

gun talk

PAT BROWNE

THE MORNING was mild, that pre-dawn mildness that we get around opening time. Just enough nip in the air to have you reaching for a jacket when you are sitting in the blind. You know it will be hot later, but not the searing heat we know in summer, just the pleasant warm when the water all around tempers the sun.

The old gentleman liked these days. Age had dampened his enthusiasm for the wild winter forays with his waterfowling mates, but he liked to be there. He did not know, nor do I think did he care much how many more duck seasons he would see. The fact that he was there for this one was good enough. God knows, he had seen plenty, good ones and bad ones but this was his life, swamps, guns and ducks.

Many things came to mind that morning as I pushed the boat through the still velvet pre-dawn darkness. The old fellow just sat there, his grey



hair faintly luminous in the fading moonlight. He sat patiently as we set the decoys and made ourselves comfortable in the blind. There was nothing new to him, watching these careful preparations, he had seen it all before, many times.

A pre-dawn blind is a good place for thinking and remembering and I remember that morning, memories that went back more than a decade, of the pigeon shoots so many years ago when as a youngster the old gentleman learned a trick or two of the couple of times he had bent himself in accidents and survived. Of the times he had walked around quail paddocks until those injuries had him grunting with pain as he walked the last hundred or so yards, of the wild and woolly rides he had across the lakes and swamps hunched up and sitting uncomfortably on the lumpy decoy bags, of the howling dawns when we have had some of our great shoots, and the blazing sunsets when we all feel a communion with nature that leaves us a little awed, of the patience shown when we passed the port once too often, of the sure instinct he had when there were ducks about, ever alert and always willing.

Yes, the old gentleman was very much in my thoughts that morning. I could feel a shiver of excitement in him as the eastern sky lightened. A kind of anticipation we all know and never tire of. He sat there quietly, the guns sounding only faintly in his ears, a legacy of the years spent in close proximity to a barking 12 gauge.

He watched as birds fell and were retrieved by dogs he had worked with and taught a trick or so to over the years.

Yes, old Geordie watched and I



"ALL TIMES WASTED WOTS NOT SPENT SHOOTIN"

think felt satisfied that he was leaving his masters work to Scotty, Suzy and Duke. It was as if the old Maestro was conducting a class in working gun dog etiquette as bird after bird was brought to hand with unflinching precision. He may have been old and the joints a little weary but he knew the score. A flurry of action had four birds down and only three retrieved. With a grunt, Geordie hit the water and with the precision of a dozen duck seasons that black duck was back and in the bag before the youngsters had time to think about getting it.

As I sit and write this, Geordie has gone and a large piece of my duck hunting has gone with him. He was not my dog but I, like a lot of other water-fowlers who have hunted with Ian Campbell grew to love old Geordie. That single blackie brought to bag at this years opening was his last and as I sit here and remember him with my black lab Suzy asleep at my feet I think-how lucky we hunters are. There is a lot of life to be learned from a good dog, patience, loyalty, hard work, satisfaction, contentment and love.

So farewell, old gentleman, I hope that if there is a hereafter for dogs that yours is full of ducks and a master that can handle a shotgun.