

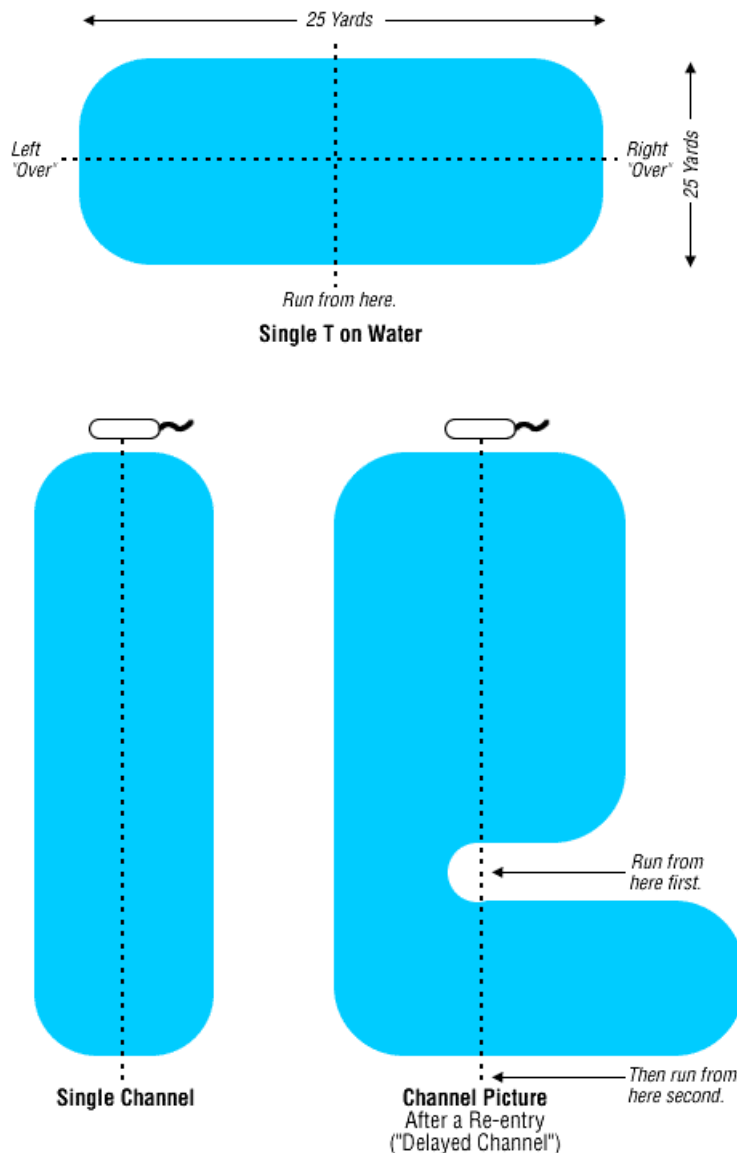
# Beginning Water Handling

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs and Alice Woodyard

Last month we started the dog on beginning shorebreaking, using an extension of the obstacle training that we use on land in the Modified Double "T." We finished with an easy channel picture, run as a "cheating single" mark. Now it's time to begin handling in the water.

## The Water "T"

Before you begin running water blinds with a dog, he needs to know how to stop and tread water in response to your sit whistle. He also needs to take your casts in water the same way he did on land during the Single "T," and he should be accomplished at the Modified Double "T."



### The Back Pile

A pond about 10 by 25 yards is an ideal size to use when you teach casting on water. Working across the SHORT dimension of the pond, place a back pile on the far shore, visible to the dog. Throw a bumper to the pile so he knows where it is. Then send him a few times to retrieve from the back pile, until he is going confidently.

Next, stop him half way across with one blast of the whistle. He will turn and look at you and probably start swimming toward you. (If he doesn't, call him with "Here" to get his attention on you.) Cast him "Back" right away and have him retrieve from the back pile. Follow up with a send straight through to the back pile, then, on the next repetition, stop him again with your whistle. This time, try to get him to tread water momentarily before you cast him back.

### Teaching a Dog to Tread Water

To help him learn to tread water, temporarily "confuse" him. It's rare to want to intentionally confuse a dog, but temporarily doing this can help him learn the new maneuver. So cast him back, then immediately stop him, then call him toward you, then stop him again, and so on, a few times. He will finally tread water as he stares at you as if to say, "Well, make up your mind!" Then give him a back cast and let him complete the retrieve.

On the next repetition, send him straight through. Then try one with a stop. With each sit whistle, ask for a little more perfection in treading water. Some dogs are naturally better at treading water than others, but the great majority have no difficulty learning to tread water well enough to get the job done.

### "Over" in Water

To introduce "Over" in water, help your dog by lining him once to each pile from the opposite shore. Now he knows the location of the piles, so you can begin to sometimes cast him "Over" instead of "Back." If the shape of your water is such that you cannot line him from one over pile to the other, you'll need to help him locate the piles. Throw a bumper to the pile as the dog is treading water looking at you. Then cast him "Over".

Sometimes when you cast him "Over," he will try to go back instead, because the back pile is more familiar and a little closer than the over piles. Stop him with a second whistle; make him hesitate a little longer, then cast "Over" again. If he persists in trying to go back, stop him with "NO," bring him toward you, and recast. You can throw a bumper to the over pile to help him figure out what you want, but don't make it a habit. He needs to be able to learn to identify your casts in water just as he did on land.

## **Our next article: Introduction to the Channel Blind**

After the dog is confident at stopping to the whistle and casting "Back" and "Over" in water, it is time to begin channel work. Your dog's foundation for channel blinds should also include simple channel marks, with progressively longer entries, as covered in our last article.

In our next article, we will explain how to develop and use channel blinds to teach the dog to accept staying in the water, and condition him to the idea of the long swim. We will emphasize trust and teamwork, and balance the dog with water re-entries.