

The Trained Retrieve - Part II

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In our last article, we taught the retriever to hold calmly, carry without dropping, and deliver reliably. We worked with both bumpers and birds, and incorporated the use of low-level stimulation to reinforce "Hold." Now the dog is prepared to progress to the "Fetch" command.

The "Fetch" Command



Wrap the end of the cord around the transmitter so that you can pull the cord while applying low-level stimulation.

no longer put the bumper into the dog's mouth. From now on, the dog must learn to reach and take the bumper on its own.

After several sessions of reinforcing "Hold" on the table, your dog will begin to open its mouth as you bring the bumper up in front of its muzzle. Once the dog begins opening its mouth on its own to accept the bumper, it is ready to progress from the "Hold" to the "Fetch" command.

Introduce the new command "Fetch" by putting the dog back on the short lead at the end of the table. For one session, use mild pressure on the dog's ear as you command "Fetch" and present a bumper right in front of its mouth. Apply the pressure until the dog takes the bumper. Remember, once the dog is reaching for the bumper, the command is "Fetch," not "Hold," and you should

Ear pressure is familiar to the dog from its previous training on "Hold." Therefore, we use it for the first session when we ask the dog to reach for a bumper held close to its mouth. But once a dog is required to move forward and reach down to fetch an object, it is better to use a toe hitch because it elicits a forward and down motion from the dog.



If the dog will leave your side to "Fetch" on command, it is ready to retrieve off the ground.

To make a toe hitch, use a two-foot long piece of cord tied to a strip of Velcro. The Velcro lets you easily fasten the cord to the dog's front leg. Pass the cord around the two middle toes in a half hitch. Leave the free end trailing so that you can pull on it to apply pressure.

Now with the dog still on the short lead at the end of the table, place the bumper between the dog's foot and muzzle as you pull the cord and command "Fetch." Stop pulling the cord when the dog takes the object.

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After just a few repetitions, begin the transition from the toe hitch to the collar. Wrap the end of the cord around the transmitter so that you can pull the cord while you simultaneously press the button to apply low-level stimulation. Present a bumper as you command "Fetch," press the button, and pull the cord. Stop the stimulation and release the cord the instant the dog gets the bumper in its mouth.



Wrap the end of the cord around the transmitter so that you can pull the cord while applying low-level stimulation.

After a few repetitions of using the toe hitch and low-level electrical stimulation, simultaneously remove the cord from the dog's toes but leave the Velcro strip attached to the dog's leg. Now try using electrical stimulation as you say "Fetch" and pull the cord. If the dog will reach for the bumper without toe pressure, remove the cord from its leg and just use the Tri-Tronics collar when you need to reinforce your "Fetch" command.

Once the dog understands how to turn off stimulation by reaching and taking the bumper, you can start giving it repetitions of "Fetch" as you walk it up and down the length of the table. Present the bumper lower with each repetition, until the dog will reach down and pick it up off the table to turn off stimulation.



When you are about ten feet from the bumper, command "Fetch" as you apply low-level stimulation. Release the button as the dog grabs the bumper.

Remember, the picture changes for the dog when the bumper is placed on the table because your hand is no longer touching it. Many dogs have difficulty with this transition. So be sure to do several repetitions as you gradually move your hand farther from the bumper and out of the picture.

When you start placing the bumper on the table, return to the dog before you give the "Fetch" command. Then as you give the command, step forward toward the bumper. Your motion forward will make it easier for the dog to be successful.

When you see the dog becoming quick at moving forward to fetch the bumper, you can stop using stimulation with each command. Instead, press the button only if you must give a second "Fetch" command. The dog will soon learn it can avoid stimulation by fetching quickly on the first command.

With each repetition, place the bumper farther away from the dog until it is moving forward at least half the length of the table. Now try commanding "Fetch" without walking forward. If the dog will move forward on its own, it is ready to begin retrieving

off the ground.

"Fetch" off the Ground

Place three bumpers about 20 feet apart on the ground. Walk up and down the row of bumpers with the dog on leash, teaching it to ignore the bumpers unless you command it to retrieve.

If the dog tries to grab a bumper, command "Heel" and use a leash correction to prevent it from picking up the bumper. Keep walking, and don't use the Tri-Tronics collar to reinforce "Heel" at this time, just use the leash.

Once the dog understands that it must not initiate retrieving on its own, randomly command "Fetch" as you walk down the row. Give the command when you are about ten feet from a bumper, and apply low-level stimulation. Release the button as the dog picks up the bumper.

Have the dog carry as you circle back to where it picked up that bumper. Stop and take the bumper from the dog. Drop it behind you as you walk toward the next bumper with the dog at heel.



After the dog has responded quickly for a few repetitions, begin giving the command without using the collar. Only use it if you must give a second command.

Once the dog is good at waiting for the command and responding quickly, repeat the drill, but instead of bumpers use frozen birds. If possible, use the type of game birds you will be hunting.

Next, repeat the drill with freshly killed birds, and finally shackled ones. When the dog has been thoroughly taught to handle live birds using this "three-in-a-row" drill, it will be ready to retrieve wounded game in the field without problems.

Hard mouth problems are much easier to prevent than cure, so properly introduce your dog to birds before going into the field.

It is extremely important to introduce live birds to dogs in a controlled situation. Many hard mouth problems are created by not preparing a retriever for its job, and putting it into a situation over its head. A common example is allowing the young dog to try to retrieve a wounded cock pheasant in the field, causing the dog to be flapped in the face, clawed and spurred by a large struggling bird. The dog quickly learns that it can stop these unpleasant actions by crushing the rooster. After a few such encounters, the dog may start to enjoy crushing birds, even dead ones. Remember, hardmouth problems are much easier to prevent than cure.

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