

Pre-season Conditioning

Every season I see out of shape gun dogs being pushed to the limit by over zealous hunters. I've talked about the value of preseason conditioning for dogs in past columns... I feel it is extremely important to touch on this topic before every hunting season. If you are one of the many who disregard preseason conditioning, you need to be aware of the critical signs that your dog is in trouble from heat exhaustion. Because dogs have a very high tolerance to pain and physical discomfort, most hunters don't realize their dog is in trouble from over work until it is too late. Heat stress can progress very rapidly, a number of important signs to watch for while hunting are; heavy panting, disoriented, sluggishness and vomiting. In advanced stages, dogs start to lose control of their muscle functions and collapse. At this point many dogs may go into shock and could die without immediate veterinary care. To help diagnose the severity of the dogs condition you should take his temperature with a rectal thermometer. The normal range should be 101 to 102 degrees, not 98.6 like a human. If your dogs temperature is elevated you must cool him down with cool water or a fan in a shaded area. Be careful not to cool the dog down too fast with very cold water. The severe temperature change can throw them into shock as well. If your dog doesn't come around in ten to fifteen minutes of rest and cooling off, you should seek veterinary care.

Key ingredients to keeping any dog hunting during warm conditions are; slowing the pace, frequent fresh water stops to keep hunters and dogs hydrated along with regular rest periods in shaded areas. Because dogs do not sweat to help cool themselves off, a dousing of water or a swim in a pond will provide evaporation, which lowers the dogs body temperature. Dogs cool themselves by exchanging the air in their lungs with cooler outside air. The best place to find cool air is in the air-conditioned cab of your pickup.

Keeping these things in mind will make for a safe and productive hunting season.

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