

The problem is that Patchwork gets in trouble even faster than a teenager. He runs those scent-trails to the end, and sometimes the end is a barbed-wire fence, which is why his hide resembles a quilt stitched together by a veterinarian. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

When Patch was a little squirming puppy, not long ago, I used to carry him out of the house whenever he started sniffing the undercarriage of our rocking chair. By the time he touched ground, all four legs would be moving so fast that they were blurred. He looked like a mechanical toy that had been turned on too soon. He'd tear off and I'd watch the furrow made by a short dog in the tall grass. In front of him, things would start flying -- indignant blackbirds and flustered coveys of horned larks. Then, after the birds were attended to, Patch would look for a tree that needed marking. First things first.

As Patch got older, he ran into bigger birds, and that's when the hunting invitations started. It was also when I discovered that my dog had an embarrassing character defect. He refused to find pheasants where I told him to do it.

This breach of discipline first came to my attention when Patchwork and I were hunting with a friend called Slim. (People who chase pheasants are often called Slim.) We sneaked up on Hell's Half-Acre, which is a secret cover known only to Slim, me, and a few others who hang out at Nagorski's Gunsmith & Sporting Goods. Any fool looking at that brush would recognize it as pheasant habitat, and Slim and I were convinced, in addition,



that we could get the bird in there surrounded. I heeled Patchwork to the downwind edge of the tangle and sent him in. He sniffed around, made a U-turn, and ran into a field of hay behind me.

Slim and I pushed through the brush anyhow and found no birds. Then we looked for Patch and noticed that he was on point out in the grass. The rooster flushed before we got close enough to shoot. Got cramps from sitting so long, I suppose.

This is the kind of thing that happens when your dog won't find pheasants in the right places. Slim hinted that my training techniques were at fault, but I blamed the pup's natural perversity.

Patch had plenty of training, goodness knows. Every time we went hunting, I would tootle my whistle frequently so that he could locate me if he should feel lonely. He seldom had an attack of loneliness till dinner-time, but that wasn't my fault. I told Slim that he couldn't expect me to train a dog when to be hungry.

In fact the problem lay deeper than my training methods. Patch and I did not even agree on what we were chasing. Details follow, so take a last, nostalgic look. We're looking for a big bronze rooster with a green head and streaming tail-feathers -- right?

Wrong. We're not looking for anything. We're sniffing around for the right scent.

I have been moved into the garage because of a misunderstanding on this subject, but it was Patchwork's fault.



Last time we went hunting, he ran wide around a patch of bristling wild-rose bushes. I called him back and gave him a lecture on the importance of working cover thoroughly, even when there are thorns involved. Then I stood him at the edge of the prickles and, with two sharp blasts on my whistle, ordered him forward.

Patch backed up.

Not me. A clump of the shrubbery began to shake and I pounced on it, but the thing sneaking around in there was no pheasant. It was a little black animal with white stripes.