

T.O.P. TIPS Vol. 5

Tracking

Love. Lines, angles and rhymes - and corners!

In the last installment, we discussed the importance of varying the pattern of your tracks to both strengthen your dog's focus and build his level of skill and adaptability. While angular tracks will always present a challenge to your dog, corners are its true Waterloo. I would estimate that over 75% of track failures occur on corners. Many dogs overrun corners because of too much speed, while others have poor focus on the straight legs and merely don't realize when they have run out of track.

Teaching corners is a critical element of tracking training. When starting our puppies, we begin to integrate corners just as soon as the dog understands the concept of following footprints to get a reward. It's vital that the dog doesn't assume that any time track scent is lost, it can be re-found by continuing to forge ahead.

Always begin teaching turns by starting them into the wind. Make it as easy for the dog as possible. Also know whether your dog is dominant left or right. See which way he turns when picking up an object.* Then formulate your turns into the wind, choosing left or right according to your dog's dominant side. Next, turn into the wind to your dog's non-dominant side. Third, down wind, dominant side,



Most dogs display a tendency to be either dominant left or dominant right when turning...



...these two littermates turn opposite ways.

fourth, down wind, non-dominant side. Teach these skills one at a time, but don't linger too long at any one point to prevent the dog from assuming a fixed pattern.

Remember, too, dogs learn by repetition. When teaching turns, try to get through the four variations as expeditiously as possible by tracking every day until the new skill is embedded in your dog's program.

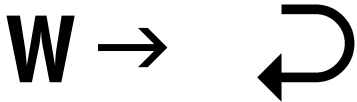
Next issue: Defining a "corner".



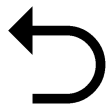
**Bonus Tip - If you know which way your dog will turn, you can help ensure a straight return on the retrieve by throwing slightly left or right.*

For a right dominant dog:

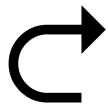
1. Right turn into wind.



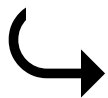
2. Left turn into wind.



3. Right turn downwind

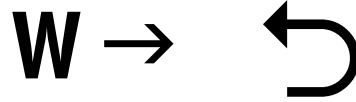


4. Left turn downwind



For a left dominant dog:

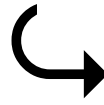
1. Left turn into wind.



2. Right turn into wind.



3. Left turn downwind



4. Right turn downwind



Obedience

Latent Learning

Because dogs lack the capacity to reason, all learning takes place by making associations. This process can happen with one event, but more often requires multiple repetitions over a period of time. When given a command (the stimulus), the dog must make a



The word "sit"...

connection (association) between an response (action) and a outcome (reward). For example, the command "Sit", followed by a fanny parked on the ground, earns a reward. The command triggers the action; the correct response to it is associated with a reward. The confusion occurs when first learning an exercise. Initially, the word "sit" means nothing; eventually, it is a pathway to a reward.

However, as we all know, it's not always that simple. Sit is a fairly simple action for the dog. Other more complicated actions, or behaviors that may be less natural, often require multiple trials. The "latency" (delay) in making a connection (learning) becomes shorter as the dog learns. The first time he responds immediately and correctly, we equate this to "learning", kind of like a light bulb going on. But in fact, the dog has been "learning" the entire time. There just wasn't enough "voltage" to make the bulb go on.

The importance of this information is as follows: do not get frustrated if the dog does not "get it" right away. He's processing. So long as you are consistent, and continue to give the dog the opportunity and motivation to make the association, it will happen.

Impatience with the rate of learning often leads to switching methods. Each time we do this, the learning curve goes back to the beginning. The dog may also become confused, not knowing what you want. Every dog learns every exercise at a different rate. It's what makes them all unique.



...must be associated with an action and a consequence for learning to occur.

Protection

"Shaping the Bark for the "Bark and Hold"

While a bit theoretical, the discussion of latent learning should be of great assistance in teaching the Hold and Bark. Let's first tackle the bark. Some dogs are natural barkers; others are not. Dogs with very high prey drive often get too intense to bark. They must be taught to make an association between barking and earning a reward. The process of teaching the dog what you want it to do (bark) is called "shaping". It works like this. Each time the dog gives you a response to "voran" (or similar command) which approximates even a tiny step toward the end product - for example, a whine - reward him immediately. Ask for this response again. Use multiple commands if necessary. Reward. After a few repetitions, raise your criteria: instead of a whine, don't reward until you get a "woof" that is closer to a bark. Then wait for a bark. Then two barks, three barks and so on. Pretty soon, your dog will be hammering out a series of barks to get his reward.

Deciding what to use for motivation is critical to teaching any exercise. We favor the use of frustration to encourage barking. This can usually be accomplished by back-tying the dog and



Back-tying a dog and using a desired object just out of reach will usually produce a bark.

putting something he wants (food or a toy) just out of reach. Greater stimulation can be created by making the reward “move”. Teach it yourself. There is no reason to delay the bark on command until you start bite work.

Once you have taught your dog to bark on command, ask for a “voran” for various activities such as feeding, going out the door, getting a treat, or throwing a ball. Make it a part of his everyday life. Be careful however, to reward the bark only when it is asked for, or it may bleed over into unwanted behaviors such as the retrieve.

Teaching the “hold” will be the subject of a future T.O.P. Tip.

△ **USA**

About the Author:

Steve Robinson has been involved in Schutzhund since 1975, and has been a USA member since 1978. He is the only person in USA history to have been selected for World Teams with two different owner-trained and -handled dogs—Granit vom Wolfshagen, 1986 and 1988, and Masa von der Lindenhalle, 1996-2000. Steve presently runs a professional training and behavior counseling practice in Ortonville, Michigan and is an advocate of positive reinforcement training. Steve especially enjoys working with puppies, as this provides the opportunity to optimize the dog-handler bond and mold the desired behavior from the beginning.



Pair the bark with a command and ask for the response at mealtime.

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