



ASK THE PRO

marking questions

By Dave and Ty Rorem

1. When training, if a dog misses a mark, when do you (a) handle, (b) have the bird boy help or (c) call the dog in?

First off, we believe there are two types of marks: *discipline type marks* and *finesse type marks*.

The trainer needs to know the difference and adjust their training to each type. When to enforce discipline, and when to let the dog go get it, is a big part of the *art of dog training*.

We also believe there are three parts to every mark:

1. The dog's focus, watching and memory of each mark.
2. Getting to it.
3. The area of the fall.

You should always try to leave one of these three elements to the dog during each mark; meaning if you correct the dog online for head swinging, correct the dog for the line and correct the dog for the fall area, you will begin to create a mechanical dog. People get too concerned with “the line to the mark” and “staying on the proper side of the guns” and therefore lose sight of a very important part of each dog, *THEIR BRAIN*.

When you are constantly telling a dog what to do, they usually become more compliant but also they become much more mechanical. Developing their brain and how to make decisions when they are in trouble or become lost, is essential to getting the most out of each dog. Leaving some decisions to the dog on each mark improves their decision making process and long term performance.

2. If you handle, do you handle to the area or to the mark?

As a general rule, the only time we handle on a mark is for a flagrantly bad line to the mark, a pronounced cheat by the dog, or enforcing some discipline because of a switch or going back to an old fall.

Once the dog reaches the fall area, we let them hunt. And for the most part, even if they start to go behind the guns, sometimes we will help them if they are on the wrong side. It has to be a strong reason that overrides letting them figure out the mark, to make it worth our interference.

We much prefer to have bird boys help, especially on the short retired. We want the dog to start looking for the holding blind and finding it. We do this by having the bird boy help without coming out of the tent or blind. This makes the dog start to look for the blind when it gets lost or in trouble. Once they figure out how to find the blind, they learn to recover and hunt the mark.

Pay close attention to the tail of your dog when hunting a mark. If the tail is up, they are relaxed and more likely to find it with more efficiency. If the tail is down, they are worried and more likely to leave the area.

Sometimes getting to the mark requires discipline and having the tail down can be a good thing. Once the dog gets to the fall area, We want them to be balanced enough to find the bird with their tail up. Bird boy help instead of handling will achieve this balance better than handling to the bird.

3. If you call him in, do you just recast the dog or do you have the mark re-thrown?

This depends on the age and the level of the dog. Young dogs need to have a black and white reason for a recall and usually we will re-throw the mark.

Older experienced dogs can be treated differently ... but our advice is: *“When in doubt, simplify”* and re-throw.

4. If you handled, do you repeat the mark?

We don't make a habit of repeating marks very often. When we do repeat a mark, it will be when we think the dog will benefit more from the repeat, versus the help or correction from the first time.

Repeating for “perfection” is not a good reason for us.

Repeating too often can develop a lack of effort with some dogs on the first attempt and hurt long term performance. The decision to repeat or not, is more *Art than Science*.

5. Do any of your answers change if it is a retired gun?

We are much more lenient on hunting a mark up on a retired bird (especially the difficult short retired) than we are on a standout gun. As long as the dog stays within the confines of the area, by our standards, we let them hunt.

6. Sub-Question: If the response to the question is to handle, doesn't that take the responsibility for doing it properly off the dog? Haven't you removed the decision-making responsibility from the dog and placed it on the handler?

The answer is “Yes.” Anytime the trainer interferes with the dog it takes some of the responsibility off the dog. Enforcing the discipline it takes to get to some very difficult marks can be a very good reason to handle.

Each dog is different and therefore, training needs to be adjusted to the dog. ■

Rorem Retrievers

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Dave, Paulette and Ty Rorem operate Rorem Retrievers based in Minnesota and Texas since 1977. They train field trial dogs and have successfully produced over 90 Field Champions, one National Open Champion, three Canadian National Amateur Champions, four Canadian National Open Champions and 66 National Finalists. www.roremretrievers.com

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