



## ASK THE PRO

### being task specific in your training

By Dave Davis

Some years ago while attending college, a professor of mine spoke on the topic of being “task specific,” meaning that however you were going to perform a task or activity, you should practice it “exactly” how it would be performed in competition. You want to practice your skills in training the way you are going to perform them in the field trial or hunt test and focus on the ones that are going to lead to success.

Over the years in training and at competition, whether it’s at field trials or hunt tests, you see so many competitors that clearly have left out the details in training.

For example, they don’t use a mat in their everyday training, whether it’s with marks, drills, or blinds. You say,

“what...drills?” Yes, drills! No matter if you’re doing the double-T, swim-by, pattern blinds, etc. There are important components that will make you a better competitor just by remembering to incorporate them in training.

One detail that should not be left out of training: take the time to put up the holding blind in the yard work. You should practice entering the blind and exiting it, both on and off of the lead. And remember to put out the running mat to assess how your dog behaves at the line. Will he move with you? Does he have a habit of creeping? Does he sit behind/in front of it? Are you able to adjust your dog on the mat?

Nothing is more frustrating than get-

ting to a test or trial – with the increased excitement of the competition – with a dog that is not familiar with proper procedure for approaching and adjusting at the line. It just may cost you that finish or placement you’ve been working so hard to get, just because that element of training was missing from your routine.

Being “task specific” is especially important in a lot of your drill work. When was the last time you gave an “over” in a trial or test and were called back to the next series? I’m not saying that 3-handed casts, the double-T, or the swim-by don’t have a place in the training regimen, but when you think about it, which casts are most used in competition? It’s probably not the “overs”

you've spent so much time with in training. Don't they say something like "back to the bird, over to the clubhouse?" It seems like in competition that anything other than a "back" or an "angle back" is going to leave you off the callback list.

So why not take the time to practice the cast that is used the most often, other than the "back" cast? "Angle-back" drills are an important part of training and should not be omitted. This is a drill where the dog will sit like you would for a 3-handed cast drill out in front of you. Bumpers are placed at 10 and 2 o'clock, rather than the typical 9, 12 and 3. In this setup, practice your right, as well as the left "angle-backs."

The point I'm trying to stress is that certain training components, whether it's practicing with the holding blind, working with your dog on the mat, or incorporating the "angle-back" cast in your training. They need to be performed, or used, in training "exactly" as they will be used in competition. A quarterback, soccer player or basketball player all practice skills that they are going to need when they get to the game. It is through repetition and drills that these skills are developed and improved. They perform the same task or skill over and over, specific to what or how they are going to use it in competition. But it would be pointless to spend an inordinate amount of time on working on the hail mary, which is seldom used, rather than passes that will actually be used in the game.

By the same token, why would you not work more on the "angle back" cast than an "over?" And incorporating the holding blind and mat in training is a good habit to get into to simulate what the dog will actually experience at a test or trial.

Another good example would come from a helpful point I picked up from a notable trainer about exiting the holding blind. Say you've got a flyer-crazy dog (don't we all?), Why would you come out of the holding blind in training on the side that exposes him to the flyer station first? I mean, you get to that hunt test or field trial, you are in the holding blind and are called to the line. If you lead your dog out of the blind on the side that exposes him to the flyer station and that's the first thing your dog sees, your chances of getting him to focus on another station or area have just been greatly diminished.

Another question to ask yourself: have you practiced the task



of coming out of the holding blind to the line enough, so that when you add in the level of excitement at a competition you still have control and your dog is heeling and showing that he is going in the direction he needs to retrieve the bird? Or, for that matter, is he looking at the stations you want him to look at once on the mat? How many of you have been dropped from a trial or test because the only thing your dog is watching is the flyer?

In summary, the next time you train with your dog, take the time and be cognizant of the specific tasks that you are going to use, whether in a competition or hunting. Repeat these tasks in training, as you would in a genuine situation, over and over until you and your dog are proficient at them. Failure to do so, especially in the excitement of a trial or test, is most assuredly going to lead to disappointment when it comes time to perform and not carry over to that placement, or finish, or qualifying score you've been working toward. ■

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Dave Davis owns and operates Chieftan Kennels in Ironwood, MI during the summer and fall months, and in Giddings, TX in the winter. With over 25 years of experience, providing training for dogs from gun-dog level up through hunt test competitors, and field champions. [www.chieftankennels.com](http://www.chieftankennels.com)