

Scottish Association for Country Sports



Advice for Gundog Handlers on the Danger of Heatstroke & Transporting Dogs

July 2006

Risks to Gundogs from Overheating

With the temperatures rising during the summer months it is extremely important to prevent our gundogs from overheating. Dogs cannot tell us when their temperature rises so it is incumbent upon us to ensure that our dogs have sufficient shelter from the sun, adequate water to drink, and a way of cooling off during the hottest part of the day.

Some facts

A dog's body temperature is normally around 38°C. They regulate their body temperature by panting - expelling heat, thus causing an evaporatory reaction. If they can not expel the heat fast enough, their body temperature rises. A rise of just 2 degrees to a temperature of 40°C is all it takes to send a dog into a dangerous situation. At this temperature, the dog can no longer cope with reducing its body heat and the oxygen demand goes up to a level where the dog cannot cope. The result is that the temperature continues to rise.

When the temperature has reached 42°C, the heart, brain, liver, kidneys, and intestinal tracts begin breaking down at a cellular level. Tissue damage can progress at an alarming rate. Even immediate treatment and effective cooling to bring the temperature down can leave the dog with internal damage that may affect its long term health.

Leaving a dog in a hot car is a sure way to precipitate heat stroke. The heat inside a car can rise to as much as 70°C, creating oven-like conditions. As responsible sportsmen we all have a duty to ensure this does not happen to our dogs nor indeed, allow it to happen to other dogs.

Early Signs of Heat Stroke

Heat stroke can be caused by a number of factors and not just dogs being left in hot cars. Extremely hot conditions outside can cause the symptoms every bit as quickly as inside a hot vehicle. The early signs are - rapid breathing, dry mouth and nose, rapid heart rate, gums that leave their healthy colour for dull, greyish-pink, or red. All these are early stages of heat stroke. Even at the earliest stage of heat stroke, dogs may be fighting for their life. These symptoms can be followed in minutes by collapse, seizures, coma and death. Remember - If you have any doubts about your dog's health whether it is heat related or some other condition you must consult a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Transporting Gundogs

The following points will assist you in the safe transporting of your gundog;

- Never transport dogs inside the seating area of a car
- Where possible, use a purpose built dog trailer
- For short journeys a purpose built, in-car dog box is adequate but this must be securely fitted in the rear compartment of the vehicle with adequate ventilation provided
- Plan long journeys so as to build in exercise and “emptying” stops for your dogs
- On roadside stops keep your dogs on leads and make sure you have a means of disposing of any faeces safely
- Carry water, dog food and a feeding bowl in the vehicle
- When parking-up ensure the dog trailer and/or vehicle is left in a cool, shady location.
- Where trailer or vehicle designs permit, open outer doors to ensure air circulation
- Check on your dogs regularly throughout the day and exercise at regular intervals. Every hour is recommended.
- Ensure trailer door locks are engaged before moving off
- After clearing slow moving traffic or traffic jams, check that your dog trailer has good air circulation and the dogs are not suffering from inhalation of carbon monoxide fumes given out by your vehicle or other vehicles
- Carry a spare wheel for you trailer and a means of changing it
- Do not keep your dogs inside cars or trailers in hot weather no matter how good their design. Heatstroke can occur in the best designed trailers during high daytime temperatures