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## TRAINING TIPS

### PROGRESSING RETIRED GUNS

*by Dennis R. Voigt*

Last issue we discussed the evolution of retired guns in field trials from the most simple to the most complex where it seems the retired guns simply vaporize. In this issue, I would like to present some suggestions on how to teach retired guns in a progressive manner that will end up with the state of today's evolved retired guns. As I said earlier, retired guns and multiple retired guns are here to stay. The following training suggestions are a simple progression that is easy to read and appears easy to adopt in the field. In reality it is extremely easy to NOT develop each step thoroughly, to skip steps and to suddenly challenge your dog beyond success. This apparently "simple progression" is also a proven process to develop good retired gun skills. I've said it before and I'll say it again: "take the time it takes so it takes less time."

1. Start the youngsters early on simple retireds as soon as they are consistently nailing singles.
2. Begin retireds by letting the dog watch the gunner retire on singles.
3. Advance to doubles where the gunner is watched retiring after the dog returns from the go-bird.

4. Advance to simple retireds that do not interact with other birds.
5. Use visible holding blinds so that the dog will recognize such holding blinds as a gunner station. Keep such visible holding blinds as part of your advanced work with all dogs. Maintain this knowledge.
6. Start to camouflage holding blinds in training and even vaporize gunners by getting them out of the area. In training, a few instances of gunners leaving the throw area will not leave a prominent scent trail as in a large trial. The use of grass mats is the simplest way to camo blinds in a variety of cover types since cutting brush for 1-2 dogs is troublesome.
7. Introduce the use of lay-out blinds and camo tarps or covers. Use these in those open fields in relatively simple set-ups at first.
8. Just as in visible gun marking, be sure to include a significant percentage of retired singles without overdoing the multiple marks.
9. Gradually complicate your retired guns and cultivate memory as you monitor success.

## TRAINING TIPS

### MAKING THE MOST OF GROUP TRAINING

#### — CHALLENGES FOR NEWBIES AND EXPERIENCED ALIKE! —

*by Dennis R. Voigt*

Perusing a bunch of Internet chats recently, it seems some think Training Groups can be your best and most important source of information while others relied on the Internet as their number one source of information. Some recommended newbies go to a training group to learn how to train dogs and do basis such as Force Fetch, Collar Conditioning, Pile work and Double-T. Some think you should go to a training group to find solutions to your problems. Some think training groups are good to work on drills like no-no's and improve your handling on blinds. Generally, I have found most groups focus on field set-ups and emphasize marks. Usually, these groups would prefer not getting bogged down with "yard work that could be done alone. Group time is just too important and valuable. (See the Training Groups article by Richard McRee elsewhere in this issue for pointers on training with an organized group.)

In my experience, many training groups set up tests like they saw on a weekend. They then test their dogs and in too many cases, each person hopes their dog will put in

a sparkling performance in front of their peers. I've seen trainers refuse to handle their dog because they didn't want to be "penalized" or they were embarrassed that everybody else didn't handle! Everybody tries to win the training session! I continually watch handlers nervously hope their dog will turn in the perfect performance. While, I too, like to see a high degree of success, I'm also continually praying for a good teaching opportunity and a learning lesson. That lesson may well be a lesson of experience based on success. BUT, it may also be a lesson based on a perfect intervention. In other words I really try not to care whether my dog does well or not but does he learn something while training. A perfect retrieve or a perfect correction or a perfect intervention are all of GREAT value. But why hope only for a perfect retrieve? Why get frustrated when your dog doesn't do perfectly? You'll never get a ribbon for winning the training group day. Take advantage of such group training opportunities and make the best of what it is ... training!

## Learning from Others

Often a group will have a guru who engineers the day. That person may be the most experienced but that alone doesn't ensure that in the big picture they have really accomplished very much. Local "experts" may even "helpfully" critique your handling or your dog's performance but their advice may be mis-guided.

On the other hand, the gurus may indeed be superb trainers. They may provide great learning opportunities for novice and experienced alike. Most trainers are not very attentive watching the most experienced trainers with their dogs. They fail to think about why various things were done. They fail to observe standards. They are usually just thinking about their dog. I try to make a point of watching the handling and training techniques of all those I train with in order to see how different dogs respond to different handlers. Watch how others dogs perform on the set-ups. Don't think though that you have to run the test the same way. Perhaps your dog is more or less experienced. If in doubt run the simpler options.

## What to Work On

A pet peeve of mine is when the question "What do you want to work on today?" is answered "I don't care – whatever you want to work on!" If you don't care – why are you here? It's why I usually end up setting up – because I've been thinking about it all day! On the other hand, it is OK to show Training Group etiquette and say, "Let's talk about what we can set up today for everybody!" There are pitfalls with committee designed tests just as there may be problems with having everybody taking a turn at designing tests. In both cases, the dogs may be subjected to a hodge-podge of unrelated concepts. There may be no systematic progression of skills. I like the idea of taking a concept and working on it over the day or over a week. This is called "Theming a Concept" or "Training in Themes". Those who have come and trained for 2-3 set-ups in a morning with me will have noticed how we theme some idea, perhaps, first with land marks, then blinds and finally on water. It works!

The concepts that you choose to work on should be built upon earlier work and progressive needs not just a list of random things. For example, you might start with simple retired guns, then next week, short retireds, then long retireds and so on. Meanwhile, it's important to keep everything in balance. This is hard for training groups as they often end up with a 'mix it up' or 'let's try this now' pattern.

Beginners can not be expected to have mastery of 'big picture' sequencing and theming. However, once a group training set-up has been designed, beginners should not be afraid to ask for advice on how to run their dog on the set-up. The assumption is that someone in the group is more experienced and knows your dog. Generally, it would

be considered inappropriate to move gunners all over the place or throw birds the other way in the midst of a particular setup. If a setup is totally inappropriate for your dog, it would better to engineer a different setup after all the dogs have run the prime setup. Or perhaps you can move the line and achieve what you want. The point is you should do your homework and know what you want and what your dog can do. Beware that what you want is not what you should have worked on at home first.

## Learning Outside the Group

Group training can be very educational as well as a superb opportunity for realistic scenarios with distractions and all the props. All the trainers in the group are unlikely to be at the same level or follow the same philosophy. This alone can create problems. In other cases, it may be that the level of the training groups is that the blind are leading the blind. If this all sounds negative, you are missing the points I wish to emphasize. The first is that the activity of many training groups can be improved hugely. Secondly, most trainers do not use training groups wisely. Third, and most important, is that you can do MUCH to learn outside of the training group – don't be totally dependant on the group as your source of information. Both the Internet and Training Groups should not be your number one source where I find too many may be Wannabe Winners. as opposed to the Best trainers and Doers who are Willbe Winners.

**Tip: If training at my property, I often have everything set up by the time folks arrive IF I know the dogs and their needs. Setting up in a group can be very time-consuming.**

The single biggest thing that you can do to improve your training and your handling, and thus your dog, is to study dogs and how to train them. Most trainers haven't studied 10% of the information out there. Study means to read, observe, think about, memorize, re-think, visualize and practice. Most of this has to be done on your own. Ultimately you become self-taught by synthesizing from the best. How many of you have made study visits to other groups to learn? How many have visited other pros? Have you read all the books available? Have you watched all of the DVD's over and over? Can you list all the steps in a program from memory? Do you know the purpose and procedure for all of the common drills? Have you studied different programs to understand what and why they are different? How many workshops or seminars have you attended? Have you ever flown across the country to observe some "expert"? Have you gone to study somebody whose dogs you DON'T like, in order to learn what not to do? Can you quote the Rule Book? All of these things are my priorities. When I can answer most of these questions with a yes, I will get so

much more out of a training group AND I will contribute more!

I know the answers to most of these questions for many by the questions asked. That's OK but how many are even planning to do all of these things?

It is extremely common for me to encounter trainers who say they have studied all the commonly available material. However, they routinely ask questions which make it clear they have not absorbed the content of the most common resources. This isn't meant to criticize their asking of questions whatsoever. It is simply meant to illustrate that

many who say they have read or studied "so and so" have not absorbed the salient lessons. Be aware of the tremendous amount of information out there these days. There is little excuse these days for lack of knowledge.

## Conclusion

Yes, I believe in and work with a training group – it is invaluable. Yes, I train alone (85% in the summer)! There is no substitute for a good mentor and for a good training group but the best resource that you have is **YOURSELF AS A STUDENT!**

## PRODUCT, VIDEO & SEMINAR REVIEWS

### AN UPDATE ON USING THE RETRIEVER TRAINER'S JOURNAL

*Product Review by Dennis R. Voigt*

**I**n the Sept-Oct 2007 issue of Retrievers ONLINE, I wrote a review on the Retriever Trainer's Journal kit produced by the RiteInTheRain company. This journal was designed by me to record training performances as well as performances at Hunt tests and Field trials. Although I designed the content, I have nothing to do with the production of the Journal, nor do I receive any income from its sale. I simply modified a note-taking process that I had been using and adopted it to smaller binder format on water-proof paper.

Since that review, production of the Journal has begun and I now have been using it daily for a month of intensive training. I thought I'd give you an update and some tips in this issue.

Overall, I am very pleased with the note-taking. Those that I know who are using the Journal are also very pleased. I found it much better taking notes in the field rather than trying to remember later in the evening everything my 3 dogs did during the day. The format encourages me to be more precise and concise and thoughtful in what I record. It helps me record only the most significant results-good or bad! The example sheet that comes with the kit as well as the short-forms are proving very useful reminders. I find frequent reference to the neat hand-writing and brevity of the example also encourages my own neatness and neatness. The concise capitalized style as in the example is helping significant observations jump out from the page when reviewing. I am using POOR to score a dog who has even 1 problem on a set-up even if he did everything else correctly. This is allowing me to go back and look at all the POORs for a review of problems. I can also glance at the EX and GD frequency.

Extra notes which generally take the form of detailing needs or problems of a particular dog (or perhaps "discovering" some great training tip, are not written on the reverse

BUT rather on the facing page thus opposite today's work.

## Addendums

After a month I have found the need for a graphic chart summary of dog performance. For this purpose I am using note-paper that has 6 vertical columns and about 25 rows. This paper is available from RiteInTheRain and is called "Level" format. In column 1, I record Month and day of month. Columns 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are labeled LM (Land Marks), LB (Land Blinds), WM (Water Marks), WB (Water Blinds) and Yard. In these columns I record the daily score. I use a separate sheet for each dog, I leave a blank if nothing is done that day. Now, at a glance I can look at the past month and see my balance for land and water, marks and blinds. I can see the sequence of performance for each dog by score and retrieve type category. Whereas, It is easy to think that you can remember all this for only a few dogs, you'll be amazed how trends and patterns jump out at you. I strongly recommend that you consider such summary charts.

In addition, I am also using this same paper to record on a daily basis the use of flyers, whether duck or hen or rooster pheasant and for each dog. This also gives me a chart of flyer sequence and usage (helps with the \$ account too!)

## Summary

If you're serious above your training, you and your dog will benefit from note-taking. The more consistently that you record your training the more valuable it will become. The Retriever Trainers Journal is the best system I have found to date!

Note: Please check out the September-October issue for more details on this Journal, as well as an example.