

Handling a Retriever: Part I

The Handler's Job

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs

Handling is teamwork! People spend a lot of time developing a dog's skill at sitting to a whistle and taking casts. Equally important, however, is that you develop your skill if you want to become a good handler

**What should you as a handler remember to do?
Let's take a look.**



When sending the dog for a blind retrieve, position your hand high enough over his head so that he doesn't have to duck under it when leaving your side.



As soon as your dog leaves your side, get ready to handle: whistle in your mouth, hands together in front of your chest.

When sending the dog for a blind retrieve, position your hand high enough over his head so that he isn't distracted by having to duck under it when leaving your side.

As soon as the dog leaves, put the whistle in your mouth so that you will be ready to blow it. If you have to reach for your whistle after you recognize the dog needs to be stopped, your whistle sit will be too late.

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Bring your hands together in front of your chest as the dog leaves your side. Then when you blow the whistle and the dog looks at you, your hands will be in a central location in relation to your body. You will be ready to give a cast. If your hands are not ready when the dog looks at you, he will see the false motion as you bring your arms up from your sides. He may misinterpret the motion and take the wrong cast.



When giving a "back" cast, extend your arm straight up.



Notice how slanting the arm forward decreases the visibility of the hand signal.

When giving a back cast, raise the open palm of your hand straight up. Do not slant your arm forward as it decreases the height of your arm decreasing the visibility of your signal to the dog.

A good way to practice giving a proper back cast is to place your heels against a wall. Now raise your arm as if giving a back cast. Ideally, the back of your raised hand should touch the wall and your biceps should touch your ear.

Not everyone can get their arm extended in this ideal position but do the best you can. The mistake most often seen is a handler raising their arm up but slanted to the front, instead of having their arm extended straight up.

When giving an angle back cast, be sure your arm is in a position that enables the dog to differentiate it from a "back" or "over" cast.



When giving an "over" cast, extend the arm out straight from your body at shoulder height. For good visibility, keep your hand open with the palm facing the dog.



When giving an "over" cast, do not slant your arm behind you as it significantly decreases the visibility of your cast.

When giving an "over" hand signal, again it's a good idea to practice against a wall. You want the back of your hand to touch the wall. When it does, you know your arm is extended correctly, not too far forward or too far back.

Common Errors

One common error made when giving an over cast is to position the arm too far behind the body rather than fully extended straight out from the side. The dog loses sight of your palm if your arm is too far back.

Another error occurs when the handler changes location to regain ground for a new cast. If the handler "regains ground" when the dog has already turned and is looking at him, the dog is likely to go in the wrong direction. Be sure to remain stationary when you give a whistle sit and move only in the direction you want the dog to cast. Contrary motions must be done when the dog cannot see you.

The third common error is to hold a gun away from the body with one hand while giving an "over" with the other hand. The dog now has to very conflicting signals to decipher.



One common error when handling is to hold the gun away from the body with one hand while giving an "over" with the other hand. You can see the confusing picture the dog is now confronted with!

Body Motion

It really helps if you add motion to your over cast (especially if you are wearing camouflage) by moving the palm of your hand up and down from the wrist. Keep your arm straight, just move your hand. Keep your hand open with the palm facing the dog.

Also, when giving an over cast, stepping in the direction of the cast helps the dog see your signal from a distance. Remember a dog's vision is much like ours when watching a black & white T.V. Some colors that are very easy for us to see are just gray to them. However, *dogs are very keen at picking out motion.*

Be Aware of the Background

Depending on the background, the dog may have difficulty seeing you.

Field trailers wear white jackets so that the dog can see them from a great distance. Hunters and hunt test participants typically wear camouflage or dark clothing.

Wearing camo hunting gloves with black palms will help the dog see your hand signal when working with a poor background. And again, motion will help the dog "see" you. Remember that this is teamwork, so do your best to ensure that he sees your hand signal.