



ASK THE PRO

proper basics

By Rick Stawski

In previous issues there have been articles written by several excellent dog trainers emphasizing the importance of Basics. The common theme is that without proper Basics it is virtually impossible to train a dog to the degree that is necessary to be successful in Field Trials, Hunting Tests or Hunting. Think of Basics as the foundation of your dog's training. Proper Basics gives us the tools to train your dog.

There are 5 factors that influence dogs from running straight to the mark or blind. They are Wind, Water, Cover, Terrain, and Diversion. A dog's natural tendency is to fade with the wind, we want them to fight the wind and go straight. A dog's natural tendency is to run around a piece of water or cover, we expect them to go through it. A dog's natural tenden-

cy is to run uphill or downhill we expect them to run the side hill. Diversions in the form of a previous mark, dry pop, poison bird, etc. all have an influence on the dog's ability to run straight to the bird. The difficulty of training set ups and trial tests is determined by how we incorporate these factors into the marks and blinds.

Basics will not assure you that your dog will fight these factors and run straight but it will give you the "Training Tools" that you can use to correct these natural tendencies and to fight factors. Lack of proper Basics becomes very apparent when I receive a new dog for training or I am working with a dog at a seminar that does not have a proper foundation. A training situation arises and without the proper Basics there is no way to correct or train

on the problem. In both of these situations it is necessary to back up the dog's training and make sure the dog Basics are solid. Basics cannot assure that your dog will get in the water or cut through a cover strip but it can give you a training tool that if the dog does not do what is expected you can correct the behavior. In this instance, you would whistle sit the dog and handle into the water or cover. Collar pressure could be applied depending on the dog's level of training and temperament.

Once we train the dog to this level, how do we maintain training tools or Basics? One thing that I do in the beginning of the winter trip or when I get a new dog in training is a review of their yard work or Basics. I go back and review collar obedience, force to the pile, whistle sit, and finish with the Mini T. If I am

satisfied that the dog understands and has a solid foundation I will go to the swim-by and review the force in the water, whistle sit and the swim by cast. Then and only then will I feel comfortable using the collar in a training situation. I want my Basics solid so that when a dog is giving into one of the 5 factors I have the training tools to correct the problem.

A common occurrence during the training year is that we will have a gradual deterioration or breakdown of our training tools. When this occurs it is necessary to back up and review that part of their Basic training. Probably the most common breakdown that I see is in the swim-by cast. A training situation occurs where it is necessary to use the swim-by cast and the dog does not take it. Now you are wasting training time and energy on fixing the swim-by cast instead of working on the training problem.

One way to maintain your swim-by is to incorporate it into your blind or marking set ups. Once or twice a month I will give the swim-by cast on the last retrieve and make sure that they take the cast. If they do not, I will work on it until they understand. Once or twice a year, and definitely at the beginning of the training year, I will do a remote swim-by. This is nothing more than taking the dog to new areas and throwing fun bumpers and then making them take the swim-by cast. A dog can be very well schooled on the swim-by in the pond where he learned it but could have a very difficult time in other areas. It is just a matter of practicing and training it in different areas. The value of a solid swim-by cast is a very important part of maintaining your Basics.

Another common breakdown can occur in recalling your dog. In a lot of situations, due to poor Basics or sloppiness on the trainer's part, recalling can create problems such as flaring, bugging, popping, poor attitude, no going, etc. But if the dog has sound training tools (Proper Basics) recalling your dog, if not overused, can be a very valuable asset to your training.

There are several drills commonly referred to as no-no drills that can be done to prepare a dog to being recalled. This should be done as part of their initial basic training or can be used to condition a dog that has developed a recall problem. One of the best, although it is not commonly thought of as a no-no drill, is the Wagon Wheel drill. Besides being a drill that emphasizes team work between the dog and handler it also prepares a dog to being recalled. For these reasons the Wagon Wheel is a very important part of basic/transition training.

Another no-no drill is where we teach the dog to run through a slot or key hole (between two trees, two hay bales, etc), or we make them jump an object (brush pile, boat, hay bales etc). These no-no drills that prepare a dog for recall are not only an important part of a dog's basic/transition training but should be incorporated throughout their entire training career. I try to do at least one no-no drill a month and use it more frequently for dogs with recall problems.

These are just two examples of maintaining your Basic training. There are many other areas where maintenance will be needed; THINK OBEEDIENCE! The last thing I want to do is to get in a training situation and have a breakdown of my Basic training and not be able to train on teaching the dog to fight factors. Although a dog has finished his "Basics" I am constantly working at maintaining those "Training Tools" we worked so hard to install. ■

Fine Line Retrievers Rick and Barb Stawski

Fine Line Retrievers is owned and operated by Rick and Barb Stawski and is located in Milaca, Minnesota. Specializing in young dogs, Fine Line Retrievers has trained over 28 FC, AFC, CFC, over 100 QAA and numerous Master National Qualifiers. Also Rick is the originator of the Fowl Dawg DVD series. This 3 DVD set uses actual dog training sequences to show a complete and comprehensive young dog training program. www.finelineretrievers.com