

Creating Staunchness With Style

by Mark Payton

Spicing up the Reset Method with wing-tied pigeons.

In the world of upland hunting, a staunch pointing dog is a must as it brings control and predictability to your hunts, maximizing opportunities while minimizing mishaps. One long-standing method for teaching staunchness involves physically picking the dog up and returning him to the exact spot where he broke point – a technique referred to by some as the Reset Method.

The underlying principle of this technique is to reinforce the desired behavior – standing still in the presence of bird

scent with no advancing, no creeping, and certainly no flushing the bird for us. It's the cornerstone of a reliable pointing dog, and it can only occur when the dog has been taught that he must remain frozen on point – no matter the temptation – until we flush the birds. The reward for being staunch is the chase after we flush the bird or the bird itself, if we shoot it. The correction is the removal of the chase, not the addition of pressure.

The best practitioners return the dog to the spot from which he moved as quietly and calmly as possible, without emotion. This isn't a punishment – it's a clear communication: "This is the correct place." By removing forward motion and resetting the dog, he learns through repetition and association that staunchness, not charging in, leads to satisfaction and success.

A solid understanding of the *whoa* command accelerates the learning process. However, too often handlers begin saying, “Whoa” before the dog has any idea what it means. Dogs are constantly forming associations, and good training ensures they form the right ones – the ones we intend. Using the *whoa* command before the dog understands its meaning can create confusion. Your dog might conclude the opposite of what you want, and that *whoa* means to break point, since it was said while the dog first started to move.

After initially using a low, soothing tone to say, “Whoa” while returning the dog to the spot where he should have stopped – but seeing no effect – some trainers mistakenly think increasing the verbal pressure by repeating the command louder is what’s required. When these verbal cues still fail to produce the desired response, they raise the stakes even more by increasing physical pressure during the reset. With one hand on the dog’s collar and the other supporting the dog’s rear, they begin to shake the dog by the collar during the reset.

There are two potential problems with this escalating pressure approach: blinking, and major style issues such as flagging and lying down on point.

Blinking is when a dog intentionally avoids birds after detecting their scent. It occurs when a dog begins to associate negative consequences with being close to birds, so rather than locking up on point as expected, these dogs learn that avoiding (or blinking) birds is the safer choice.

Flagging is when a dog detects the scent of a bird and stops; but instead of assuming a classic, stone-still, intense point, he wags or moves his tail. The rest of the body may remain mostly still, but the tail, and sometimes the head, will move.

How can a trainer use the Reset Method effectively, without creating problems like blinking or flagging? Professional dog trainer Bryan Camper has refined the method over years of experience, having successfully trained more than a thousand pointing dogs along the way.

He starts all young dogs by gang-running them in groups of three or four. During these sessions, the dogs knock and chase birds launched from an electronic releaser (see “The Case for Chase,” March/April 2025). Over time, they begin to point – sometimes only briefly – and many will even honor. When a dog does point, he says, “Whoa” in a calm, mellow tone; but he’s not using the word as a command or asking the dog to *do* anything. He’s simply pairing the word with the right behavior, helping the dog form a positive association long before any pressure is introduced.

Resetting the dog suitcase-style.





With the checkcord through the rear D-ring, the dog thinks he is restrained from behind.



Beginning the process on the whoa-post.

Once the dog begins pointing birds with some reliability, it's time for formal staunchness training. Chasing bumped birds is no longer allowed. At this stage, Camper introduces a clear transitional period in which each dog is thoroughly whoa-broke, establishing consistent expectations moving forward.

He uses the whoa-post method to teach *whoa* where compliance is assured in the yard because it restrains the dog from both the front and back. A 10- to 15-yard rope is attached behind the dog and anchored to a post or stake in the ground, while a second rope of similar length is held by Camper in front. Both lines connect to the dog's flat collar, but the rope running to the post is configured as a half-hitch around the dog's flank.

This half-hitch creates a key point of contact, a method popularized by legendary trainer Delmar Smith. Pressure applied at the flank physically communicates a clear message: stop, and then remain still. Later in training, low-level stimulation from an e-collar – positioned at the same point of contact on the flank – conveys the same message: stand still until released. The e-collar allows this message to be delivered conveniently and consistently, whether the dog is 30 feet away during the whoa-post yard training, or later, when the dog is 300 yards away in the field during an actual hunt.



Proofing the whoa with a wing-tied pigeon.

The verbal *whoa* command isn't reintroduced by Camper until the dog shows an understanding that the low-level stimulation from the e-collar on the flank means to stop and stand still. Waiting to add the verbal command after demonstrating this level of proficiency prevents an erroneous association with the command. At first, *whoa* is simultaneously paired with the low-level stimulation, but in time, the dog will stop with the verbal command only.

When the dog reliably stops and stands on either a verbal or physical cue, Camper tosses a pigeon that has its wings interlocked or "tied" together approximately 10 feet in front of the dog. (To "tie" a pigeon's wings, gently cross the wings twice: once at the elbow and again at the wrist. This restricts flight, but the pigeon should only remain tied for a minute or two to avoid impairing its ability to fly afterward.) Most dogs will move

when first presented with a wing-tied bird, but Camper calmly resets the dog to where he was initially standing while continuously applying low-level stimulation. Stimulation terminates the moment the dog's feet are back on the ground.

The wing-tied pigeon is a mesmerizing sight to a bird dog, so he will typically exhibit both style and intensity in its presence. Neither the act of calmly being reset nor the low-level stimulation that occurs during the reset will normally detract from the dog's style. The dog learns that resets are not harmful, and Camper believes that the presence of the bird causes the dog to forget about both the reset and the low-level stimulation. The dog is focused and thinking exclusively about the bird.

Mastery of the yard sessions signals it's time to move the *whoa* training to the field. This is initially conducted with no birds planted for the purpose of pointing them, but wing-tied pigeons are still used. The dog is allowed to chase the pigeon as a reward for stopping quickly. However, if the dog stops too slowly, the chase is denied in one of two ways: either Camper



returns the bird to his bird bag; or he holds the dog's collar while releasing the pigeon. Once this brief phase is complete, it's finally time to return to pointing birds – but without the knocking and chasing that were previously allowed after a brief point.

One technique Camper has devised to bridge the gap – chasm, really – between the yard and the field is to have the dog drag a small checkcord. The cord is snapped to the dog's flat collar and threaded through a D-ring on the flank collar. When the dog has been commanded, "Whoa," he grabs the cord and moves in front of the dog, where light tugs are felt at the flank – making the dog think he's restrained from behind, just like during the whoa-post training.

He now begins teaching staunchness using birds restrained in a Velcro harness, also known as a "bird wrap." If the dog breaks point, he commands, "Whoa" in a normal tone while simultaneously applying low-level stimulation to the flank and then quickly, but calmly, reaches the dog and resets him to the exact spot where he initially pointed. These resets are done suitcase-style, where one hand holds both the e-collar's transmitter and the checkcord that stretches over the dog's back, while the other hand holds a portion of the checkcord that extends past the flank collar's D-ring.

Should the dog be fast enough or determined enough to catch the bird in the wrap after he's been commanded to *whoa*, the bird is gently taken from his mouth and tossed on the ground again, in plain sight of the dog, before the dog is reset. Once reset to his original position, Camper now puts his hands on the dog in a purely positive manner, slowly petting the dog and stroking his tail. He'll even lightly try to push the dog forward, which, due to the dog's innate opposition reflex, causes the dog to resist and to remain stationary. While the petting aids in the dog having good style, so does another wing-tied pigeon that he also tosses in sight of the dog.

Dogs that don't break their point or those that cooperate immediately after a single reset are rewarded with the opportunity to chase – either the wing-tied bird after it's been untied or the bird restrained in the bird wrap. Dogs that require another reset due to a second refusal to stand are denied the opportunity to chase.

The fact that Camper tempts, corrects, and rewards the dog in the field exactly as he did in the yard underscores the importance of proper *whoa* training. The corrections are nothing new to the dog, so there's no risk of forming negative associations. The dog has simply disobeyed a known command and is being fairly corrected, as has been done dozens of times in the past.

With enough thoughtful repetition, the dog begins to internalize the rules of the game. He knows what earns a reset, and he understands what leads to the reward. He starts choosing staunchness on his own, not because he's forced, but because he sees the value in it. And the use of the wing-tied bird is a brilliant piece of the puzzle. It adds just enough enticement to encourage the dog to perform all of his work with style.

So whether you're new to bird dog training or just refining your approach, the Reset Method, as done by Camper, offers a clear path to a staunch and stylish dog. It keeps the dog eager and focused, turning every lesson into something the dog *wants* to do. In the end, it's not just about control – it's about cultivating a dog that holds point with purpose, intensity, and a look that'll make you proud every time he points.



To see Camper quickly demonstrate this process, scan the QR code to watch a short video; if you're reading this in the digital version of the magazine, simply click the play button above now!

