

# WATER TRAINING PART III

## THE FORCE RETRIEVE

by Chris Kieres

(Water Training Part I and Part II can be found in FBGDA magazine Issue 20)

To many the term 'force retrieve' conjures visions of squeezing the dog until they pop. Fortunately the truth of the matter is that it refers to a force of will not a physical force. There has been a long-standing dispute as to who actually developed the practice. Retriever trainers will tell you that the pointer trainers borrowed it from them and vice versa. What is important however is that the force break provides results and not just occasionally. The theory is that when the 'fetch' command is given, the command is carried out, period. The dog will come to understand that if told to do so they will make the retrieve no matter what the situation, whether that means going into a briar patch or the cold water during a duck hunt.

Fetch training like all other, starts on the table. Next to 'whoa', 'fetch' will be one of the most important commands a hunting dog will learn. Without it we would not have retrieval of game to hand. The training itself starts as all others should, with patience. Start by introducing your dog to the command. (Notice I said dog. This is training that should be spared on young puppies.) To do this bring your dog onto the table and command 'whoa'. Take a dummy in your dominant hand (I prefer a wooden dumbbell), place it in front of the dog's muzzle and give the command: fetch. Do so in a normal, reassuring tone, don't make it sound like a punishment.

With your non-dominant hand, take hold of the dog's jowls from atop its muzzle and open its mouth. Place the dumbbell into the dog's mouth and clear the jowls from between the dumbbell and teeth. Hold the dumbbell and continue saying fetch until you feel that they have a hold of it. Let them hold it for a few seconds before giving the release command 'out'. Continue this until they hold the dummy for longer periods of time. Teasing them by tapping the dumbbell will help reinforce that they have to hold the dummy until the 'out' command is given.

Once they have gained an understanding of what fetch means, the true "force" training begins. Many trainers use different methods all with the same result, by either the ear or toe pinch or a toe hitch. I prefer the ear pinch because it keeps both hands close to the dog's head and allows for more positive control of the dog. With your non-dominant hand, take hold of the dog's ear and his collar. Place the dumbbell in front of his muzzle as before and command: 'fetch'. Now apply pressure to the ear until the dog opens its mouth and then place the dumbbell in its mouth. Once the dog opens its mouth to receive the dumbbell, immediately release the dog's ear. Continue this until pressure is no longer needed and the dog opens its mouth upon command.

Begin moving the dumbbell further from the dog utilizing pressure on the ear if needed. The dog should now be reaching for the dumbbell when commanded. This will progress until eventually you are able to place the dumbbell on the table a few feet from the dog, give the 'fetch' command and the dog will move forward and pick up the dumbbell. It's at this point that it is most important to use a dumbbell to make it as easy as possible to pick it up from the table. Only after the dog has completely mastered the training on the table should you move to the

ground.

Once the dog has progressed far enough to work from the ground, always walk out and place the dumbbell and return to the dog before giving the command. This will more closely simulate an actual hunting situation, when the dog will wait for the bird to be shot and mark the retrieve before being released. As the training progresses it is important to vary the training implements in size and weight until you are actually using dead birds. This will help to solidify the training to the dog that it doesn't matter what is in front of them, if the command is give they must fetch it.

As with all other training it is important to let each dog progress itself through the training. No two dogs will take to it the same, nor progress at the same pace. You are bound to encounter harder dogs that will require more pressure and those that are a bit softer and will seemingly fold up when pressure is applied. It is up to you as the trainer to recognize which one you may be dealing with and act accordingly. So much in the dog's training depends on whether they are being handled correctly. A hard dog may convince the novice that they are simply un-trainable, and hence out 'force' the force retrieve. On the other hand, too much force too soon may traumatize a dog that is softer (this being also true if you were to try this training on a young pup) and they may start to cower or even run off when the command is given.

Ultimately we must remember that however much natural retrieve a dog may have, like all other aspects, training must be used to focus this natural instinct. If we could rely on our dogs to perform in every situation every time it is required of them there would be no need for training period. We could simply raise our puppies as companions and take them to the field whenever we felt like it. However, we all know that is not possible. True enough that a number of dogs will in fact soar upon their heritage to find and retrieve game. It's when times get tough and the situation is not normal that the training will shine through.

Knowing that your dog can be counted on in those times will give you great peace of mind before entering the field or blind. I will relate a story of my father and his American brittany Max. One day there were hunting ducks from a blind and some hunters near by with neither dog nor boat and had shot a number of ducks into the water. Hating the senseless waste of game, my father sent Max into the lake until every duck was retrieved. He then presented the ducks to the men who shot them and had left them for waste. Nothing was said as the men looked in astonishment as Max produced the last duck at their feet and my father said, "Maybe you guys should get a dog". The point I'm trying to make with this is that these ducks had been down for quite some time before Max was sent out to retrieve them and it was the training alone that facilitated the preservation of the game. Until next time, best of luck, happy hunting and remember: Preserve game: use a trained dog.

