



# ASK THE PRO

## dirt clod drill (aka cow chip drill, etc.) one application

By Evan Graham

IT MUST BE NOTED that the following drill is not a basic drill for a less developed dog. Its application is designed for a fully trained dog, or at least one in late Transition that has shown habitually poor commitment on his hunt area. Dogs prone to switch, or to give up on a hunt can benefit greatly from it.

This valuable little drill has a number of applications depending on need. I'll focus on de-switching in this article. A dog prone to switching lacks discipline about diligently hunting a fall to the extent that they will readily leave a hunt to go and hunt another fall.

### Not for All Dogs, or All Occasions

Keeping in mind the age and developmental level of the dog; we'll approach the treatment

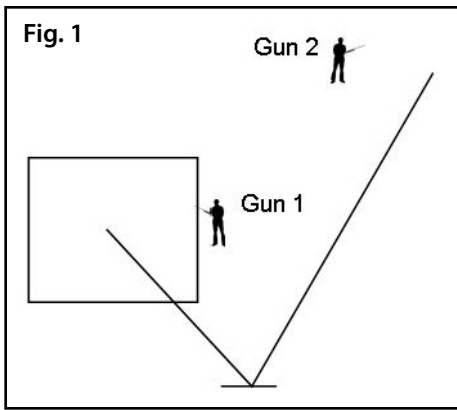
on a more advanced level. This approach requires a fully developed set of Basics, and advanced handling. That is because you will be applying more advanced concepts of training than you did in the early development of your dog. That will include literally setting him up to commit the foul you have noted as having become habitual, such as switching, and then correcting it sternly for lasting effects. Bear in mind, this is something you will likely need to do a number of times, reading your dog as you go for the development of a conscience. You will also need to balance your training during this time with plenty of wide spread marks where discipline is less likely to be needed.

D.L. Walters once noted that when a dog has been given enough education about his job he must learn a sense of obligation about

doing it to be reliable. I agree with that, and this drill is designed to do that.

The first step will be to configure a set of double marks with ample suction away from the go bird. Fig. 1 (opposite page) is an example of Flower Pot marks in a tight formation that would tend to draw a dog toward the longer mark if he over ran the shorter one (the "go" bird). I would say to set yours up so that there is no more than 50 yards between the falls. "Pinched" or converging marks also work well, but won't generally provide you with as much room to work.

The dynamics of the drill, as they were originally run, include having your bird boy either throw a large dirt clod or a cow chip. The thrown object was roughly the size of a bird, and we used enough distance that they



couldn't tell the difference (roughly 80 yards). But, when they got to the fall area, there was no bird. That is because we wanted them to quit the hunt if they had that proclivity, so we could correct them for it. They would sometimes leave it instantly, finding no mark in the area.

Instruct your bird boy to be ready to slip a bird out into the fall area on your cue. This would happen when the dog left the AOF to go for another mark. You'll make your correction, and direct your dog back into the fall area to resume the hunt. Try not to get sidetracked here about "What do you do if he doesn't hunt." We'll get to that.

There should not be enough cover in the fall area adequate to hide even a pigeon. When your dog returns to the fall area, the bird should be visible, and retrieving it should be virtually automatic.

Don't re-run it. Put him up and go run something non-mark related. Come back tomorrow and run another Dirt Clod Drill in another spot, and change the configuration slightly to have a different look for the dog.

### Making the Correction

As for when to make the correction, let me say this. First, I no longer use dirt clods or cow chips. I use the same drill dynamics, but we throw birds (ducks), and attach decoy anchor lines to both of them. The distance to the shortest fall is about 75-80 yards, so the bird boy has plenty of time to reel in the bird after the dog is sent. The shorter mark is the go bird (last thrown). The bird boys pick up both birds as the dog is sent; the go bird reeled in, rather than the bird boy going after it.

That allows a more effective application of the drill because I allow the dog to complete the switch and establish a hunt in the long fall area, provided he does not make a strong attempt to hunt it. Just as he commits to the

hunt on the long fall area, "Toot" – nick – "Toot," and then "Toot, toot" to direct the dog to come back into the go bird fall area, where the bird boy will have already replaced the fall with a duck that has no line attached to it. This rewards the dog for hunting the fall area of the go bird, in direct opposition to having been corrected in the long fall.

I do not send them for the long mark, where they've just received a correction.

In the rare case of a dog hunting so diligently for the go bird that he will not leave it to switch, I instruct my bird boy to be ready to sneak out a bird on my cue, and to do so in a manner that the dog will not see him do it. That is a reward for a diligent hunt. But that rarely occurs, at least the first time they run this drill. ■

### Evan Graham

Evan has trained and handled many dogs that earned positions on the National Derby List, including five in a single year, as well as many qualified All-Age dogs. At least three of the dogs he trained as a professional became field champions. Numerous dogs trained by the Smartwork method have become field champions, one winning the Australian National Retrieving Championship. Evan has also been a contributing writer for The Retriever Journal and HRC Magazines. <http://rushcreekpress.com/page8champions.html>