

Benson relies on 60 years experience of dog-training

People

Orin Benson

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TOWN OF EAGLE — Orin Benson has a specific theory to dog training.

“Select an animal, work with him, go into the ring and the performance should be first-rate if it’s his movements giving actions to your thoughts,” said Benson, Highway ZZ. This man speaks with the authority of more than 60 years with the dogs.

He was born on a farm near St. Paul, Minn. He was not quite 10 years old when he and Coolie, a collie-type farm dog, worked together to collect the cows. Benson realized then that words were not necessary. The dog saw what was happening and then tried to duplicate man’s action.

There were few books on training animals available to Benson in those days. He was to form a live, first edition. “Neighbors watched me make sled dogs out of big airdale type animals and proceed to hunt with a cross bred German shepherd,” commented Benson.

He says a neighbor brought him a registered springer spaniel for hunting when he was 14. “The only thing,” laughed Benson, “was that dog was afraid of guns. So I had to calm him.”

He figured the best way was to pop paper bags and get the animal used to noise. Then his father became a customer when he wanted decoys for hunting.

Benson switched from dogs to birds. He remembers teaching Mallards to be live decoys. These creatures would stay in harness while sitting on the water calling their wild relatives.

So named “call ducks” were in demand when hunters did not want to use the old hand mouth horn.

A next natural step was gun dog training. This had to be accomplished in the wide open spaces of the family farm.



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Joan Holman

who weren’t allowed into these beauty events.”

Benson returned to the family farm in Minnesota where he began his first dog school. The farm cottage was headquarters. A 1921 Model T Ford was his dog wagon. His clients were St. Paul industrialists with summer homes in fashionable Dellwood who owned hunting dogs.

He drove out each morning in the Ford to collect the pupils. Near each house, the horn would sound, the door open and the maid would let the dog out for class. Benson would fill the car and carry the pupils to the training grounds. At the end of the session, the dogs would be turned loose to make their run home.

His career had started. In 1936, he chose Wisconsin because it had a longer hunting season than Minnesota.

With the backing of three Wisconsin businessmen, he began the first retriever kennel in the state. It was located at River Hills (near Milwaukee) and was called Dogs Unlimited.

Milwaukee became a nucleus for the Wisconsin Amateur Field Trial Association. This was Benson’s special interest as he had worked field trials in Minnesota. The trials, as an event, began in New York in 1933 and since that start, Benson had followed the events.

He first worked as a bird boy and had progressed to the point of being spokesman to encourage Wisconsin to join the association. In 1936, the first Wisconsin trials were held