

Improving Whistle Commands, Part II: "Come in Whistle"

By Jim and Phyllis Dobbs

The Come In Whistle

The come in whistle may vary somewhat with each handler. But, generally speaking, the most common way of giving a come in whistle is to rapidly blow three whistle trills in a row. To make a trill, draw the whistle out a bit rather than giving a quick "toot".

Most handlers use three trills for their come in whistle to keep it clear for the dog. A come in whistle that ends in a distinct toot can be easily misinterpreted as a sit whistle.

Marks

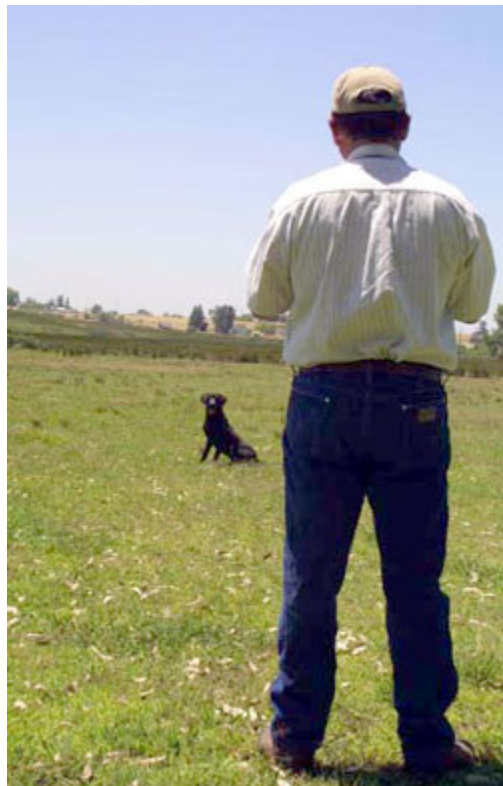
We want the come in whistle to be a meaningful command, so we do not blow a come in whistle when the dog picks up a mark. The exception would be if the dog were to dawdle over the bird or not come directly back.

If the dog has been trained to retrieve what do you think will happen when he picks up the bird? Odds are he will come back to deliver the bird whether or not you blow a come in whistle. So don't make the mistake of washing out the effectiveness of your come in whistle by making it merely background music.

Blinds

When running blinds, there are several situations that can erode the meaning of the come in whistle. The first common mistake we see occurs when dogs are being taught to cast during the "T" pattern drills. A handler will stress "over" and "back" casts and forget the come in whistle.

To prevent the come in whistle from becoming ineffective, incorporate it often into your "T" pattern drills. Send the dog to the back pile and, as he is going, toss a dummy about 20 feet in front of you. Give a sit whistle and, after he is sitting, give a come in whistle. With this set up he must come almost all the way to you to find the dummy. Repeat this exercise often so that the dog will obey the come in whistle as well as he obeys an "over" or "back" cast.



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You can turn an "Oops" into a positive in much the same fashion. Whenever you send the dog on a blind to a bumper pile and you realize that there are no more bumpers to retrieve, use the same procedure. When the dog isn't looking, toss a bumper about 20 feet in front of you and give a sit whistle. Then, call him in to pick up the bumper with your come in whistle. Instead of adversity you get a good repetition of having the dog come in to you.

Another mistake is to consistently use a come in whistle to move the dog in only a few feet to pick up a blind. The dog gets into the habit of quickly finding the bird or bumper after it hears a come in whistle. Now, you have inadvertently taught the dog that a come in whistle means, "Start hunting".

To prevent this mistake, the handler must know exactly where the blind is so that he can handle the dog directly to it. It is important that the dog does not over run the blind. If you guide the dog directly to the blind you will not be put into a position that requires the short come in whistle.

The third reason some retrievers come in only a few steps and then stop is that they have been indirectly taught to do so when the handler tries to correct a crooked sit. What happens is that the dog sits crooked on a sit whistle and the handler falls into the trap of giving the dog a come in whistle followed quickly with another sit whistle.

What the handler is trying to do is have the dog sit square in front of him so that he will take his casts correctly. Unfortunately, using a come in whistle to straighten out the dog's sit will often teach him to come in only a few steps and then sit again. This happens because the dog anticipates the sit whistle that usually follows. In our last article we discussed how the sit whistle should mean not only sit but turn and face the handler. If you need to teach a straight sit, please review our article in Retriever Journal July/August 2002 for the training procedures.