

Teaching a Dog to Mark — Part V

Common Marking Problems

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Head Swinging

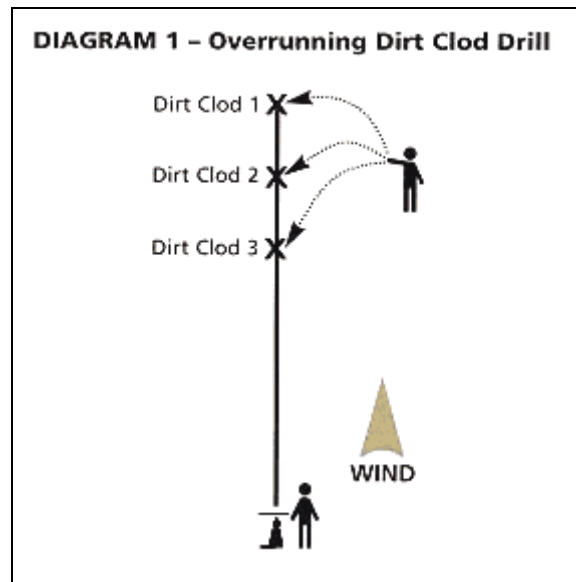
After starting double marks, it won't take long until the dog anticipates that a second bird is going to be thrown. This will adversely effect the dog's concentration on the fall of the memory bird. The dog can get into the habit of just glancing at the memory bird and then swinging his head toward the “go bird” (which is typically the more interesting bird).

Teach the dog to concentrate on a fall longer by using the Push-Pull Drill to move his head back to face the fall. (*Retriever Journal*, April/May 97.) When the dog is in the heel position and swings his head from the memory bird, give him a “nick” with the e-collar and cue him to move his head back towards the fall. Then send him for that mark as a single retrieve.

During training do not allow your helper to use any sound attraction *until after you have the dog looking in that direction*. The sound attraction can then be given and the mark thrown.

Overrunning

Another common problem is when the dog overruns the marks; especially when there is a tail wind present. The dirt clod drill is one of the methods we use to counter this tendency. It teaches the dog to check back into the area of the fall rather than being influenced into over-running by the push of the wind.



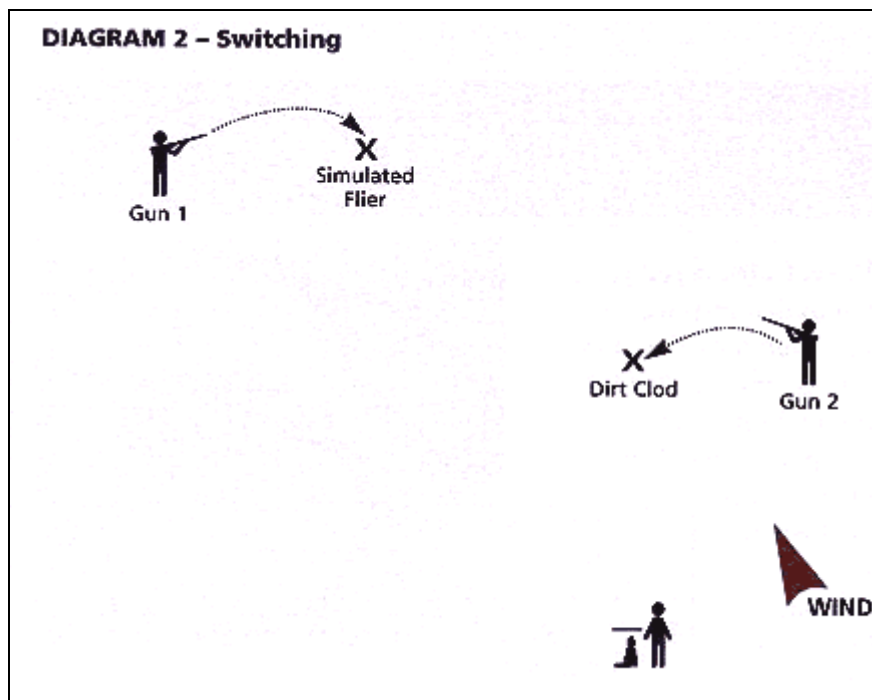
While practicing this drill always be sure that the mark is thrown directly downwind.

1. Have the helper throw something such as a dirt clod or cow chip.
2. When the dog overruns the spot where the dirt clod fell, the helper should toss in a bird so that it lands on line and at a right angle to the dog handler.
3. After several repetitions of throwing the bird at a right angle, toss the bird on line but at an angle in towards the handler. Be sure to sneak it in without the dog seeing it thrown. Let the dog hunt until it checks back in and finds the bird.

Switching

Another problem that usually occurs while teaching double marks is switching. This is when a dog breaks his commitment to retrieving the “go bird”, to go and retrieve the memory bird instead. This is likely to occur when the angle between the marks is narrow or the memory bird is more interesting to the dog than the “go bird”.

A flier thrown first will often entice a beginner to switch. Therefore, in this drill the memory bird is a “shot flier” and the “go bird” is a thrown dead bird.



To prevent or stop a dog from switching, set up the configuration of marks using a clip winged pigeon as the memory bird (Gun1) and have the gunner fire a shot with the throw. Use a dirt clod for the “go” bird (Gun 2).

Since the dog has been previously schooled on the dirt clod drill, he will hunt in the area of the dirt clod long enough for Gun 1 to run out and pick up the pigeon.

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When the dog switches to the more interesting flyer (Gun 1), Gun 2 should toss a bird into the area where the dirt clod fell.

As soon as the dog gets to the area of the “flier”, give him a whistle sit as you correct him with the e-collar. Then handle him back to the bird that Gun 2 slipped into place.

After several repetitions, the dog will average out much better at persevering in the area of the fall and he will know that he had better not switch to another fall.