

A New Way to Teach the Swim-By

By Jim and Phyllis Dobbs

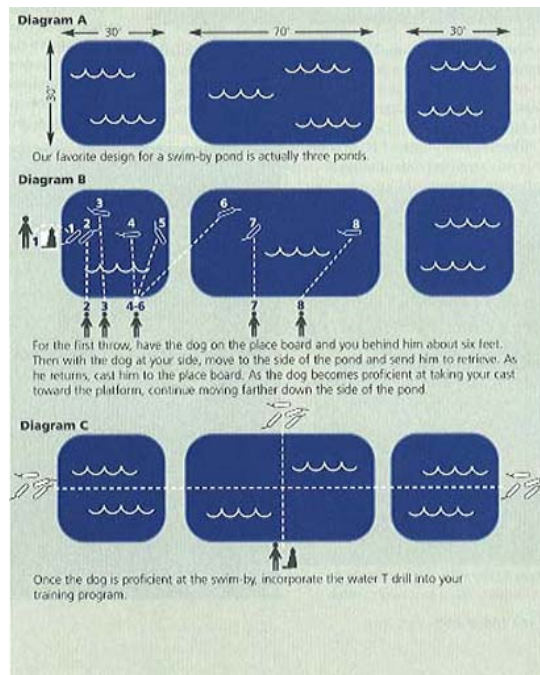
The swim-by is a traditional shore breaking drill that has long been used by retriever trainers. The new method described below alleviates a lot of the dog's confusion when being taught to the swim-by.

Prerequisite Training Steps for the Swim-by:

Teach the dog casting to a place board. For this procedure we recommend viewing the "Dogtra E-Collar Introduction" video. It shows in detail how to teach a dog to go get on a place board. This video is available in the *Retriever Journal* Books and Videos section of this issue. Also, you can get information on place board training from our previous *Retriever Journal* article "Training Your Dog to Cast", June/July 1996, which is reprinted in our web site library at www.dobbsdogs.com.

Before you teach the swim-by, the dog should also know not to run around the corner of a pond. See our article in *Retriever Journal*, "Shore breaking" August/Sept 1997.

Swim-by Pond



An ideal shape for a swim-by pond would be 30 X 70 feet with another 30 X 30-foot pond at each end. So you would actually have three ponds (See diagram 1). If you were thinking about designing a small pond, this diagram will give you a very functional plan with multiple uses. Of course, this is the ultimate and you certainly can teach a swim-by in almost any pond.

Swim-by Drill



Throw a bumper about 20 feet into the pond and have the dog retrieve it. When the dog starts to return to you, cast him toward the place board. The place board gives him a target so that he will understand where to go.

Put a place board on the shoreline at one end of a pond and have the dog get on the place board. Throw a bumper about 20 feet into the pond and have the dog retrieve it. Move so that you are standing directly behind the place board about 6 feet. Instead of having the dog deliver directly to you, have him stop on the place board. Go to him and take the bumper. Repeat this procedure a few times.



Once he reaches the place board, have him wait a moment before calling him to you.

Now send the dog for a retrieve from the side of the pond. When he turns toward you to return, cast him to the place board.

A New Way to Teach the Swim-By

The diagram shows the succession of throws and your position on the shore. When you get to the stage of throw C, the dog will typically want to come to you. Cast him toward the place board only once or twice. If he doesn't take your cast to the place board and comes into the shore, give him a "nick" the instant he touches the shoreline. Then take the bumper; throw it so it lands about 10 feet from the place board and send him to retrieve. Right after he picks up the bumper and turns toward you, signal him to swim to the place board.

Repeat this drill until the dog anticipates being sent past you on a swim-by to the place board. Then as the dog is swimming parallel to the shore, walk down the shore following him, but do not lead him. Stay slightly behind him and any time he turns in toward the shore tell him "NO!" and signal him toward the place board.

At this stage of training, he should be doing a swim-by without having to be signaled to do so. Now, alternate between doing the swim-by and calling him directly to you.

After mastering the swim-by in one direction, teach the swim-by drill in the opposite direction but do it during another session to prevent confusion. After practicing this drill a few times, the dog should willingly do the swim-by to either end of the pond.

The design of the swim-by pond in the diagram gives you the ability to teach water re-entries while teaching the swim-by. Think about it from the dog's perspective. A swim-by teaches him a picture, "parallel the shore until told to get out of the water". Because of this training, he may want to swim *around* a finger of land. He is just trying to stay parallel to the shoreline. If, however, you include water re-entries while teaching the swim-by, he will learn to cross the land instead of just merely paralleling the shoreline. This training will help him to carry a straight line.

It is amazing how much easier teaching the water "T" becomes if the swim-by drill is taught first. After all, the only *new* task the "T" drill incorporates is for the dog to stop and tread water when given a sit whistle. Now is a good time to put the swim-by lessons into use by doing the water "T Pattern" as shown in diagram #3.