

Hunting With The Dachshund (Teckel)



Written by Bernd Kügow

Hunting With Miniature Dachshunds (Teckels)

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Just to give you a little background. I am of German origin, having grown up in Lubars, Berlin, where my father was a forest master. We kept lots of hunting dogs at home, our main breeds being the Weimaraner and the Teckel. A Teckel is a Dachshund. There is no distinction where I come from, between a working or non-working Dachshund – they are all called Teckels. To add to the confusion, some dialects also call them Dackels. It was a surprise to me to find that, in England, Dachshunds and Teckels are regarded as two different breeds. In Germany, Dachshunds of all coats and sizes are used for hunting, both for the flushing and retrieving of game, for tracking wounded animals and for finding, bolting and despatching vermin. I have been in England for over 20 years and have been surprised to see the difference between the English “show-bred” Dachshund and those I knew at home. When we decided to keep, breed and show Dachshunds, I was keen to make sure that they retained their natural instinct and were also well constructed; so the showing and working ability go hand in hand. This booklet hopes to cover the basics of hunting with Dachshunds, ours being miniature wire-haired, and hopes to point out some of the difficulties associated with training. It is not for me to advocate that all those who keep Dachshunds should enable them to hunt, I am just keen to share what I do and encourage anyone else in the breed who is interested. For ease of writing, all dogs are referred to as “he”. This obviously includes bitches.

Where To Start?

Firstly, you need to decide what you want to do with your dog. If you decide you want to train your dog to find, flush and retrieve game birds, he will need to have a soft mouth and it is not advisable to also train him to find and despatch vermin. Similarly, if you want your dog to track wounded game, he must not be introduced to vermin, because for game tracking he needs to be quiet. Vermin hunters give tongue when they are on the scent of vermin and are not useful for tracking when firstly trained for vermin hunting.

We train our miniature wire-haired Dachshunds for either vermin hunting or game bird flushing. The type of terrain we have access to is open moorland and, as such, lends itself to fox, hare, rats and a variety of game birds.

Dachshunds are not terriers and do not hunt like a terrier. They use their intelligence and speed to often outwit their prey – they do not look for a fight but they will stand their ground against the opposition if they have to. Dachshunds, no matter how well trained, are stubborn and, if you do not catch them with the whistle quickly enough when they put up a hare, you can often be left waiting for a good 20 minutes until they give up the chase and return with their tongues hanging out!

Preparing The Ground

Training begins right from the outset, with every opportunity being taken to encourage the young dog to look for scent and track interesting smells. We often lay a trail of raw tripe juice along the grass for young puppies to follow. If they can keep on track, they are rewarded with a lump of tripe hidden somewhere in the garden. We also introduce them to tunnels and pipes as soon as they can walk so that they become used to going through and coming back again. When they are steadier on their feet, we hang a pheasant wing or a fox tail from a piece of string on the end of a stick and see if they are interested in trying to catch it or follow it along the ground. We use every opportunity to encourage them to be independent and to introduce them to interesting smells, sights and sounds. From 8 weeks old, they come up onto the moor with the older ones and we watch how they behave. Are they noticing smells and sounds? Will they go into cover and explore independently or are they frightened? It doesn't always click right away, you often have to give them time to assimilate the information they are gathering but with time and patience their instinct usually comes to the surface. It is at this time that they are trained to come back to the whistle. This is vitally important and can be crucial in avoiding danger. Our young ones usually respond by copying the older ones, who come back when the whistle is blown 3 times. If they do not respond to the whistle, we put them on a long field line and blow the whistle – if they ignore it, a good tug that stops them and brings them back towards you usually makes sure they get the message (eventually). This is also used on older ones who become headstrong or stop coming back to the whistle. It is important to remember that your Dachshund is a dog, just because he is small doesn't mean he should be treated any differently. The field line is also a necessary piece of equipment for training your Dachshund not to bother sheep. All our Dachshunds walk through fields of sheep on a daily basis and do not even look at them. This has been achieved through using a field line and, when the dog did not respond to the whistle, letting it out quite a distance to chase a sheep, blowing 3 times on the whistle and yanking the line hard, taking the dog right off it's feet and leaving it in no doubt as to the consequences of sheep chasing.

Fox Holes

It must be remembered that all of the above takes time and patience. The Dachshund does not respond to rough handling and it can set the training back a long way if the dog is not praised and encouraged. In order to hunt, the dog must have instinct, you can then channel it correctly to give you the desired results. Running around aimlessly and accidentally flushing animals is not hunting; the Dachshund should be methodical and persistent in his hunting, using the wind to advantage and following the scent keenly.

Before you can think about training your dog to go into a fox hole, you have to be 100% sure that, if required, your dog will stand his ground. In order to make sure of this, it is useful to make sure he is introduced to rats, mice and rabbits in a controlled situation, to see if he manages to despatch them efficiently. If your dog goes into a frenzy when confronted with a caged rat or rabbit, you can probably be sure he will do his best to kill it, if it becomes necessary.

We install artificial fox holes on our local shoots, which the foxes take up, as they are lazy by nature and it is easier than digging their own. There are very precise dimensions and materials involved in doing this properly, in order that badgers do not take up residence and to ensure that the lairs you create are attractive to the fox. These are useful because you know exactly how the pipes are laid underground, you know where the lair is and you know your dog can get out. The aim is that the dog will go in, bolt the fox and the fox will then be shot. It is crucial that you only use one dog at a time so that the one dog doesn't take possession and fight over the prey. It is also of the utmost importance to ensure the hunter is a good shot and does not become trigger happy—many Dachshunds are lost through trigger happy hunters!

If you are sure that your dog is ready to face a fox, it is better to firstly introduce him in an artificial lair as you then have control of the situation and can get to him quickly if the need

arises. It is much more difficult in natural holes and this should only be attempted when your dog is reliable, and only then with control measures in place, such as a ferret locator on the dog and a spade ready just in case it is needed! I remember one particular day that Kate got stuck on a fox in a natural hole and we dug her out 3 hours later, still hold of the fox and covered in 60 ticks, which were removed overnight so she could attend Crufts the next day. She was still so high on adrenalin that she won the bitch ticket!

During the winter months, our dogs can flush as many as 20 or 30 foxes to the gun on our local area of moorland. This is exciting for them, keeps their instincts sharp and their energy levels and senses keen. It also provides an excellent pest control method for the local farmers.

Dangers To Be Aware Of

- Only ever enter one dog to a hole as there is a strong likelihood that, if a fox is present, the dogs will fight over possession.
- Don't let anyone else take a dog near the hole as, if the fox bolts, there is a danger that the other dog will also chase it and the gunman may lose concentration and shoot a dog instead of the fox.
- Ensure that the dogs do not enter badger sets. Apart from the legal aspect, dachshunds can suffer severe injuries, and possibly death, as a result of confrontation with a badger.
- Trust your dog—if he thinks there is something in the hole, there probably is; if he is disinterested there is probably nothing there.
- Do not encourage your dog to be reckless; it is far better to avoid injury to your dog and hunt safely. There is no place in the hunting field for macho behaviour.
- Ensure any bites or cuts are thoroughly cleaned and antibiotics administered.
- After any contact with fox or other vermin, check your dog for fleas and ticks.

And Finally

- Remember that your dog's coat and feet are of major importance for happy, healthy hunting.
- It is crucial that he has a good undercoat that keeps him dry and warm.
- His feet should be well arched with strong pads and thick hair for protection.
- He should have enough ground clearance to enable him to get over and through thick cover and he should be athletic enough to get into holes and turn around to get out.
- It is no good having a dog that is too fat as this will hinder his performance and stamina.
- Exaggerations of any kind are best avoided for the hunting dog. Over full fronts and too deep chests are barriers to the dog performing the tasks he was created for and should not be viewed as desirable.

Dachshunds in my (and their) native Germany are happy, athletic, working dogs. I hope this short booklet explains a little about how our Teckels hunt and the way in which we start training a Teckel for the hunting field.