

Cedars Point Small Munsterlander Development Guide

Developing Pointing Bird Dogs Ownership, Exposure & Avoiding Early Pitfalls

Purpose

This guide's aim is to help handlers develop their dogs with clarity, confidence, and long-term potential while avoiding early-stage pitfalls. If possible before conditioning your dog for a hunt test, hunt them on wild birds their first season. Notice we use the term conditioning. This implies no pressure just positively natural experiences to draw out genetic instinct. Wild birds do this far better than NAVHDA training events. Remember, breeders provide canvass, handlers must bring the creativity and paint. Wild birds are beautifully creative and full of color. They should be your visionary. Often this is all that's needed prior to hunt testing. Miss this opportunity and pay dearly.

Why It Matters

The first season is the foundation everything is built on. Poor exposure creates problems that take far longer to fix later—and can often require pressure to correct.

Core Principle

You are responsible for your dog's development—no one else.

Training Environments

Wild birds first. Training groups second and only if necessary. Know they provide opportunity—but also risk. Multiple handlers, inconsistent setups, and varying bird quality require intentional decision-making each time you turn your dog loose.

How to Approach Training Days

Ask yourself:

What is today's goal?

Does this setup support it?

Is this helping—or hurting—my dog?

If unclear: do not proceed.

Bird Quality Matters (In fact, it's critical)

Do not put your dog on poor flying unhealthy birds.

Pen-raised birds often lack natural feather oils from preening, making them susceptible to water.

Wet conditions can quickly create birds that cannot fly effectively. Many are not flight-conditioned or physically strong/healthy to begin with.

Birds that cannot escape teach dogs they can be caught.

Wild birds teach truth: crowd, creep, or pressure— they're gone. Gone! Gone!

Pen-raised birds the opposite. They typically fly short distances and land on the ground, allowing pursuit and capture.

If birds cannot fly adequately: keep your dog in the truck!

Preferred Option for Post First Season Development

Homing pigeons (or trained ferals). They return rarely caught, are strong flyers and can be reused.

Non-Negotiable Rule

Do not allow your dog to catch birds.

What to Watch For

- Dogs who scoop or grab birds
- Dogs who circle or cutting off birds before flight
- Dogs who creep in on birds after scent is established
- Reduced intensity on point
- Confusion or hesitation on bird contact

These indicate the dog is learning the wrong lessons from poor bird encounters.

Tools & Alternatives

Limited use of a check cord and only use them when bird contact cannot be controlled due to excessive prey drive, big running dogs, or simply an immature pup who has no cautionary.

If you choose to use pen raised birds do so cautiously keeping these suggestions in mind:

- Encourage dogs to cross bird scent cones at right angles and only train with sufficient wind to aid scenting at a distance.
- Once dogs scent the bird, if using a check cord release all tension on the check cord. The second the dog advances toward the bird it must fly away!
- Prevent delayed chase
- Only allow your dog to chase if you are trying to build drive.
- Manage distance from bird when crossing scent cone-this depends on dog scenting ability and wind.
- Use light cover to aid scent transfer.

Control the bird, not the dog.

- Seek access to launchers, pigeons, and experienced handlers.

The following Development Often Order Applies

Bird exposure → chase → confidence → control/steadiness follow.

Control before understanding creates conflict for pups, loss of intensity, and flagging.

Control is subtle and can equal the use of the word “whoa” after the pup has established point.

Silence builds authentic exposure aligned with real world experience.

Let the bird teach the lesson.

Cedars Point Perspective

Non authentic learning exposures are tools—not real world experience. They provide opportunities to supplement development but create imperfect conditions. When we attempt to replicate wild scenarios with poor birds, we increase the chance of failed outcomes.

Remember: More is often less.

Once your dog is pointing, tracking, and swimming—the elements of the NAVHDA Natural Ability test. Stop!!! Go test or hunt your dog. Let the dog show you its natural ability. The more human intervention and orchestration, the greater the risk of creating problems or a shaky foundation.

Final Reminder

You don’t owe anyone a run. You owe your dog the right exposures and experiences.