

Transition Training

by Jackie Mertens

People often ask, "what is transition training?" I consider Transition as the time period after the BASIC yard work is done including - obedience training, force fetching, force to a pile, double T, and swim by. Transition is the time period when all the skills that you have taught the young dog in the Basic yard work are applied in actual field situations.

Just because the dog knows all the commands and skills in the yard, do not expect him to obey them in the field yet. It is your job to slowly and skillfully teach the dog to apply these skills to various field tests. There are a lot of yard lessons that have to be transferred to the field — do it slowly and carefully, so your pup will understand what you are doing. Just because your dog knows what an over is on the double T does not mean that he will be skilled at overs in the field or backs or whistle sits etc. During Transition you will start with a triple set of pattern blinds on land, easy cheater singles on the water and simple water blinds. At the same time, you will be giving the dog plenty of marks with about a ninety-percent success rate. If your dog's success is less than ninety percent then you had best set up easier marks.

If your basics are solid, meaning you have done a thorough job of teaching all the necessary commands and introduced all the collar corrections during your yard work being sure that your dog understands what a collar burn is for, then you can start using these commands in the field and the transition should go relatively smoothly. If things break down in the field, always stop and ask yourself — "is my dog confused or is he making a willful mistake through lack of effort?"

If the dog is confused or afraid, then you must guide him through his mistake, simplify the test, or back up to where he first got confused. If you interpret the mistake as a lack of effort due to a distraction or just not paying attention, then a correction is warranted. The temperament of the dog and the type of mistake that he made determine the severity of the correction given. It is times like this that dog training becomes an ART, and not a SCIENCE.

Example - Just because you saw trainer "A" correct his dog for a POP on a water blind, does not mean that you should do the same thing that trainer "A" did to his dog if your dog should POP. Maybe his dog was an all age dog that popped on the water's edge on a re-entry into a large body of water because he did not want to make a big swim 200 yards across. This might be a justified collar correction. Maybe your youngster popped in the water when you tried to cast him onto a point. Just after the swim by, dogs with a lot of conscience will often be cautious about getting onto land. In this situation, your cast may confuse your young dog and he does not warrant a correction.

Example 2 - Although Trainer "B" burned his dog for leaving the area of a bird does not mean that when your youngster runs through a mark and heads for another that you should burn him. Trainer "B's" open dog may have been thinking about that flyer shot to the left of the shorter bird that he was sent to retrieve. He may willfully head to the flyer after making a quick loop at the dead bird area. This dog probably should get burned, if he took the line and started to hunt the shorter dead bird and then quickly took off for the flyer. Maybe your dog just needs the gunner to help him or maybe you should just handle him back to the bird without a correction. However, always remember that even a handle is a mild correction to some sensitive dogs, so don't always handle on a mark that the dog is not getting. Many times, it is better to have the thrower help the dog and you do nothing at all. That way you remain the good guy.

When you walk up to run your dog, you should always have alternate game plans in mind. If this goes wrong, I will do this. If he does this, I will then do such and such. Never go to line without first analyzing the test and deciding how you will run it. Will I have the gunner help if he gets in trouble or should I try to handle? If my dog is going behind the gun on the memory bird, will I let him? Have all these situations in mind before approaching the line.

The above examples are just a few of the many situations, where you must make an intelligent judgement based on your dogs level of training, his temperament, and the situation he is in. This is all a big part of Transition Training. The Transition period can be fun as it is a time when you will see lots of progress in a short period of time, but it is also a critical period that will determine your dogs training attitude for the rest of his running days, so tread softly. "Happy Training and always remember to give the benefit of doubt to the Dog"

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