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Author: Jackie Drakeford

The young terrier has not yet learned to work in a methodical manner, nor as part of a pack. She travels at an extended hurtle, smashing through the thickest cover without flinching. She's like a cocker on speed. The lurchers, used to steadier terriers, find her a tad exasperating. Once she steadies down and sticks to working in the same county as the rest of us, she's going to be a gem.

I like to work terriers and lurchers together, but you need a sense of humour and properly trained dogs. It helps if one of you works the terriers, and another the lurchers. And you have to be adaptable, because each one has a favoured method of working, and you're better to go with it than agin it. It's true you sometimes get a lurcher working thick cover and a terrier bouncing about outside waiting for the bolt: it happened again yesterday and I saw a terrific course. The terrier is about the same size as a good rabbit, and she flattened her ears and pelted after it, little legs a blur, then took the most amazing flying leap and seized the coney halfway along the back. It was as good a catch as I've seen any dog make. My old lurcher, who had been working the cover, emerged in a halo of dangling greenery, confiscated the rabbit and retrieved it to me. Had the terrier not let go, he would have retrieved her as well. We still have some work to do there, but what the hell.

Up on the hillside, where there are huge patches of thick thorn cover, dense scrub and strange ferns, it is like the Home Counties equivalent of the Amazon Basin. Anyone old enough to remember

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Michael Bentine's flea circus will be helpless with laughter watching: small wriggles in the vegetation are followed by large wriggles, there is gasping and the odd yip (damned noisy terrier at home, but silent working unless she is right on a rabbit's scut), and starbursts of exiting blackbirds tell us where the little wossname is now. A rabbit slides across a bare patch followed by a terrier running hard with nose down, and lurchers dance around bramble heaps like Essex girls around handbags. Sometimes I intervene with my stick, or wade through waist-high nettles in obedience to a stout mark by a lurcher that would like to know when we will be getting a terrier that is actually on hand when needed. Every now and then there is a frantic note to the scuffling, sometimes followed by a squeal and a shaking of undergrowth, or else a bolt that is generally a rabbit of some sort. Then you see lurchers lurch, for these two, father and daughter, have learned to work quarry between them, and very little that gets out in the open makes it to safety these days. Meanwhile, the terrier gallops across to a large puddle, drinks copiously, wees in the water (why do they do that?) and collapses grinning onto her belly, legs out fore and aft and a tongue a yard long. A couple of minutes' R and R and she'll be off again. Now, where are those lurchers?

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If dogs are going to be worked together as a pack, there are certain refinements in training that make the job easier. You need to be able to stop any dog in its tracks, either in a stand, sit or down, so that when one of the others catches, they don't all pile onto the catch and muller it. You also need dogs absolutely sound on the 'leave-it' command, in case something bolts that is best let go. The way to achieve this is to have each dog trained and worked separately until you have the required standard, because if it won't obey on its own, it sure as heck won't when in a pack. Generally, one dog will 'volunteer' to be the retriever, so back that dog up and see that the others let go as soon as he or she goes to pick up. If they all retrieve, then the one that catches takes the honour of bringing the catch to you. Insist on this: you are the boss (especially if your wife tells you) and all catches belong to you (or her).