



ASK THE PRO

tips for long bird success

By Kenny Trott and Marcy Wright

HERE ARE SOME TIPS for you to have more success in mastering the long bird.

Work on the line

If your dog needs work on his lines to long birds, then leave the gun out. The line to the bird can include running tight past other guns/birds and having the dog challenge varying factors en route such as wind, terrain, water and cover. If you want to work on one or more factors, such as your dog holding the

line to the bird in a crosswind (big throw into the wind,) then leave the gun out and do not retire. It is very difficult for dogs to understand teaching in these circumstances if they have a poor mark and no reference to the gun.

Retire the gun for memory

By having the long gun retire, you can work on your dog's memory. In this circumstance you should give your dog the freedom to run less than ideal lines to birds, give

them the freedom to hunt and allow them to achieve success by working the mark out on their own.

Sometimes it is not such a bad thing to have a young dog just starting out on retired long birds crosswind a bird from a distance. The dog learned, on this day, that if he kept running, he found the bird. Requiring the dog to challenge factors such as wind, can be added once the dog is confident enough to keep punching.

If a dog breaks down early when sent for the long retired, then handle. We like to wait until we can see the dog's face to blow the whistle. A poor line deserves a recall and re-send. Simplify as necessary by re-throwing the mark if you have to recall.

Isolate the punch bird

If long birds are a problem for your dog, make sure that the other birds in the test are simplified for the dog. They should be go get-tum marks so that you can focus on the long bird training that particular day.

Isolating the punch bird can also include breaking down a test to throw the marks as singles.

Teach the dog where not to go

I believe that a good marking dog has two qualities ... knowing WHERE to go and knowing where NOT to go. Knowing where not to go is a skill that can be seen occasionally in young, untrained dogs and this is an exciting natural quality to have in a dog. However, dogs can also be taught where not to go through good, solid training.

A dog should be well trained enough to know not to be greatly influenced by other birds. For example, if the long bird at a trial is very tight behind the flyer, we should feel comfortable enough to send the dog right at that long bird and know the dog will neither go back to the flyer nor break down to hunt behind it. We tell our clients often to "trust the training" and point the dog at the bird and not worry about the influence of other guns. A well-trained dog should know where not to go.

Lengthen your blinds

Whether you compete in Hunting Tests or Field Trials, chances are your blinds are at about the distance you expect to see at a weekend event. Lengthen your blinds beyond your comfort level. This will not only increase the level of training of your dog, it will help your dog be better prepared for the long bird.

Practice long bird placement in training

A good long bird is further than a dog wants to go. The "long" bird might only be 200 yards on any given day, but if it's a good one, then the dogs will tend to want to break down at 150 yards.

I was at a Field Trial once, and I thought the judges had a fabulous long bird in the field. Dogs were breaking down and establishing sizable hunts 50-80 yards short of the bird. I overheard one person in the gallery say, as yet another dog hunted so long it could be timed with a sundial, "now THAT is where they should have put the bird ... that is where the dogs are hunting"! I almost fell over, as clearly this person did not recognize that this long bird was great because it was further than the dogs wanted to go.

When you arrive at your training field for the day, try to discern where you think dogs want to go. You should put your long bird beyond where you think they would like to hunt.

Use the wind

Use a downwind mark to help push a dog to simplify the long bird or a crosswind to add a factor to the mark. While I often repeat that the best tests are "downwind marks and crosswind blinds," crosswind marks do have their place on training days.

Make the long bird hard to get to and easy to find

Especially for the young dog, the typical long bird in training should be hard to get to and easy to find. Oppositely, the short bird in training should be easy to get to and hard to find.

Teach the dog to watch birds

A dog should come to line looking for the long bird and then watch that bird as it is thrown.

If a dog head swings off the long bird the

second they hear the shot, or has difficulty even looking past the flyer to find the long bird, then training to work on this lack of focus becomes a priority.

One drill we use is to throw long singles with a very short flyer station off to the left, giving us the opportunity to work on head swinging.

Another training tool is to have the long gunner throw a second bird, immediately after his first bird was thrown, to encourage dogs to focus intently on the long bird.

These are two of the many things we can do to improve our dog's focus and bird watching.

The long bird is a discipline bird

It takes a tremendous amount of discipline and training to fight multiple factors: avoid flare, suction, drift and punch out to a well-placed long bird. Don't lose this discipline and training on the mat at an event. Allowing the dog to jump around, or generally be unfocused while lining up for the long bird, can erode away the discipline the dog needs at that moment to punch out to the bird.

Use live throwers

Whenever possible a live thrower, versus a tosser, should be used on the long bird in training. The thrower is able to help when needed and provides the throwing motion necessary for dogs to be able to see long birds at a distance.

A dog that is a proficient long bird marker requires training and time. Hopefully these tips will be helpful in approaching the mastery of this difficult bird! Good luck. ■

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Kenny Trott and Marcy Wright operate Horsetooth Retriever Kennel out of Wellington, CO and they winter in Anderson, TX. They train Field Trial dogs from Basics through All-Age. www.horsetoothretrievers.com

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