



ASK THE PRO

lining paths for confidence and style

By Mark Mosher

I AM GOING TO TALK ABOUT a training tool that other trainers may shy away from but which I have found great success with. I refer to this tool as lining paths. These paths are a wonderful way to introduce dogs to all types of technical blinds without a lot of pressure. Not only do lining paths allow a dog to relax while learning, it really makes the transition to the real thing easier by building confidence between the handler and technical difficulties.

Whenever a dog may develop a problem with a blind or certain aspects of blind such as lining by bird crates, squeeze, poison birds, under the arc and/or etc., I find it the easiest way to go back to the lining paths and correct it while building up a dogs' confidence again.

I set up two sets of paths. One set of paths

have the lines very tight, which I use to teach the dog to take the line that I send them on (picture 1). The second set of paths is spaced more widely to throw marks or poison birds between them (picture 2). All the paths must come to a focal point to send the dog from. If you have just one area to set up one set of lining paths, you can always make two or three paths that are tight and one path that is a little wider from the others. All the paths can vary in length from 50 yards to 250 yards. It can be useful to have a short one where they pick up and come back and line by it for the second pick up. (See Diagram 1)

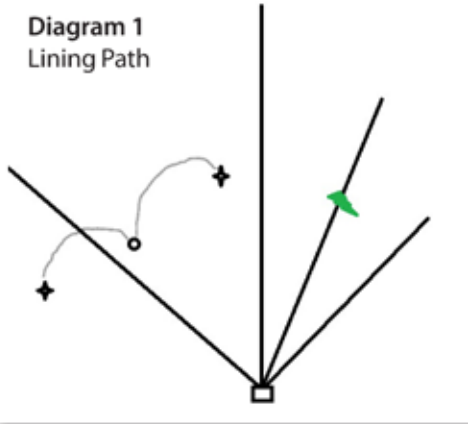
Once a dog has been force fetched and forced on back, basically doing good baseball or through the double T, the dog should be

ready for serious lining drills. To introduce a dog to the lining paths, I will either place white bumpers 40 yards apart down the path or I put a pile at the very end and start the dog close to the pile and work my way back. I find that either way, depending on the dog, within a few sessions of these drills a dog will learn quickly and with confidence to go down the path. I find that once a dog has learned each path, it is important not to repeat a path in any one session. This reinforces to the dog not to go back where it has already picked up something.

I believe that one of the fears that people have in using the lining paths as a training tool is that it may cause a dog to run down every path or road or strip in a field that it comes to. This is not the case. If used properly



Diagram 1
Lining Path



as a drill, it does not happen. After a dog is confident in the basic lining path, I immediately introduce hay bales, tree brush, and canoes directly into the path where the dog must jump over

them to stay on line. I always start up close to the obstacles and then move further away. I am always surprised at how the dog will learn to look for such obstacles when I start them on a real blind.

One of the most important aspects in using the tight paths is getting a dog to take the handler's line. I cannot accomplish this without communication. When I am at the focal point of the paths and the dog is looking out, I will use this time to teach the dog my language. As I get dogs in all ages and stages of their training, it is important for the dog to understand its handler's language. I will pick the path that I want the dog to line down and set the dog up for it and when the dog looks down the path where it is looking where it will be going, I use my key words to the dog such as "good," "right there," and "that's it" or whichever gets the dog's ears up and eyes locked in, and then I send the dog. Not all dogs will line the same way so it helps to be able to read each dog and be able to talk to the dog so the dog will know when he/she is lined up properly. This is crucial to the long-term success of dog and handler.

One of the most difficult things to teach a dog is to be respectful but not afraid of gunners and old falls. The wider paths are very useful for this. In my experience, the hardest thing to teach a young dog is to take a line tight behind a gunner. I start this by just putting out a chair or a flag beside a lining path or beside two of the lining paths. I have the dog line by this until it gets comfortable and then I add a gunner beside one and then throw a bird away from the path. I have the dog pick up the bird, come back and line down the path by the gunner. Usually it is easier to move off the focal point in the beginning to have the dog pick up the mark and then I move back to the focal point to do the line by the mark. As with any other obstacle being introduced, I start close and increase the distance as the dog gets comfortable with it. I also use the lining paths to teach a dog to line outside of a mark thrown. I have a bird thrown toward a path and have the dog take the lining path by it. I set up between two paths so that I can do both drills during the same session.

Introducing poison birds can be done the same way. I will start by throwing marks towards the path and away from the paths and eventually over the path where the dog will have to run under the arc.



Once again while doing these drill sessions with the dog, I use this as an opportunity to develop consistent and strong language bond between myself and the dog. When I start teaching on real blinds, my dog and I will understand one another without a language barrier.

I use the tight lines to teach the "squeeze" blind. I sit a gunner to the left of the second path and put a bird even with the gunner two paths over. I have the dog pick up the bird and then line the dog down the path between the bird and gunner.

On the odd occasion a dog has to line at a gun, pick up a bird in front of the gun and come back and line by the gun. Lining paths simplify (for handler and dog) any scenario that may come up during a test with a technical blind. All aspects can be imitated without applying too much pressure giving a dog and handler confidence and style. I believe a dog must have confidence when it leaves me to take a straight line and trust in me that I will allow them to enjoy retrieving however technical the field looks.

I have had older dogs come to me because they would not line properly or were unstylish. The first thing I do is introduce the dogs to many sessions with the lining paths. At first the dog does not want to line down a path at all. With a little encouragement and some use of positive language, the older dog will get used to the paths and find that it is a relaxing game for them. Soon the dog will come off the truck and immediately identify the lining paths as fun and not pressure.

In closing, I would like to add that there are so many positive aspects of using lining paths as serious training tools. They are not as scary as some may think. I feel that all dogs can learn these concepts without tons of pressure, it allows for the dog to run harder and more confident. I can add that in my experience of more than twenty years of training as a professional at Sugarfoot Kennel and now on my own as M & M Kennels, every single dog has worked on lining paths and shown success. My father, David Mosher, and I have trained and worked with more than fifty field champions, including four Purina award winners, and two derby champions. Lining paths really work! ■

M&M Kennels **Mark Mosher**

While growing up in a diehard hunting family, with all different types of hunting dogs, including beagles, setters, and retrievers, I found an avid interest in training dogs. I was throwing birds and helping build training grounds as a young boy for my father. I started running dogs as a teenager. I have been involved with the training and raising of dogs all my life. I went to work at Sugarfoot Kennels as a full-time professional young dog trainer in 1987. I have made this a life career and I started my own company, M & M Kennels, in 2010. I train in Maine during the summer months and in southeast Texas in the winter months.