



Dispatch photo by D. R. Huey

Art, a yellow Labrador, helped, from left, Dave Harkless, Lynn Carroll and P.C. Carroll bag these six pheasants.

Hounds put some hop into first rabbit outing

MOUNT VERNON, Ohio — First impressions are lasting, maybe, but it pays to keep an open mind.

Take Friday. At first glance, it looked like a dog of a day to hunt small game. It was the first day of rabbit, pheasant and quail season in Ohio and it was wet.

After a night of thunder, lightning and rain the sky turned a dreadful lemon yellow and then became a gloomy gray. The showers stopped long enough to let four men get out of the barnyard, where the beagles had a snarling contest, and well away from any farm outbuildings.

Then it poured.

I TOOK shelter, if that's the word, beneath a walnut tree that didn't have a leaf on it. The other three guys in the party weren't any better off.

All you could say is that we were a lot drier than the three hounds. They were poking into the briers and every time they bumped a blackberry cane it showered raindrops on them.

One beagle, Nell, looked like she knew what she was doing. A black and tan with lots of blueticking, she put her nose to the ground and snuffed along like a vacuum cleaner. A good sign in a hound.

Another pup, Rover, gave appearances of being out for a walk. Like I said, first impressions will fool you. Sam, the older dog, didn't tongue much.

Our hound trio quickly got a couple of bunnies going after the rain and one member of the party shot both of them.

IT WAS his right. When hounds start a bunny the hunters should pick their stands, remain as still as rocks, and keep quiet. Do that and a cottontail just might run close enough to offer a shot.

After the two kills we couldn't get Nell out of the wood lot where



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the blackberries and wild rose grew. Her short chop kept up and I eventually realized that all of her belling was coming from a patch about the size of a living room.

To a beagle pup like Nell, it seems everything smells exciting and is worthy of comment. Nell never shut up until we put her back in the truck.

The other two hounds bayed less and showed more, though I'm not certain Rover has the run-until-I-drop attitude of most hounds. Now and then he sat down during the hunt, an unusual position for a die-hard beagle.

While Nell, the faker, was bay-ing in the distance, the other two dogs started a rabbit along a run that always produces a chase.

I WATCHED the cottontail. It came out of the brush along the stream, hopped into the rows of corn, and progressed to 6 feet of me. Though I didn't move an eyelash, it suddenly veered away and was lost in the cornfield.

Later we corralled Nell and I took her back to the truck before we got arrested for noise pollution. With Nell silent at last, the other two hounds drove a rabbit past the gunners and they got it.

We quit in midafternoon with the sun shining and two relatively efficient beagles working for us. It pays to keep an open mind about the day and about dogs.