

FORWARD:

Occasionally, I will receive something in my email that must be shared. Recently a young officer, Robert Ohly, stationed at Fort Riley sent me his narrative of a first solo hunt with his first birddog, Milo a German Shorthair Pointer. It took me all the way back to my first dog a German Wirehair Pointer and our first solo hunt. I could not help thinking that it would be just as appreciated by you, my readers. It is a well written account filled with the warmth, honesty, pride, sensitivity, and the high that every birddog owner has experienced on their first solo flight with their first dog. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. It is a great read.

*David McNeal
Somewhere north of Saint George, Kansas
January 7, 2021*

Milo's First Wild Bird

January 5, 2021

Fort Riley, Kansas

By: Robert Ohly

It has been some time since I have written much of anything. Perhaps it is my recent decrease in reading, which has led to a noticeable reduction in my own creative energy. In any case, my young shorthair Milo and I had our first solo wild bird together yesterday, without the assistance of more experienced hunters and dogs. It was an experience worth remembering, and I think Milo deserves more than the text message summary I would have sent my close friends.

I was, and am still, working from home in accordance with the Army's current COVID-mitigation efforts. I became very frustrated with work around 3:30 yesterday afternoon, closed my computer, and decided that we would go out for the last hour of light. It was a winter day that felt more like the comfort of Kansas mid-November, and it would have been a shame to see the sun fade away from behind a computer screen.

I parked the truck in the general home territory of a covey we have bothered in the past without success and cut Milo loose around 4:20. The ground was soft from a New Years' warm up, but not too soft. A gentle wind agreed with our direction of approach, carrying scent toward us. I am too new at this to truly know, but it seemed like a great day to chase quail. We started in a bean field and the young dog zipped through it with the energy you may have envisioned when I chose "cut Milo loose" as the right words to describe letting him out of the truck. We reached a wood line, and he slowed his pace, showing me that there was scent in the area. Milo's nose led him into the trees, and I followed. His pace shifted from a run to a

deliberate but smooth glide. He shifted and changed direction with grace and fluidity, instantly dissecting the evidence on the ground and in the air. I listened as his footsteps on the winter leaves halted, and once more I followed. I found him locked up on an old fallen tree covered in brush and grass. A field mouse fled from under the log as I approached. Milo did not blink at its rushed exit. He held his painting-quality point. There were birds in there. I stepped about the treefall for what felt like an eternity, looking around in a vain effort to identify my shooting opportunity before it presented itself. I consider myself a decent wing shot. I have cut my teeth as a hunter on waterfowl, gunning dozens of species in countless shooting scenarios. I still miss, but I have grown fairly proficient over the years. None of that mattered. The covey rose with its signature explosiveness and I barely had the presence of mind to raise my gun. Milo held his point, I moved all too slowly, and the birds moved rapidly through time and space to safety. My time stood still while theirs carried on, and I barely got a shot off before they disappeared. A clean miss.

We took off in their direction of flight, knowing that there were singles to be found somewhere. We moved through tight cover and I followed Milo around a tree without realizing that he had one pinned under a good point on the other side. The bird flushed a few steps ahead and I, once again, managed one shot and miss as the bird fled through the trees.

Milo continued his search through the woods. I checked my GPS to find that he had moved 150 yards away, which I was not comfortable with given the limited visibility and our proximity to a nearby road. I called to him and he ignored, dead set on finding those birds. I repeated my call. He returned to me less than a minute later, but I knew that he heard me the first time. Concerned by my brief lack of control and already satisfied with our experience for the evening, I put him on leash, and we began our walk back to the truck as the sun began to set.

We returned to the truck and Milo, still on leash, caught scent from a nearby brush line which we had not yet checked. His nose led him toward it and once again, I followed. A witness, had there been one, may say that I was dragged. In what seemed like no time, he locked up on point. The timing of the rest is a blur. One way or another, I dropped the leash and flushed the bird in just one step in its

direction. It took off over a harvested field, and I knew that this one would be different. I shouldered and the bird fell with one shot. A moment later, Milo was standing over our first wild bobwhite. I walked over, joined him, and we enjoyed the moment together. It was not a retrieve and I still do not care. He hunted well, with intensity but also with precision, mindfulness, and a soft touch. In just an hour, he had three separate points and did not bump a single bird. It was one of the purest hunts I have experienced to date, with great lessons to consider on wing shooting and obedience. I am not an upland man yet, but I believe that I am beginning to understand.

