



ASK THE PRO

is your dog truly conditioned?

By Kenny Trott

SOME ARE, MANY ARE NOT. Many people think that collar conditioning involves one or two weeks of re-enforcing obedience commands while walking their dog on a leash. Collar conditioning only starts with leash work, then continues through basics, transition and then ultimately with on-going fieldwork.

A properly conditioned dog is one that fully understands all commands (e.g. sit, here, back, fetch) and understands pressure when it is applied to these commands. A thoroughly conditioned dog understands corrections in the field as well as it does on leash and is a confident retriever because it knows what the pressure is and how to turn it off. We collar condition our

dogs to be able to advance their training to a high level.

Oftentimes I see dogs that are “collar conditioned” come into my training program that actually do not fully understand pressure.

Some examples of a poorly conditioned dog may be: dogs that start to run in after a correction, dogs that “bolt” after a correction or dogs that flare a hot spot.

Many years ago a client called and asked me to check the work he was doing on the Double T with a dog that he was currently training. After doing a nearly perfect Double T, I said, “Let’s disrupt it with a whistle-sit correction.” After the sit/nick correction, the dog bolted, refused to go

and the whole Double T fell apart. A week later the dog’s understanding improved and so did the Double T.

Collar conditioning starts with one or two weeks of obedience on known commands. We are not teaching these commands, but rather re-enforcing them with pressure. The conditioning does not end here. It continues on with the basics program where the dog will continue to be conditioned to known commands such as correcting loopy sits on the Double T or forcing on back on the Water T. Conditioning for sit while on a leash should be the same as conditioning the dog to sit at 200 yards in the field. If I encounter a loopy sit while running a land blind with a dog that has undergone

Reprinted by Permission of Retriever News

proper conditioning, a collar correction for the loopy sit will not overwhelm the dog and he will understand the correction and move forward. A poorly collar conditioned dog will not understand the correction for the loopy sit and this will impede advancing the dog's training until the dog is properly conditioned.

As for training at all levels, we must train to a high standard. A dog should have a smart, crisp sit while on leash, working the Double T, doing pattern blinds or handling in the field. Most dogs encounter problems at some time during their career with one aspect of training or another. Without proper conditioning, there is no solid foundation to fall back on and often times a correction will negate any benefit of the correction to a poorly conditioned dog.

I received one dog for training several years ago that looked to be a promising All-Age dog as the dog had several All-Age finishes. I was sent the dog because it had developed a problem slipping whistles with its Amateur Owner/Handler. Upon working the dog I discovered the dog was poorly conditioned and did not understand pressure when applied. When receiving a correction for not stopping on the whistle, the dog would become overwhelmed, as he did not understand pressure, or how to turn it off. This particular dog was very well "taught," just not very well "trained." The problem could have been avoided if there was a solid foundation of conditioning to fall back on, and the dog could have learned the difference between go, stop and come with pressure. Although this

dog continued to run All-Age stakes with limited success, I felt that his potential was never fully reached due to poor collar conditioning as a youngster. Unfortunately, it is always more difficult to break bad habits than it is to instill good ones from the start.

True collar conditioning does not end on the leash. The high standard of GO, STOP and COME must be conditioned at each stage of basics training. ■

Horsetooth Retriever Kennel Kenny Trott and Marcy Wright

Horsetooth Retriever Kennel is owned and operated by Kenny Trott and Marcy Wright and is based out of Wellington, Colorado. They train dogs at all stages of training and have over 125 All-Age wins to their or their clients' credit, including several National Finalists. www.horsetoothretrievers.com