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A New Look at Training the Retrieve



There are three useful canine courier behaviors; Delivery, Transfer and Retrieve. A Delivery requires the dog to take an article from the handler and release it at a designated target (person, place or thing). A remote Transfer requires the dog begin at, or travel to, a designated target, take a specific article and release it at a second target. The Retrieve, requires the dog to travel to a designated article, take, carry and release the article into the handler's hand. The Retrieve of a telephone from a tabletop to a disabled handler bears the same elements as the dog who is sent from a boat to shore to return with a stray paddle. The dog understands what the target article is, how or where to go to find it and that the job is to move the article into the handler's hand.

There are three FUNDamental behavior blocks that help make courier behaviors easy, fast and

one treat after another over the heel of the palm. You want the dog to place the weight of her chin into the palm. Meals and treats can be fed this way for a few days to expedite learning.

The mere presentation of the palm becomes the cue for chin contact. A verbal cue, such as "chin" or "hand" may be attached by saying the verbal cue followed by the open palm. Rehearse this game in new environments. Advance travel distance as the dog becomes reliable in different locations. Train until the dog enjoys racing to the palm under competing attractions & distractions.

2. Toy-Joy

Toy-joy is the dog's love of toys and parading objects around. Toy-joy can be intensified by first getting the dog interested in an article and then



There are three FUNDamental behavior blocks that help make courier behaviors easy, fast and fun to teach. ~ By Deborah Lee Miller-Riley

fun to teach. Taught independent of a dog's desire to chase and capture, the three behaviors are:

1. Hand Targeting: resting a chin in a human palm assures the dog a high level of pleasure.
2. Toy Joy: carrying articles specified by a human assures canine pleasure.
3. Course Direction: moving to a specific target or in a direction indicated by a human assures canine pleasure.

1. Hand Targeting

As the most important element in the retrieve behavior, it is essential for a dog to believe an open palm is an invitation to pleasure and fun. This is especially true for the innate retriever who needs to prioritize the hand target above chasing and retaining a toy.

Getting started:

Begin seated with high value treats. Present your dominant hand, flat, palm up and parallel to the floor. With fingertips pointing toward the dog, place a treat into the palm as the dog watches. The moment the dog investigates and/or takes the treat Mark (click or "Yes") and toss another treat for the dog to chase. Present the palm target again without a treat. Mark the moment the dog returns to investigate the palm and feed the dog

rewarding that interest. Naturally enticing games of chase and tug will motivate some dogs to grasp & hold, but disinterested or insecure dogs may need more patience and some creative motivation.

Getting Started:

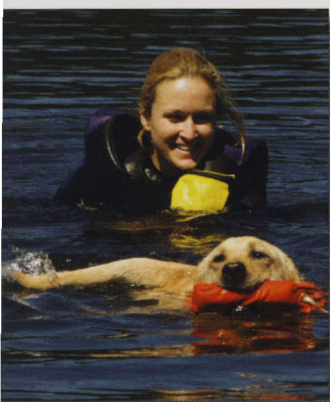
Try one or more of these methods to encourage a grasp and carry:

- Watch for the moment the dog decides to pick up an article around the house. Respond with a flood of happy sounds. Continue to praise as the dog is parading her treasure. You may also mark and offer her a treat while she is carrying. Make no effort to take the article, just show your pleasure each time she picks up an article. (This is my favorite method, especially for puppies and shy dogs)
- Prompt a grasp by offering a tough chew food item or by placing food inside a toy. Abandon it on an elevated surface like a stool, chair or stack of books. Mark the dog's interest with praise. Return the article if she knocks it off. Wait for the grasp. Mark and offer bubbling praise and treats, (before the dog chews on the article).
- Create toy joy by teasing and playing keep-away with a plush or squeak toy. A furry toy attached to long line also offers stimulating

“Watch for the moment the dog decides to pick up an article around the house. Respond with a flood of happy sounds.”

tease opportunities. Tease and release the toy allowing the dog to capture it. Immediately show your approval with happy tones, praise, treats and/or an opportunity to chase again.

- For obsessive retrievers the opportunity to hold a favored object is already a source of pleasure. What she needs to learn is that picking up new articles, ones that you want, can bring her different and/or greater pleasure. Withhold her favorite toys, tease and play with a new article, then drop or gently toss it. The moment the dog shows interest in the new article mark and toss her favorite toy or some treats. If she didn't grasp the toy on the first round, wait for the dog to show a bit more mouthing effort or a grasp before the Mark and treat toss.



“Suppress your desire to have the article right away. Let the dog own it.”

Notes for success:

Suppress your desire to have the article right away. Let the dog own it. Joyously celebrate whenever the dog has something in her mouth whether she is parading something she stole or something you provide. Focus on increasing grasp & carry offerings.

Increase carry duration by delaying treat tossing, but keep up the cheerleading. Walk away and encourage her to follow with the toy, verbally celebrate her choice to follow while carrying. Gradually take longer walks and end with a treat festival. For safety, respect and training reasons, reserve grabbing things out of your dog's mouth for emergencies. To encourage a polite release, offer or toss a high value food treat. For a dog too excited to release the toy, clip on her leash and wait for her to calm down. A verbal cue, such as “drop” or “spit” can be attached to the release and thus ready the dog for other courier games.

3. Course Direction

Course Direction means the dog will follow a verbal and or hand direction to a destination. Travel to a specific, remote place is called remote targeting. With remote targeting the dog learns to travel away from the handler and contact a place target to earn a reward. Course directions help direct a dog to a specific retrieve article. This is essential when identifying what the article is, where the article is located or identifying a specific article from among multiple articles. When a dog is sent from the handler's side the directional route is a straight line between the handler and the article. However, if the dog is sent from

a remote location away from the handler, or needs to be redirected during travel from the handler, the course direction signals could be: (1) Come to hand; (2) Go Straight Away (from the handler); (3) Turn or bear Left (of the dog's position); (4) Turn or bear Right. Basic remote targeting games are the foundation to these course direction signals.

Getting Started:

First, build trust and awareness through hand pointing games that reveal hidden canine treasure. A simple game of scattering a handful of treats and excitedly pointing at their location will suffice.

Next step, present a small plastic or ceramic tile on the floor with a treat on top. Point at the tile. When the dog investigates immediately Mark the moment the dog sniffs, licks or touches the tile and toss another treat. Pick up the tile and repeat. On the third try put the tile down without a treat. Mark, toss or place a treat on the tile. Next either pick up the tile and move it or toss a treat away from the tile and wait for the dog investigate the tile again. Mark each contact and feed the treat at the tile. When the dog is joyfully running to the tile whenever you put it down you can present two tiles. Place the tiles to the right and left of the dog, a few steps in either direction. Point to one of the tiles and then drop a treat on that tile. Do the same for the opposite tile. Next point at one of the tiles and wait for the dog to move to the tile BEFORE you mark and deliver treats at the tile. Reward only for the correct tile contact. Gradually increase distance to the tiles. Then add two more tiles and place them in a baseball diamond pattern. Stand in the center (pitchers mound) with the dog and point to the tile of your choice. Mark and treat for the correct response. Have some fun with this game. Place tiles around the house and when you walk into a room point at the tile and reward the correct response.

Achieve a Retrieve

The last step is to bring these three target games (chin, toy-joy and course direction) together to achieve a Retrieve. Anytime your dog is carrying something, kneel down and cue the chin to palm. Mark, praise for chin contact even if she drops the toy. If she makes chin contact with the toy - oh what a treat celebration you are going to make. Otherwise, be patient. She may drop the

toy before she gets to your hand a lot in the beginning. But, during the next few days, if you make it easy for her to immediately reach your hand, she will rush to the palm with the toy. Celebrate, celebrate, and dance to the music! After toy-to-palm is learned try adding a pointing game. While sitting, drop a toy next to you and point at it. Praise the dog for picking it up and show her the palm cue. Feed treats when she places her chin on the palm with the toy.

The final step is to only reinforce the dog for moving the toy into your palm and releasing it so that it stays in your palm. It is her job to get it into your palm. If it falls out of your hand or she drops too soon, she doesn't earn anything. Wait for her to pick it up and get it to stay in your hand. When she has mastered all of this, walk her into a room with multiple toys and point at the article you want. Your heart should explode with pride when she brings you back the toy you wanted. Congratulations, you have a novice RETRIEVER! **DS**

Deborah Lee Miller Riley is the founder and director of Canine Water Sports, a sports organization dedicated to providing swim challenges for all kinds of dogs. She is also a watersports competitor, instructor and judge for Canine Water Sports and the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America. www.caninewatersports.com



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