



ASK THE PRO

correcting “flaring” on a Double T pattern

By Jerry Patopea

CORRECTING FLARING on a Double T is more a matter of prevention than correction. If all the basics prior to the double T are taught thoroughly, most of the work on flaring will have already been done. Every step in basics builds upon the previous step, so every step is important to prevent flaring, all the way back to the dog heeling straight beside me and walking straight toward me on simple obedience and collar conditioning sessions. If the dog learns in these initial sessions how to flare away from me, he is developing a habit of avoidance as his basics progress into more difficult lessons. So, at every stage of development, flaring is a major concern which should be addressed right there to deter any avoidance behavior from developing. By not being in a hurry, teaching and reinforcing each command thoroughly and in the proper sequence and by breaking down each lesson into the smallest steps, I am not only teaching the obvious lesson but also building an understanding of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable patterns and quickness

of response. So by the time I get to the double T, the dog has a background of learning to go and come straight and has already been prevented from establishing a habit of flaring. This background work will be very helpful in preventing confusion and needless difficulties as I teach the double T.

In setting up the double T, I teach a straight line in very small increments by establishing the pile with the dog by my side. I walk a short distance with the dog along my ultimate Line and then turn and throw to the pile with the dog at my side. I send the dog and if the retrieve is good I back up a few steps and send the dog again. If that retrieve is good and straight I back up and send the dog again, repeating the process of backing up a few steps and sending the dog to the pile from a little further back on each successful retrieve. I'm building a straight-line corridor from my ultimate starting point to the pile.

When the dog begins to bow his line unintentionally, bend his line, or intentionally flare

the line, I stop him on a whistle and cast toward the pile. It's important here that the dog is heading away from the line and has not already begun his arc back toward the pile when he is stopped. He may have no idea why he was stopped on a whistle, if he was just being lazy, or lost his focus, and may think he should take an over, or just continue on his original route. So I stop and cast again and again if necessary, correcting any slow stops, half sits, no-go's, that may occur while the dog is not in the corridor. I try to give all my commands and especially corrections while the dog is out of the corridor, and heading off line, where I don't want him. This helps guide him in the right direction, and develops the parameter of the corridor. I want him to feel comfortable running straight and learn to understand that I want him to change his direction after he stops on the whistle. I like to put some whistles on the dog outside the corridor as I'm developing distance, before I set up the over piles.

If the dog doesn't straighten his line in a few

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attempts, I begin moving up each time I send him, thus decreasing the distance barrier. I'll continue to handle him down the line if he flares as a first option because those whistle-stops are good for development. If progress is not occurring, I will call back at a close distance and resend, moving up if necessary. I might also change sides and send him from the right instead of the left, but eventually I have him run the line sending from both sides.

As a final resort in straightening the line, I will put a chair or other obstacle where the flare will correct itself. This usually works very well but eliminates the other learning possibilities that handling develops. Placement of the chair is important, however, because the dog will respond to the chair. If the chair is too close to the line the dog will flare the other way; too far from the line and he won't correct at all; too far from the handler and he may develop an s-curve to the pile. Most dogs develop the entire straight line in one or two days but if it takes longer, that's okay by me. It just means we had some other issues we needed to work out. I don't try to push too fast on the distance, because increasing the distance too quickly will increase flaring in the line.

On the following day, I will start about half way back from where we ended and see that his memory and comfort level are strong, then progress back from the pile. When I get back to my ultimate starting point and he is running straight, I run him down there a few times and then start hand throwing short diversion retrieves, sending to the back pile after each diversion. I start with 90° diversions then tighten to 45° then finally inline diversions. Then I'm ready to set my overs.

When I set my overs, I start with the long overs, furthest from the line. I start with a fresh dog just beginning the day and run him down the line a couple times. Then I move all the way with the dog to the over pile and establish each of the two long overs separately and completely. I then do a single T to the back pile and those overs from up close, making sure the line and over casts are clean before I back up. I run the dog to the Back pile at least once for every over I give, more times if flaring occurs. I back up slowly with each retrieve until I am again at the ultimate starting point. If any flaring comes up, I handle it as I've already described. When this part is all smooth, I move up and set the short overs, establishing each one completely, casting to each short over and running straight down the back line before I stop again for the long overs. It's important to send to the Back pile at least every other retrieve once the overs

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are established. I alternate casts between long overs and short overs, right and left casts, and running to the Back pile to increase flexibility. Two to three more days practice at this point will probably graduate him from the double T, and to a significantly higher level of understanding.

Normally, this drill takes two to three weeks to complete, three to five days a week, and builds a better dog every day. Without a previous solid foundation undesirable side effects will arise, requiring a review and better understanding of previous learning.

Note: Significant rest during this period is important, as this is a physically and sometimes mentally difficult drill. A lot of other taxing work will not help his understanding or development here. This is best done in the cool part of the day, as heat reduces learning power and causes lack of focus. It's also safer if the dog is cool, and recovery will be quicker for the next workout. ■

Jerry Patopea

Jerry Patopea has been working with field trial retrievers since he was thirteen years old. He had his first field champion when he was twenty-two and started Utopia Retriever Kennel when he was twenty-three. He has trained many field and amateur field champions, two Canadian National Amateur Field Champions, a high point derby champion and twice won the Purina High Point Open dog award. He enjoys every day training retrievers and working with their owners.