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Retrievers ONLINE is published six times a year. Subscription information can be found at [www.retrieversonline.com](http://www.retrieversonline.com).

### WHAT CAN YOU BRING TO A TRAINING GROUP?

*by Richard McRee, Richmond, Virginia*

In my previous article on training groups, I wrote of a situation of an organized group and a somewhat not as well organized group.

The discussion centered on how efficiently the organized group ran their dogs in a specific time frame, and how the other group ran their dogs in almost double the time. Dog numbers were approximately the same.

Dennis and I both received some positive comments on the article and he asked me to write a follow up article. I emailed and talked to experienced individual trainers and professionals alike to get ideas. It took some time to put together.

Professionals of course have paid help and a specific amount of time available to them for their client's dogs. They have to hustle to get their dogs trained on a given training day and cannot afford to waste time or effort. Their equipment has to be ready to work and work all day. Many times their clients come for day training, and volunteer to help. Many are experienced and some are not, so they are told what to do and what not to do to speed the process. Professionals tell their paid help what to do and it happens. But they all have time saving tips about how things are done and what's not done, and that organization and tips was what I was after.

Individuals that form training groups often do not have that level of organization and you really can't "boss around" volunteer help like you can paid help. As the size of any training group grows, time saving tips and organization have to be communicated to everyone so that all of the training can get done as efficiently as possible. Why spend 5 hours training when with a few tips and organization you can do the same thing in 3.5 hours.

Here are some suggestions that I have received to address these issues. These suggestions are geared to an organized group of trainers including groups such as those formed on a Club training day. Many more ideas might come to mind as you read this. Perhaps these suggestions along with your own, will make your training group a more efficient organization.

#### Time and Efficiency

One thing that all contributors consistently suggested to keep in mind is **TIME**; everyone's time. Everyone has time considerations, so let's make the most of our training time.

Be on time ... always!!! Don't arrive late and leave early. If it's a club type training session, inform the training group organizer, usually with a phone call the night before, if you

have to leave early so that he/she can plan accordingly. If only a couple of folks come to the training session, this will probably alter the type of training tests that are available to the group. If a large number of trainers arrive, the organizer may consider splitting the session into 2 distinct groups... one on land, another on water.

Don't arrive and announce that you can only stay for one series, run your dog and then leave without going out in the field to throw. It's better to stay home that day.

Don't go to socialize during training. While this will never be eliminated, it has to be kept to a minimum to save training time. If you want to socialize, arrive 20 minutes before or stay after the training ends.

Run and train only two (2) dogs that will be competing. That means don't expect throws for older, retired dogs (just for a little exercise) or puppy setups. Get someone to help you with the old dog or puppy in your yard or a school field away from the training session or after the training session. Have a couple of folks set up something for the puppies while they are waiting to run their big dogs. Do this away from the main training group. Or run puppies when changing guns or fields or when finished, especially if there is limited time for big dogs that are being trained for competition.

If you plan to train, then you're there for the duration to help setup the tests and pickup the equipment when finished.

#### Equipment

Have your own working equipment. If you are serious about training you will need your own equipment, sooner or later. Don't continue to sponge off of others by borrowing their equipment. Purchase retired gun umbrellas, holding blinds, extra whites, camo, pistol and primers, shotgun, poppers, Bumper Boy blank ammo, calls, bumpers, birds, chairs, buckets, mats, ribbons, flags, range finder, bug spray, ear protection, whistles, white, orange or pink marking tape, etc. You can use all of these training items when you train with 1 or 2 others.

No one expects you to have all needed equipment next week, but at least make an effort to acquire a few pieces of basic equipment in the coming months. Equipment should be charged, gassed up, available and ready to go. Not lost under the back seat somewhere or have parts left at home.

Always write your name or initials on your equipment. If you borrow a radio, a primer pistol, a duck call or 10 bumpers from someone, make sure you return all of that equipment to the person you borrowed it from. Don't just

leave the bumpers in a pile on the ground or place the radio, pistol and call in a chair and walk off. Please don't put radios and calls in buckets with wet stinking birds. Would you want someone to do that with your equipment?

Do have extra radios. You do have a couple of radios don't you? You can find them for less than \$50.00 at Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, etc, for a pair with a charger. When you leave the field after the last dog has run, turn the radio off to save batteries. You would be surprised at the number of trainers that leave the radios on, (especially if they have borrowed them) only for the owner to find that 3 days later the batteries are dead. But you of course, have spare batteries, right?

Only offer use of Bumper Boys or other launchers when other trainers don't show up due to unforeseen last minute circumstances. **Nothing** beats live throwers in the field and if you have them, use them. There are no Bumper Boys or Maxxs or remote launchers at a field trial or hunt test! Strive to duplicate in your training sessions what you will see at a field trial or hunt test.

It's a sad training session when there are 9 trainers and they say they don't want to go out in the field to throw. "Let's use the Bumper Boys or the Maxxs".

Remember that live training birds average at least \$8.00 to \$10.00 a bird. If someone else has gone and purchased the birds for you, give them \$2.00 extra for their trouble. Don't get in a hurry to leave without paying and thanking this person that went 37 miles out of their way, on their \$3.00 a gallon gas so you could have a live flier. Offer to pay the guy shooting your flier with his shotgun shells. Better yet, go buy him a box of shotgun shells.

For those of you that do not have primer pistols or Bumper Boys, and you are relying on those that do, you should consider the cost in a year's time of primers for the pistols or blank ammo for the Bumper Boys. The same could be said for the gas cartridges used by the Maxxs. If you are not contributing to these costs, you might want to ask yourself why.

Many training groups are fortunate enough to have individuals that own ATVs for their personal use, hunting, pleasure riding or their own personal training. When they consistently bring them out to a training session, have you ever thought about the gas involved with towing the ATV to the location or the gas consumed in multiple training sessions? How many of you have ever offered to contribute to the gas and maintenance expenses involved?

After all, it's that ATV you are riding on the back of that's saving you a long walk with a heavy holding blind, a bucket of birds and a chair to where you can throw a 300 yard bird; and you don't have to walk all the way out and back. Or carry a heavy holding blind, a chair and a heavy bucket of birds out to the short 200 yard go bird.

Think about fairness to these folks and their equipment that is making your training day easier, faster and more effi-

cient. Offer to help them load up the ATV and prepare it for the trip home.

## Helping in the Field

Don't stand around and wait for others to ask you to go to the field. You can see that there are 3 folks out throwing while you run your dog and they will need to be replaced to run theirs. Volunteer to go out and take your turn. Remember, if you run a dog, you throw birds for others. It's been that way since we all started and that will not change just for you. Have your training equipment, radio, pistol and primers, calls, etc, in your pockets, and ask the group organizer which person you should replace on the next re-bird. Grab bumpers/birds and run the blinds out. Always offer to do dry pops, and poison birds.

Learn how to throw high and consistently. Practice throwing bumpers and birds at home. No birds? Pick up a couple at the next event or ask someone that you know that uses birds a lot to loan you one so that you can practice throwing. Then get them one to replace the one you borrowed.

Dead birds will last a long time wrapped in a plastic grocery bag and kept in the bottom of the 'fridge.

There is nothing worse than replacing someone that knows how and where to throw and having your throws be low, short and in the wrong area. This is especially true when throwing real birds because of the scent issue from previously thrown birds on the ground. Many folks tie a piece of orange or pink ribbon to a clump of grass or weeds to mark the target throwing spot.

Know what you want to work on with your own dogs ... short or long retired birds, singles off multiple guns, doubles, triples, blinds tight behind a gun station, under the arc of a thrown bird. Give clear instructions to gunners on the radio while you are in the last holding blind prior to your running as the previous dog is returning with its last bird.

Just because a triple is set up, doesn't mean you have to run it as a triple. You can run 3 singles or a double and a long go bird. The handler always specifies what he/she wants for their dog. Inform the group organizer and they can help you get what you need for your dog, when it's your turn to run.

Be ready to run your dog and in the holding blind. Don't make gunners wait for you to air your dog, put your jacket on, find your collar or transmitter, your whistle and your radio.

Have manners and know training etiquette. Don't talk on the radio when a dog is in the field, especially if the dog is close to a thrower/gunner; the dog may hear the radio conversation and get distracted; and it's your fault! Know when you're to stand and shoot. Know the order of throws and the direction of throw and the target area. Ask the handler when he/she is in the holding blind, if they have not

told you what they want. Don't ruin the setup because you're unaware of what's going on, when you should be.

Also, watch the dog while it's in your area. Be aware if the dog were to stumble, roll or fall and possibly injure itself. Obviously, in the event of an injury, notify the handler immediately and stop the dog.

Don't give advice unless someone asks for it. Don't critique one person's dog to others. If you spot something the handler did that "maybe" was incorrect or confusing to the dog, discuss it with the handler in private.

Don't talk to the person on line trying to focus on their dog, unless they're talking to you. If a handler is running a blind, **sit down**, especially if you have a white coat on.

Don't critique the work publicly or compete against the team or try to impress. Don't talk loud behind the line or in the gallery while a dog is working. Some light, whispered talking is fine, but most judges will not allow the gallery to distract the dog, and will say something to you if you are doing so. It's very distracting to the handler and the dog, if it's still on the line; especially young dogs. How would you like that to happen to you?

## Running Your Dog

A friend had a great idea awhile back. A triple was set up and there were about 10 dogs that were going to run it. (That's 30 bumpers) After the line was set and a couple of chairs were placed, he demonstrated what to do with the bumpers the dogs would retrieve. When the dog returned with the bumper from the right hand bird, he threw the bumper into the right hand pile behind the line, center bumper into the center pile and left hand bumper into the left hand pile. He stated that this simple procedure would speed up re-birding with the correct amount of bumpers in each pile. Just grab a pile and go out. No counting of bumpers. It was a wonderful idea.

Don't run a dog over its ability, i.e., a dog that doesn't fetch, hasn't picked up a dead or crippled bird, or doesn't handle on blinds. Do these basics on your time, **not** the groups training time. Don't run a 377 yard retired gun (from hell) if your dog has never seen a retired gun and has not been trained for it. You are just setting yourself and the dog up for failure.

Don't waste other peoples' training time. There's nothing worse than watching a handler just watching a dog messing up, due to lack of training. Go training to train your dog. And, don't be swearing at the dog or fighting/arguing with your significant other or others in the training group. This is a time consuming, expensive hobby that is supposed to be fun and not a stressful, agonizing morning and/or afternoon.

## Etiquette

Be respectful to the landowner or the person getting you on the land. Bring beer, food, soft drinks or offer to

take owner to lunch or dinner. Invite the landowner to train with you and explain what is happening. Collectively, the training group can give the landowner a gift for Thanksgiving or Christmas, just to show your appreciation for the use of their property. I give my landowners a country ham every year, and they really appreciate it. One of my landowners that I recently gave a ham to told me "I just bought another piece of land that has 2 ponds on it. You should go training there too". We got the map out and I got directions and found the property. Great place to train!

Offer to cut points in fields, pick up rocks, limbs, downed trees, clear fields, and look for hazards such as groundhog holes (inset a large stick in them). If you know how to run a tractor and a bush hog, offer to help bush hog any areas that the landowner needs; not just the training areas. Often, they will let you bush hog strips or create land points for training.

Don't leave cigarette butts, shotgun shells or trash of any sort anywhere. If you see some trash, pick it up and take it home with you. And, don't leave steel dog stake-outs to ruin someone's mower. Don't drive vehicles on wet ground, especially 4WD vehicles because they will chew the ground up and leave deep ruts. If gates are closed when you arrive at them, close them after you go through. If open, leave them open.

One might surmise that sharing the passion of retriever training and competition in the field, whether hunt test or field trial, and having an efficient training team would be enough to insure the longevity or cohesiveness of a group, but they would be wrong.

Within every group the dynamics are affected by different training philosophies, levels of experience and knowledge, expectations and goals, standards, ethics and not to be forgotten, individual personalities and characteristics.

Nothing is gained, by anyone, when group members talk badly about someone in the group to other group members. Eventually, the person you are talking about will find out who said what and be resentful, maybe to the whole group. Now you have upset or lost a contributing member of the group. If you have negative thoughts about someone, it's better to keep them to yourself.

When you find a group that is a good fit, try to exercise the previously discussed aspects of a good training team and keep the synergy of the group strong and friendly.

I would like to thank the many folks that contributed their thoughts and ideas for this document. They know who they are.

