

Obstacle Training on the Modified Double "T" Drill

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In our last article, we covered the procedures that teach the dog to "take an initial line," using the four-, eight-, and 16-bumper wagon wheel drills. Now we can begin obstacle work, which teaches the dog the idea of *holding the line*. At this stage of the dog's training we teach him to identify a *picture*. The picture is: "Going straight over the obstacle to a mark, or on a line to a sight blind, will be the comfortable route. Going around the obstacle will be less comfortable by comparison."

The obstacles you use for this drill should be low, and physically easy for the dog to go over or through. (Their role is to be a "mental challenge" to the dog, not a physical one.) To make the picture clear to the dog, we like to define the boundaries of the obstacles with stakes, as shown in the photos. This is especially important if you use something like a little brush piled up. Without the stakes, the dog cannot visually identify where the obstacle begins and ends.



Use a "nick" or momentary stimulation as the dog goes around the apex of the jump.



On the next repetition, move up close to the jump and help the dog so that he will be successful.



Now repeat the exercise from your original starting point.

Teaching the Obstacle Concept

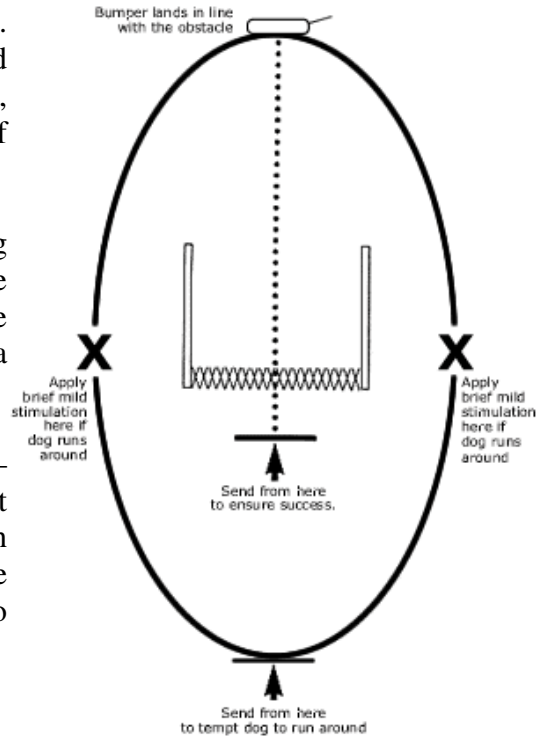
We start by teaching the dog to understand the correction for flaring an obstacle. Take the dog up close to the obstacle and call him over it a few times, so he's familiar with it. Now move back about 15 yards from the obstacle, and have the dog sit at heel. Toss a bumper over the obstacle, or have an assistant throw a mark. The main thing to remember is that the fall must land so that the dog, the obstacle, and the bumper are all in a straight line.

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Send the dog, and if he runs around the obstacle, use your e-collar to apply brief, mild stimulation just at the apex of his route around the obstacle. Momentary stimulation is best for this purpose. Say nothing; don't "No" him or call him back, and don't handle him. *Just let him get the bumper.* Meanwhile, move up very close to the obstacle and encourage him to return over or through it. If, however, he runs around on the way back, again apply brief stimulation at the apex of his return route.

Now you're going to give him a comparison by letting him find the more pleasant route: Over or through the obstacle instead of around it. Take him very close to the obstacle so he won't try to run around, and toss a bumper over it for him to retrieve.

Repeat this sequence until the "light dawns" — deviating off-line to flare an obstacle is less pleasant than staying on-line and going straight over or through it. (Make sure the bumpers are in line with the obstacle when you send him. You are trying to teach him to go straight, not to go over things that are off-line.)



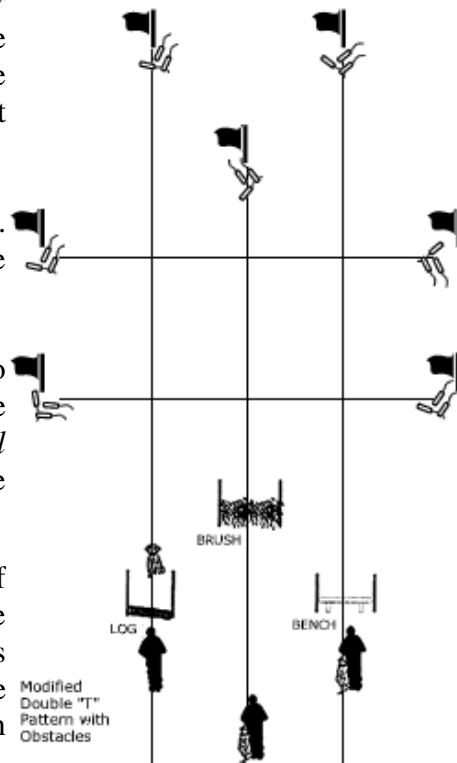
Three Parallel Lines

Start by setting up the Modified Double T, (*The Retriever Journal* December/January 1997) placing the familiar white markers at the piles. Obstacle training is usually done while teaching the Modified Double T. Obstacles can be most helpful in keeping the "banana" out of the back lines.)

Place obstacles on the three parallel "back" lines as shown. Familiarize your dog with each obstacle by standing close to it and calling him over a few times.

Then begin lining him over each obstacle all the way to each flag. At first, send him from about 15 yards from the obstacle. Add a little more distance with each *successful* repetition. Repeat this procedure with each of the three lines.

Any time the dog deviates to flare an obstacle, apply brief mild stimulation just as he passes by the side of the obstacle. Say nothing. If he deviates so far that he switches lines to head for the wrong flag, just handle him to the correct flag. Don't attempt to handle him over or through the obstacle itself.



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After any correction for deviating, run that line again but start *very* close to the obstacle so that the dog won't be tempted to go around it. This shows him how to be successful immediately after any failure, and is essential for good progress. Now, return to your original starting point, and rerun the same line, giving the dog a chance to show you what he's learned. (If he flares again, repeat from up-close, and then repeat from the original starting point.)

If he still flares the obstacle after two rounds of this sequence, try increasing the intensity of your correction slightly. Some "hard driving" retrievers don't really feel the low level when they're running hard. However, too high of an intensity can chase the dog away from the obstacle entirely, so be cautious as you increase intensity. If you get two more failures at the original distance, take about half the distance out of the line, and try again. After the dog fully understands, you can increase the distance.

Conclusion

When the dog understands the concept of going over or through the obstacle rather than flaring around it, you can use the location of obstacles as an aid in teaching the dog not to succumb to the influence of many other types of hazards such as side hills, cross winds, angle entries into water, and to prevent squaring in or out of ditches.



Once the dog understands to run between the stakes, you can use stakes in the field to teach the dog not to go around obstacles when taking an initial line. Once he is successfully negotiating the hazard, remove the stakes and repeat the concept.