 months later took him out for his first couple of hunts.



I took him to a couple of areas where I knew there were goats, kept him on a long line, turned him into the wind and concentrated on making sure his commands and discipline were rock solid. I shot a couple of easy goats over him and encouraged him to “find them” slowly and under control.

Naturally young Bruce got a few titbits as a reward when I cut the animals up.



A couple of trips later and after a few close animal encounters Bruce put me onto a pig and his first deer. I took a shot at the deer and couldn't believe it, I had a clean miss.

Upon reflection I think I hurried and pulled the shot as I was concentrating more on the dog than the deer, but I guess that's what happens when you are training a new pup - lesson learnt on that one.

A couple of weeks later I was lucky enough that a mate let me use his hut in the Orongorongas. I finished work early on Friday and left just after lunchtime for a pre roar hunt. Bruce and I walked into the hut, dropped the pack and went for a quick walk up a creek to see what was going on. Bruce put me onto some goat sign but we left them alone that evening and headed back to the hut for dinner and a warm fire.



The dogs usually wake me up at 6am every morning at home so I didn't bother setting my alarm.

That was a bit of mistake on my part, Bruce slept in, and so did I, waking up at about 7am. It was a bit later than I wanted as I have planned to travel into, and be in the hunting area by first light. I threw some porridge, some nuts and some dried fruit down my neck and gulped down a quick coffee, hoofing it out the door of the hut locking it behind me.

I took a route that is well known to me, half hoping to catch a couple of deer feeding in the early morning, but I was simply too late for that. Never mind, I concentrated on gaining elevation and headed towards an area that I knew had previously held deer. The wind was relatively light but it wasn't in my favour as it was swirling around the spur making life a bit difficult for me and Bruce.

The thing that was in our favour though was that the morning winds were still coming down the slope as we were gaining elevation.

Heading higher we crossed a slip showing reasonable deer sign, and sidled through the bush underneath a plateau. Bruce was showing good interest on a ground scent. My plan was to "take a bite out of the wind" (see Paul Micheal's Blue Print) so that I could turn the dog back into the wind before we crested onto the plateau. Being about 10am and having climbed for a while I decided to take a short breather, and also to let the bush settle down.

I sat quietly for about 5mins, only to catch movement out the corner of my eye and to see the back end of a deer crashing away downhill, bugger it, but never mind there's plenty of deer around.

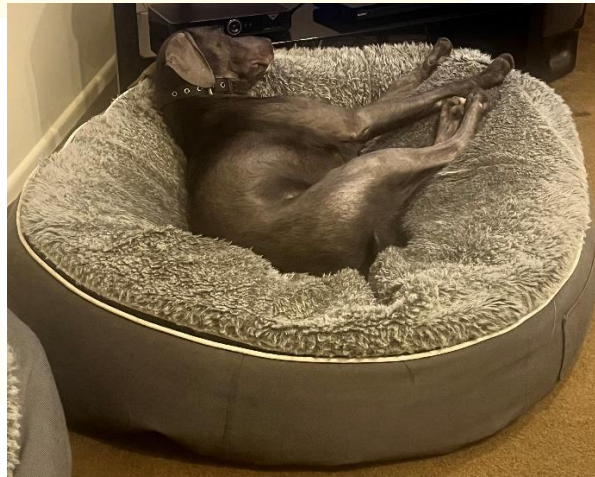
Sticking to my plan we continued to sidle, turned into the wind and then crested up onto the plateau. Brucey boy was very keen, winding hard out by this stage, so I guessed that there were still animals on the face above the plateau. Calling Bruce in to a very close range (2-3m) and instructing him to go slow, we stalked quietly around the edge of the plateau, staying downwind. Moss being a full Vizsla used to do a classic point, Bruce on the other hand does more of Heading Dog indication, dropping his head and shoulders down and staring intently. Bruce was still winding hard and leading me quietly through thick bush. Paying close attention to my dog I could see he was getting keener and keener, and I just had the feeling that something was on. Sitting down I called Bruce in to sit and stay to minimise noise and movement. I pulled my camouflaged hoodie over my head, waiting patiently and silently. I could hear an animal rustling around, at first I thought the sound was coming

from my side and from below, however Bruce knew better, and was staring intently behind me up the face. Trusting the dog I slowly and carefully adjusted my position to look up hill and heard an animal rustling in the bush again, by this stage Bruce was giving a classic Heading Dog indication and sure enough I spotted the deer that he was indicating about 20m away looking down at us, not quite sure of what was going on or what we were. Taking the shot I drilled the spiker through the shoulder, dropping him on the spot.



I let Bruce “find him” even though he was right in front of us as it is good training and reinforcement for the dog and a great reward for his efforts. Cutting the young deer up I boned him out, put the meat in my pack and headed down a different spur to the one we came up only to find a freshly used wallow. I am guessing that the first deer we spooked that morning may well have been the stag. I think we might well go back and get him in a couple of weeks, unless of course he falls to another hunters bullet beforehand.

Bruce had nailed his first deer, performed really well doing it, and had earned his rest on his dog bed that day.



My enthusiasm for hunting has returned with a vengeance now and I’m off in a couple of weeks for a fly in trip with some mates to chase Sika – here’s hoping.



Happy and safe hunting for the roar – hot barrels.