

## A Boy's First Hunt

At the end of December, I took a friend and his fourteen year old son pheasant hunting at the Des Plaines Conservation Area. My friend has endured with some interest the stories of our German Wirehaired Pointer Abbie's successes in competition related to him over the past several years. Because of this, I admittedly felt some pressure for Abbie to live up to her reputation as a highly trained show dog and AKC Master Hunter.

As a rule, I am very cautious about taking my dog and myself into the field with inexperienced hunters armed with shotguns. But the man and son, though having never hunted, are both experienced competitive high powered rifle shooters and I felt confident in their safe gun handling abilities.

The conditions could not have been better that day, cold with a clear blue sky and a good breeze. An hour into the hunt found us walking in tall brown grass near the edge of a cluster of small trees. As Abbie moved briskly ahead of us, she suddenly spun back to her left and locked up hard 20 yards ahead and between the fourteen year old and me. Just as we had discussed prior to entering the field, the boy and I slowly walked in to flush the bird but it had given us the slip. I quietly released Abbie and she crept forward with that posture that spells hot scent. Seconds later she was again on point and the tension in her crouching form reassured me that we were closing in on our quarry. With mounting anticipation, the boy and I again moved in to flush the still invisible bird. As we closed the distance to my statue of a dog, the pheasant burst into flight and thundered away to the boy's left. His preparation at the trap range with Dad paid off with a one shot kill and when I sent Abbie for the downed bird, she finished the scenario with a retrieve to my hand. Abbie handled the bird work like the Master Hunter she is and on the first hunt of his life, my young friend took his first pheasant over a first class dog. I don't know who was more proud, his Dad or me. This was a great experience for me because of what I am sure was a life experience for the boy and his father.

In relating this story here, I am reminded that our great heritage of hunting and shooting can only live on if we share it with others, especially our youth.