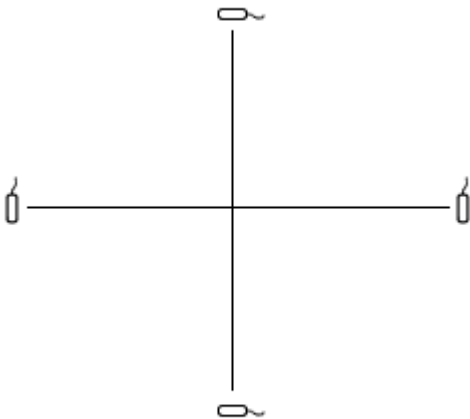


Initial Lining Drills

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs and Alice Woodyard

In our last article, we covered the drills that are used to teach the retriever to sit straight at heel--with his spine aligned in the direction that you are facing. After the dog shows us that he knows the correct heel position, he is ready to learn to "take an initial line."

Powr-Bumper Wagon Wheel



Place the bumpers about 10 yards from the center of the wheel. The dog must be able to see the bumpers easily from the line

Four Bumper Wagon Wheel

We begin with the 4-bumper wagon wheel drill. This drill works on two important skills. First, the dog gets lots of practice realigning at heel as you turn to face a new bumper. The drill also introduces the "diversion throw" concept to the dog. After each retrieve, you throw the bumper back to its old location and then pivot the dog to face and retrieve a different bumper. Thus the dog learns to disregard the attraction of a thrown bumper, and go in the direction he is sent.

Work this drill by moving counter clockwise around the wheel. Then repeat, going clockwise. Insist that the dog sit straight facing the bumper before you send him.

Place your hand in front of and just above the dog's head. Then, when he is looking at the correct bumper, send him on the command "Back."

Correcting on the Wagon Wheel Drills

If the dog goes toward the wrong bumper, stop him with "No! Here," and bring him back for a restart. *If he makes the same mistake twice in a row, move several steps closer to the bumper to send him.*



Don't worry if the dog gets the bumper. He will remember the reinforced "Here" command, and tend not to want to repeat that mistake. If the dog isn't "getting it" despite several corrections, you need to move your bumpers a little farther out from the center so that you have time to stop the dog.

The 8-Bumper Wagon Wheel

Now refine the drill by adding four more white bumpers. Pick the bumpers up in the order indicated on the diagram.

Eight-Bumper Wagon Wheel

Put out eight white bumpers so the dog can see them from the center of the circle. The distance from center to the bumpers should be about 10 yards.

Heel the dog to face the bumper before sending him, and pick up the bumpers in the order indicated.

Throw each bumper back to its original location, and pivot so that you and the dog are facing the next bumper to be retrieved. If the dog looks at another bumper tell him "NO." Make sure he is looking at the correct bumper before you send him.

Push-Pull Drill

This drill teaches the dog to realign his focus from bumper to bumper without moving his body. He learns to let you influence him away from distractions that would pull his focus off line, and the drill will make the subtle cues you give with your leg more meaningful.



Start with the dog sitting straight...



...then step forward with your left leg to push his focus to the left...



...step back with your left leg to pull his focus to the right.

Begin with two white bumpers placed about 10 feet out in front of you and 45 degrees apart. When you see the dog looking at one of the bumpers, tell him "No" and move your left leg (assuming your dog heels on the left) a small step forward or backward to refocus the dog on the other bumper.

Initial Lining Drills

Remember this rule: "Push" is accomplished by a small step forward, just enough to "push" the dog's focus to the left. "Pull" is accomplished by a small step backwards, thus "pulling" the dog's focus to the right.

Next, add a third bumper between the first two. When the dog is looking at it, move your left leg to give the dog the cue to push left or pull right, and send him to retrieve one of the outside bumpers.

Staggered Eight-Bumper Wagon Wheel

Now the dog is ready to learn the 8-bumper staggered wagon wheel. In this drill, every other bumper is replaced by an orange bumper that the dog cannot see from the line, and the orange bumpers are placed twice as far from the center of the wheel as the white ones.

Now the dog must "hold the line" between the attraction of two visible bumpers on the way to the non-visible orange bumper. *This is the first time you will be asking the dog take a line without a visible target.*

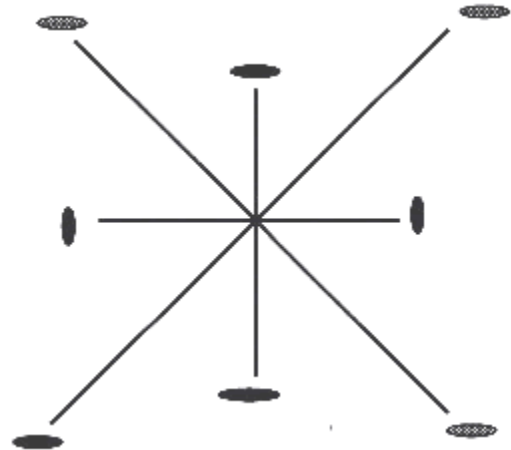
When you introduce this drill, begin by sending the dog to pick up each orange bumper from a position halfway along the "spoke" of the wagon wheel. This starting point reduces the attraction of the white bumpers, and gets the dog running to the orange bumpers. Run from this *position just one time only*, at the *start of the first session*. From then on, run the drill from the center of the wheel.

There is an exception to this limitation. If you need to "simplify" the drill for the dog after he has gone the wrong way twice in a row, then of course you should shorten up and send for an orange bumper from part way along the "spoke." This situation is covered under "Correcting on the Wagon Wheel Drills."

Expect it to take you and your dog several sessions to perfect this drill. Break the drill into two subtasks.

1. Practice picking up *only* the orange bumpers until the dog can do this with only an occasional mistake (probably you will need more than one session to achieve this goal).
2. After Step 1 is completed, start picking up white bumpers, as well as orange ones. Pick them up in a random order, alternating between orange and white bumpers.

Always throw a retrieved bumper back to its location on the wagon wheel, before pivoting the dog to the next one.



The Eight Bumper Staggered Wagon Wheel

In this drill, the orange bumpers are twice as far from the center as the visible white ones. The orange bumpers are not visible to the dog.

When the dog can pick up the orange bumpers with very few mistakes, begin having him pick up the white and orange bumpers in random order.

Sixteen-Bumper Wagon Wheel

Now you and your dog are prepared for the teamwork required to accomplish a 16-bumper wagon wheel. Set this up with 16 bumpers of the same size and color. Put them about 50 feet out from the center of the circle.

Keep your right foot stationary (putting it on an object such as a crushed soda can helps.) Put your left hand in your pocket and send the dog to pick up the bumpers. Move around the wheel, first clockwise, then counter clockwise.

Be sure your dog is sitting at heel with his spine aligned so he's facing the correct bumper. (He should have learned how to do this from our drills in the last article.)

With your hand in your pocket, you must use your left leg to align your dog's focus on the correct bumper. This will give you the ability to subtly adjust your dog's focal alignment, and get the two of you working as a team.

In the Next Article

In our next article, we will incorporate obstacle training on the Modified Double T.