



Photo by Molly Schlachter

Never let your dog turn his head away on delivery. He must turn toward you while delivering as seen in this photo.

## ASK THE PRO

### teaching solid basics

By Mark Smith

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SOLID BASIC PROGRAM...Without a solid foundation, your dog will never reach his/her full potential. The basic program is the backbone to your dog's entire life of training. Throughout this article I will touch base on a few subjects to explain why this is true.

Try building a house without pilings or a slab. Eventually it will sink and so will your dog's future as a hunting companion or a trial dog.

"Force Fetch" is exactly what it says. You're forcing the dog to do something even when he doesn't want to. I love when someone says, my dog doesn't need to be forced, he never drops the bumper. The worst thing you can do is to be in a hurry to run a trial, or hunt your dog before he's ready. Recently I had the opportunity to evaluate two dogs with mouth problems. Both dogs had the same problem, of not wanting to give up the bird "Freezing" but they were different in their own way.

We will call the first dog, Dog "X"—Dog "X" was a mess. He

would not fetch on command at all. But, a nice dog that I think is very salvageable. The worst thing to do is to start giving him a work over without checking out some of his basics. When I would put a bird on the ground and say fetch, not only did he not fetch, he would get very nervous about it. After a few minutes, I realized this dog was very sensitive and willing. I went back and taught him the "Fetch" command, applied pressure and mixed in some praise. Once we reviewed his force fetch, we then did walking fetch with staggered birds placed on the ground. During this procedure, we incorporated collar and stick fetch. After two sessions, Dog "X" was beginning to see the light.

On the third day, we threw him a few marks. On return, he began to mouth the bird. This is where indirect pressure comes in. Instead of nicking on the "Hold" command, I applied light pressure to the "Here" command. If he mouths the bird on line, I would 'nick' saying "Sit." After one week on drill work dealing with this issue, Dog "X" became a new dog.

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Now there was dog “Y.” Dog “Y” understood the “Fetch” command much better, but when under pressure, the response was not what we were looking for. Although he fetched on command better, his big problem was spitting the bird as soon as your hand got close to it. Previously, he had some patch work done to get through a field trial. That’s what caused the spitting of the bird as soon as he would see your hand coming for it. I want every dog to drop on command, not spitting a bumper or bird as my hand touches it. This will come up in basics, just raise your standards and make them do it right from the start. We did the same procedure as done on Dog “X,” but had to concentrate more on his hold. In a few days, Dog “Y” is getting back on the right track. Remember, when a problem arrives in your training, always check out the foundation.

Some signs of potential mouth problems are: your dog backing up when you take the bird and turning their head away from you on delivery, to mention a few. Remember, never pull a bumper or bird from your dog.

If you teach your dog “Fetch” and “Drop” properly from the beginning and don’t take the birds like you are pulling the rope on a lawn mower, you have a great chance of never going through this problem. ■

### South Lake Kennels

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Mark Smith started training full time in May of 1986. Since then, I've fully trained over 35 field or amateur field champions, a High point derby dog, three National Open finalists and over a thousand hunting dogs. South Lake Kennels is located in La Place, Louisiana. We live by our slogan, *From Fetch To FC*. Email [southlakekennel@bellsouth.net](mailto:southlakekennel@bellsouth.net)