

Advancing Handling in the Water

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs and Alice Woodyard

The demanding water tests in the Master stake and field trials require a dog that won't "square out" to exit the water too early. The Parallel to Shore drills in this column will help your dog learn to negotiate better "angle exits" from water, and will increase his willingness to be handled close to a shoreline without "bailing out."

"Over" Parallel to Shore

For this drill you need a pond or channel of swimming water. The water should be at least 15 yards wide. Place a few bumpers as your "back" pile on the far shore across the short dimension of the pond. Then place white bumpers ("diversion bumpers") every 20 feet or so along the far shore, located so that the swimming dog can see them. At the end of the long dimension of the pond, leave some bumpers that are not visible to the dog. See Diagram 1.

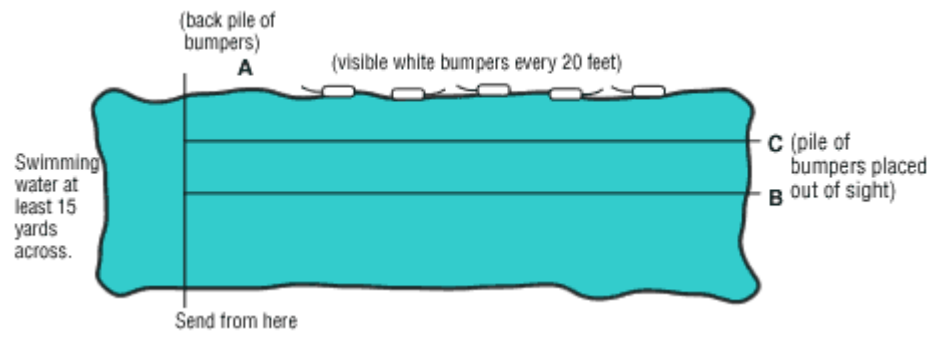
Diagram 1. "Over" Parallel to Shore Drill

This drill teaches the dog to take good "Over" casts in water and carry a cast very close to land without trying to get out.

Place a pile of bumpers at location "A." Place visible white bumpers along the far shore. Place a pile of bumpers out of sight at location "B." Handle the dog past the white bumpers as described in the text.

When he can pass all the white bumpers on his own without needing to be handled, you can occasionally begin stopping him and casting him "Back" to retrieve a white bumper.

When the dog is successful at holding the "Over" cast past the white bumpers on a line that is half way to the bumpers, move the non visible pile from location "B" to location "C." Now stop him 3/4 of the way across the pond and have him hold the "Over" cast closer to the tempting white bumpers (the cotted line).



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Locate the back pile for your dog by throwing a bumper to it, and send him to retrieve from the pile. Then send the dog again, and this time when he is half way across, stop him with your whistle and cast "Over" toward the pile you have placed out of sight at the end of the pond.

Any time the dog heads toward one of the white diversion bumpers, stop him with the command "No, Here" and have the dog swim toward you a few feet. Then stop him with your whistle and cast "Over" again. Continue this procedure until you can get the dog to the end of the pond, where he will retrieve one of the hidden bumpers.

As you repeat the drill, you will see the dog decide on his own not to try to head for the white bumpers when given an "Over" cast. When the dog will swim past the white bumpers without trying to get one, sometimes handle him to pick one up. This keeps him thinking, and stops him from just assuming that the white bumpers are "poison birds." So stop him with a whistle when he is opposite one of the white bumpers, and cast him "Back" to retrieve it.

Also, it is important to sometimes let the dog go all the way to the back pile when you send him. That way, he won't lose momentum and begin to anticipate your whistle.

When the dog becomes proficient at this drill from half way across the pond, begin stopping him 3/4 of the way across. This will require him to swim closer to the diversion bumpers on the "Over" cast, and still disregard them.

Don't use the e-collar to correct the dog unless he ignores a sit whistle or a "Here" command.

"Back" Parallel to Shore

The set-up for this drill is similar to the "Over" Parallel to Shore drill, only now you will be asking the dog to carry a "Back" cast parallel to shore, rather than an "Over" cast.

Place white diversion bumpers about every 20 feet along a shoreline, with the first one about 40 feet from where you will stand when you send the dog. Place bumpers out of sight on the far shore, located so that the line to them would be about three yards from the shore. See Diagram 2.

Send the dog. Whenever he pulls in toward a diversion bumper, stop him with "No," and then blow your sit whistle. Cast "Over" to move the dog away from the bumper and back on line. Stop him again, and cast "Back," using the arm that will turn the dog *toward* the shore.

If the dog heads for the same bumper again, stop him with your sit whistle and mild stimulation from the e-collar. Now cast him "Over" away from that bumper, but don't stop him until he is farther from shore than he was on your last "Back" cast. Then give another "Back" cast, again turning him toward shore. The "extra room" should allow him to have no trouble turning and swimming parallel to shore, leaving the diversion bumper alone.

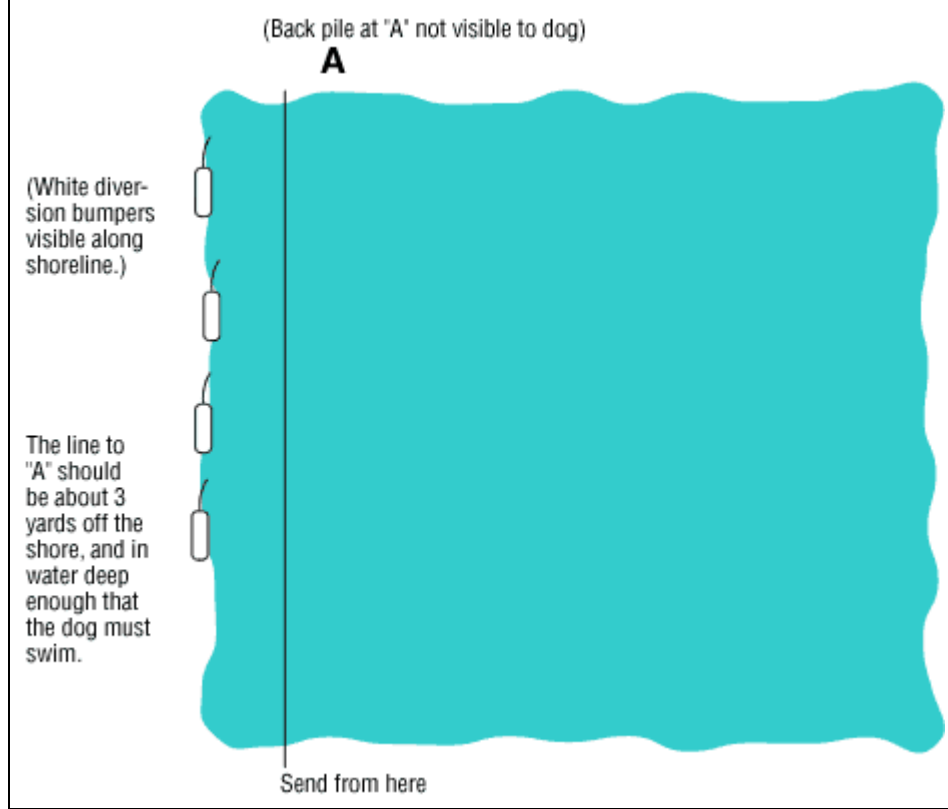
When the dog can swim all the way to the back pile without trying to get one of the diversion bumpers, start mixing things up. Now sometimes stop him opposite a diversion bumper and cast "Over" to pick it up.

Diagram 2. "Back" Parallel to Shore Drill

This drill teaches the dog to hold a line close to land, and to accept your handling while swimming very close to shore.

Place a pile of bumpers out of sight on the back shore at location "A."
Place visible white bumpers along the side shore. Handle the dog past the white bumpers as described in the text.

When the dog can swim to the back pile on line without needing to be handled off the white bumpers, mix things up and occasionally cast him "over" to pick one up.



Generally, if the dog has become good at the "Over" Parallel to Shore drill before beginning the "Back" Parallel to Shore drill, he will readily learn to swim parallel to and only a few yards from the shoreline. However, if the dog is having a great deal of difficulty with this drill and is not becoming smooth at leaving the white bumpers alone, establish the line farther from the side shore in order to help him be successful.

Advancing the Dog's Handling in Water

Both of the Parallel to Shore drills teach the dog to accept your handling without flaring away from land or getting out too early, even when he is very close to land. This skill can be invaluable when you are hunting and need to handle in tight areas and still not lose sight of your dog.

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These are also the skills your dog needs when you begin handling him to keep him on an angle course into shore without squaring out. So when he is proficient at both the "Over" and "Back" Parallel to Shore drills in water, set up the No Squaring drill (described in our last article). But now you will set the drill up across a channel instead of on land. Handle him to keep him on line to the flag, until he can maintain a good angle to a farther flag on his own, and not try to cut out to a closer flag.

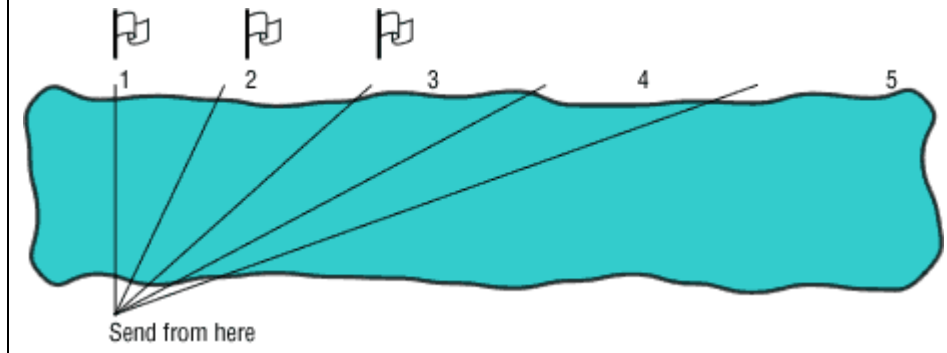
Diagram 3. No Squaring Drill

This drill, done across a channel of water, challenges the dog's ability to hold his lines without squaring to get out of the water early. The "Over" and "Back" Parallel to Shore drills should be taught first.

Put a white flag at locations 1, 2 and 3, with one bumper at each location. Pick the bumpers up in order, and handle the dog to keep him on line.

When the dog is successful with lines 1, 2 and 3, move the flag from position 1 to position 4, and run lines 2, 3 and 4.

Finally, move the flag from position 2 to position 5, and run lines 3, 4 and 5.



This drill, using sight blinds, is an excellent start on teaching a dog how to hold the line all the way to the long bird in shoreline multiple marking tests. Such tests are often seen at field trials and sometimes at the Master level of hunt tests.