

The Training Platform-More Tips

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In our last two articles, we covered the use of training platforms for steadying a retriever and for starting casting. Once the dog is familiar with the platform for these situations, this simple piece of equipment has other uses as well. Here are a few you may find handy.

Waiting in the blind



Have the dog "sit" on a platform inside the holding blind to establish good manners right from the start.

Placing the familiar training platform in the holding blind is a good way to introduce the young dog to waiting in the blind while still being under control.

We like to introduce young dogs to waiting in the blind well before they encounter holding blinds at trials or hunt tests. Failure to introduce the holding blind when you can correct misbehaviors, can lead to exasperating habits later, such as climbing on the blind, crawling under it, and charging out to the line.

Furthermore, at the hunt tests, a holding blind may be the place the dog must remain for honoring. So if you plan to run your retriever in these events or hunt waterfowl from a blind, he should know that waiting in the blind is not "recess"--it's part of the schoolroom, too.

A platform-trained dog knows that he's under control whenever he's waiting on the platform. So introduce the holding blind to him with the platform *inside* it, and establish good manners in the blind right from the start.

Going to the line



The platform teaches the dog to stay in the "heel" position and not creep forward when you give him a line.

When its time to go to the line, you'll have better control if you lead the parade, not your dog. So get him in the habit of waiting until *you leave the holding blind first* and take a few paces toward the line. Then *you* invite *him* to join you at heel, making sure, as he reaches you, that he remembers that heel is at your *side*, and not out in front.

This habit is easy to develop if the dog is waiting on the familiar training platform in the blind. The boundaries of where he must wait are clear, and corrections for leaving before being released are easily understood.

Delivery to heel



Teaching the dog to return to "heel" on the platform will create the habit of delivering and staying in the "heel" position.

Physical corrections at the line can interfere with a young dog's marking. By using a platform, you can give a young dog back-to-back single marks before he's learned to sit straight at heel, without the risk of developing bad habits.

Have the platform in place at your left side. As the dog returns with a bird, signal him onto it as you give the command he knows that means to "get on the platform" (such as "Place"). Then encourage him with voice and motion to face front again and sit. After a few repetitions, you can substitute the "Heel" command for "Place."

The first time you introduce returning to heel on the platform, have your thrower coached and ready to immediately get the dog's attention and throw another mark as soon as the dog is facing forward. (Take the first bird from the dog *after* the second mark is down.) The habit of heeling to deliver and looking out eagerly will be established forever. A poor delivery can also be improved by this procedure.

If you want the dog to heel on both sides, you can alternate your position relative to the platform so that the dog gets practice coming to heel on either side. Your hand signal will tell him which side to head for as he comes in with his bird. This platform method can also be used to establish a right-side return in an older dog that has become patterned into returning only to the left side.

Introducing "push-pull"



A small step forward with the left leg :pushes the dog's focus to the left. The platform keeps the dog from creeping.

Davis Arthur of Truline Kennels likes to use a round platform, which allows him to step forward at an angle toward the dog. This exaggerated leg cue allows the handler to move the dog's attention left or right when starting multiple marks. The small round platform keeps the dog from readjusting his sit position or creeping forward. Assuming the dog is heeling on your left side, a small step forward with your left leg accomplishes "push" to the left, and a small step backwards accomplishes "pull" to the right.

Reward the dog for the correct behavior by calling for the bird immediately after his attention shifts in the desired direction. You'll easily establish your dog's habit of working off your leg cues at the line.

Retraining the dog that "takes the steering wheel"



**A small step backward
"pulls" the dog's
focus to the right.**

Then there are the dogs that consistently sit in front of the handler before being sent. When the handler steps up to give them a line, they take another step, so that they're out in front again (These dogs are telling their handlers, "I have the steering wheel, and you can ride in the back seat.").

Running these dogs from a training platform that's placed in the heel position can reverse this trend, and retrain the dog to accept running from the heel position. If the dog steps off the platform to get in front of the handler, the collar reminds him not to. The presence of the platform makes this a meaningful correction that builds understanding, rather than just subduing the dog with discomfort (a condition that usually disappears the morning of the trial!)

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