



A Valuable

Water Drill

By Ken Thorson

This is one drill that is very important to teach a competitive dog. Primarily because of tests that are of such a long distance between your dog and the first, second or third water entry. Some of these entry points are 300 to 400 yards from the running line. But before starting this drill, your dog should have already been through the preliminary force program and the swim-by.

Someone once said that training a dog without understanding its behavior can be compared to driving a car using only the horn. Many of us first learned by observing others who worked their dogs or professionals. However, the good trainers are the hard-working ones that are

trying to understand why training is done the way it is. But sometimes they continue only to copy both the good and the bad without progressing to any level above an imitation of someone else.

We believe that a good trainer teaches to develop and reinforce a bond between the dog and him or herself. Teaching rather than coaching will develop a better foundation for competitive work. Before starting this drill, you should refresh your dog on the Single T drill. (*see Figure A*)

To do this, start running the T drill cold by putting out white bumpers. Have your dog sit about ten to twenty yards from where he will be stopped to sit and take an over.

COMMANDS

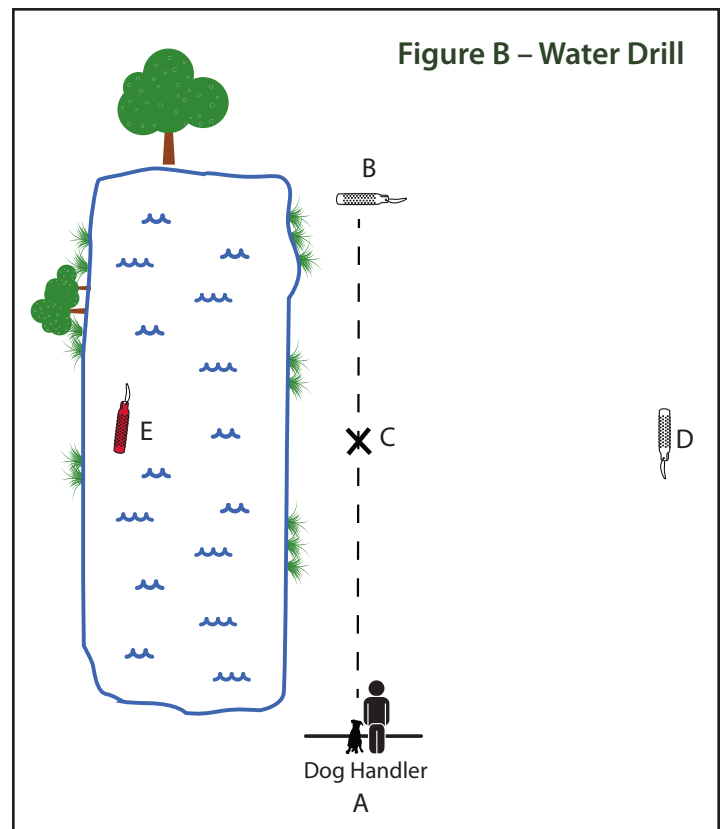
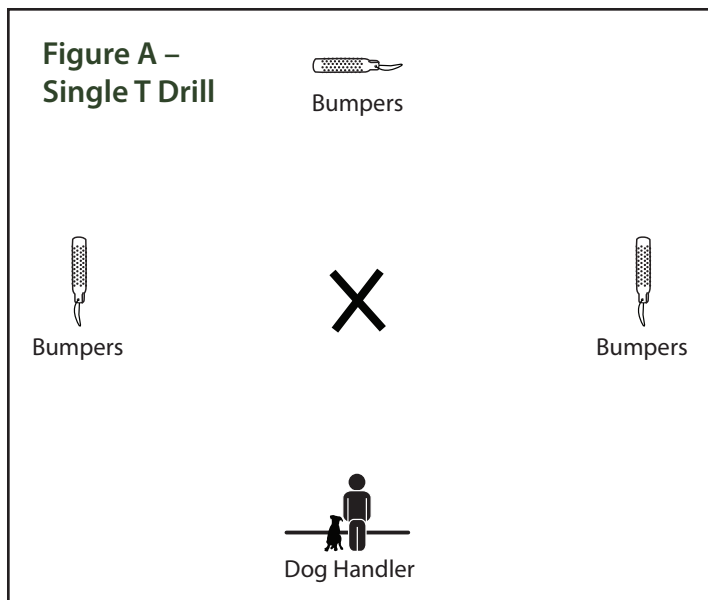
- Send your dog on several backs before stopping and sending on over.
- Then send, stop and give a right over.
- Send with two or three backs again before giving an over.
- Then send, stop, and give a left over.
- Send on several more backs.
- Always send on a back in between overs, alternating one, two, or three backs in between so they will not anticipate a whistle to stop.
- Once your dog understands this concept, start the next drill.

This over all phase of dog training must be taught with great intelligence and foresight. The trainer must constantly be reminded of the effect of motivation. Too much force, or force applied at the wrong time, or inconsistent motivation, will inevitably result in destroying a good attitude that is so necessary in the foundation building. In addition to constantly thinking about motivation, a trainer is also burdened with responsibility of creating and carrying out a plan which is designed to train particular exercises. But if all this is done by the trainer, he or she will make a quantum jump from simply having a dog that follows on a lead to a positive, fast moving dog that never removes its eyes from the handler.

The following water drill should be set up by putting a white stake, bucket or something to identify point B in the following diagram. (see Figure B)

The following order should be the way to teach this blind:

1. Get your dog out, and with two white bumpers and an orange one, heel your dog to point A.
2. Then walk your dog with bumpers in hand towards point B. About 10 feet from point B throw a white bumper.
3. Then turn, with your dog at heel, and proceed to C. Stop at C and throw a white bumper to D, send your dog and while he or she is retrieving the bumper, turn and throw the orange bumper to E.
4. Receive your dog at C and heel him or her to beginning point A.
5. Now set your dog up for a blind to B and send.
6. When he or she reaches C, blow whistle to stop your dog and handle to point E in the water.



If you have problems running E, then practice this drill many times. If problems with the over into water, you may want to do a swim-by when your dog gets the bumper.

Once this drill is established, and your dog understands it, change the process before bringing your dog out of its crate. Place a bumper at points B and E, then take your dog out and run from point A as before. Once that is established and your dog is working well with you, have someone throw a bumper to B as a mark or throw a dead pigeon or duck and run the drill. This should all be done on different days to give your dog time to digest. In any case it is nice to practice this drill once or twice a month.

The process of planning for training also requires us to remember the role of corrections in training. If we force the dog to learn complex exercises, rather than more fundamental steps, or if we push the dog too fast, the dog will become confused and unable to perform, which usually results in more negative motivation further confusing the dog that will show a loss of its attitude. This will continue in a downward spiral until handler and dog have given up on each other. Therefore, a plan must be designed to apply only enough correction to eliminate unwanted behavior, but never less than required to do exactly that. If our dog is not ready for the level of training we are attempting to teach, we will violate this rule for we will only get the response we are looking for by applying excessive corrections, if in fact we can get a correction response at all. ■

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Ken Thorson has written two books for the sport of field trials: "Competitive Retriever Training - My Reference Notes On Rex's Preliminary Force Program and Basics" and "Judging Field Trials - Preparation and Mechanics." He is in the process of writing a book on "Transition and All-Age Training" and this article is an excerpt from his current book. Ken resides with his wife, Sandi, in Bloomington, California and can be reached by email at kthor1@juno.com.

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