



ASK THE PRO

the poison bird drill

By Bill Totten

TEACHING DOGS to leave a poison bird mark and run a blind is actually an easily taught lesson and your retriever will actually be learning better memory retention on marks and working on checking down for short guns at the same time. The drill begins with a short blind 75-150 yards long. At a distance of approximately 1/2 the distance of the blind and on either side of it you place a gun station. The thrower must be able to throw a mark that will place the blind under the arc of the throw. See diagram on opposite page.

1. establish the blind by running it. I find it helps to have a white marker out when beginning the teaching process.
2. Have the gun station shoot a dry pop. And re- run the blind.
3. Have the gun shoot and throw to mark four send the dog for the mark by name. Stop

the dog short of the mark and cast away to the blind. Stop the dog early when teaching the drill. You might correct for whistle refusals but not for cast refusals. Remember handle away from the hazard and then back to the blind. If the dog should continue on and get the mark, stop them with a whistle, walk out and take the mark from it. Throw the mark back to the fall area and step away from the dog a few steps and cast away to the blind again. After retrieving the blind send the dog for the mark you took from them. Always send the dog for the mark after retrieving the blind, they will quickly realize that you are not asking them to leave the mark forever but just interrupting the mark for the blind. Re-throw the mark and try the step again. With most dogs you will find them successful the second time around.

4. If you are successful the first time around with step three and about 60-70 % of dogs are, then send the dog to pick up the mark. You might have the gun stand up and or help in any way needed to have the dog succeed at retrieving the mark. Some dogs will backside the gun in the early teaching stages to avoid the area the whistle sit took place at.

5. Have the gun station throw to the mark area six. Send the dog for the mark by name and stop with a whistle sit and cast away to the blind. Correct as in step 3 if needed. And repeat if you have to correct.

6. Send your retriever for the mark and retrieve it.

7. Re-throw step 5 and this time tell your dog to leave it. Line up on the blind and run it handling as needed. I will usually use a blind marker to give the dog a sight picture.

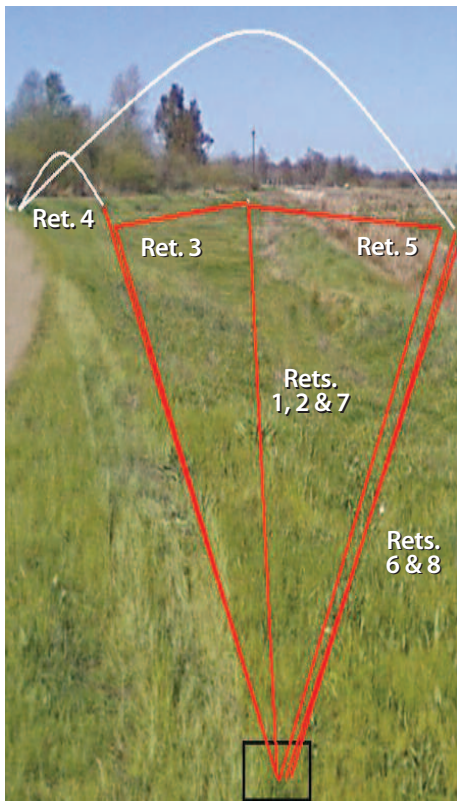
8. Re-send the dog for the mark to end the drill.

Using this drill without collar pressure will result in a dog that is very willing to leave the mark and run a blind knowing it will retrieve the mark later. It has been about 15 years since I have lost a dog because it picked up the poison bird in a competition. The great thing is if your dog also over runs short retired guns you can use this drill to improve their work on that aspect of their game.

You can find this drill on the web in a couple of different sites and if you would like a video or a DVD of the drill contact us at teamtotten@aol.com. In the video you will see several dogs run the drill at different ages and see common problems and how to handle them to make your dog successful. ■

Bill Totten

I have been a professional trainer for over 20 years and have been president of the PRTA for the last 8 years. My training facility is in Twin bridges Montana and I winter in Morgan Hills California. I trained FC-AFC Dust Devil's Shoot the Moon the # 2 open all age retriever of all time, he accumulated over 400 all-age points in his career. I have qualified for 15 straight US Nationals and over 20 years straight in the USA and Canada. I commonly have at least one dog in the top 10 open retrievers in the country.



Before running the blind as *Retrieve 7*, a live hen pheasant flyer was shot for *Retrieve 8* in the same line as *Retrieve 6*. The drill can be and should be run on a flat field until the dog has learned the drill well. Also shooting live flyers should be saved for accomplished retrievers only.