



ASK THE PRO

getting more out of the double-T

By Brian Hartfield

The Double-T drill is one of my favorite parts of retriever development. The results of your efforts, and progress made, can be seen daily. During this stage I will often ask clients, “What is the Double-T drill for?” The common answer is, “It’s where a dog learns to handle.” That is only partially correct. The honest answer is that a dog does not learn to truly handle until they are running cold blinds. A more accurate answer is: It’s where a dog learns to “go,” “stop,” and “go” again (in a direction given). But, it is also where the response to all of the predictable infractions are installed. In a dog’s career all dogs will at some point choose to respond incorrectly; no goes, whistle refusals, cast refusals, popping. I want to be able to leave the ‘T’ drill knowing that my dog will respond consistently to correc-

tions incorporated for these infractions.

I think it helps to view the blind retrieve from a dog’s point of view. To do this I have used the following analogy: consider a long hallway. Stretched down the center is a guide wire. Blindfold yourself, grab the wire, and run to the other end. Half-way there someone has extended a 2 x 4, nose high. Your forward progress is abruptly halted, and with bloody nose and teary eyes someone suggests you blindfold yourself and do it again. Your answer is going to be?

I don’t want to give the impression that you will “bloody” your dog, but think of the contradictions we are asking our dogs to understand: stay off the point, get on the point, get in the water, get out, drive...now stop! It’s no wonder they get confused. We want a dog that

runs hard, runs straight, stops on a dime and takes off in the direction we give them. It is at this point that I can discuss the need for “have to” or force. My definition of force: a power applied to overcome a resistance. To lower the amount of force required, one can lower the amount of resistance by spending more time showing, teaching, training and finally re-enforcing. It is necessary to understand this as we move on.

There is a critical balance taught on the Double-T: “go”-“stop”-“come.” Balance is important, but there are ways of intentionally tipping the scales to create the reactions that you are looking to install corrections for. I believe that the strongest response should be the command to “come.” If it is not, you have a bolter. That having been said, “go” is critical.

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One drives a dog to a pile and indirect pressure is applied to enhance the “go”...so much so that an ‘out of balance’ is welcome. This is necessary for the injection of “stop.”

I begin enforcing the sit whistle on the return from the center pile. I don't want to lose any of the “go” I have been installing just yet. But I can afford to stop a dog on its return, gradually insisting on a quicker response. And, if there is a freeze up, a quick “here” correction and balance is again found. For a check to see if “go” is at the strength level I need, I will whistle sit on a return and then give a back cast. If the student turns and drives towards the pile with bumper in mouth, it is usually an indication that “go” (“back”) is understood. It is one thing to cast a dog to something, but totally different to cast them in a direction with something. With this knowledge I can begin to use whistle sit (“stop”) en-route to the pile.

I begin by stopping the dog relatively close to me. This allows for more control of “stop.” But, it also allows more room to add “go.” Often at this time a dog may respond by not going or popping. So the addition of “stop” really allows you to install even more “go.”

With “go” and “stop” both understood, I can begin challenging their understanding. To do this I begin showing them the short over location. To do this with the student in front of me, I throw a bumper to one of the short over locations. For example, I throw to the left over and cast right back. If the dog attempts to go to the over I whistle sit them and cast back, adding force if required for back. Upon the return, I repeat with the right over and cast left back. I will continue this until compliance in turning right/left and driving straight back is given. I should mention that I also expect a ‘no hands’ back understanding as well at this time.

But what about the overs? I will cast the student to the over location enough for them to feel comfortable retrieving them. I now have a student I can send from my side and stop anywhere up and down the center line (including right at the pile). By sequencing my stops and casts I can tilt the scale as needed for installations desired. No one wants a dog to no go, pop or ignore whistles. BUT if these infractions are going to surface, dealing with them in the known environment of the T-drill will allow one to add force that is more easily understood by the student.

Finally, the Double-T. What I have described so far has been a Single-T. I introduce the long overs by moving out to the long intersection and briefly repeating the steps of showing the overs as mentioned earlier. It doesn't take nearly as much time or pressure as it is understood fully now. What I have found is that I get a chance to use attrition on the cast for the long over. Frequently a student will attempt to come in to the short over. I stop and cast back, stop and cast over. If they are trying to comply there is no collar pressure. Once a failure to comply with “go,” “stop” or “come” is exhibited, collar correction is used.



It has been my experience that most dogs having learned the five locations will need some digestion time. I will continue to run this drill until it flows smoothly. I need it to be thoroughly understood. When I turn a dog over to its owner and tell them they can expect a certain response, I need to know it will respond in a predictable manner consistently. ■

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