

## Dog Training — the Basic Steps!

### Part III

Over the last two months I have covered free walking a dog on a slack leash, also heelwork which included: the forward, sit, right-about, right and left turns. These simple exercises have been designed to lay the foundation of obedience training whereby the respect of the dog is achieved. The next step is to teach the dog to come when called.

The recall is the most important exercise in all forms of dog training. Without a reliable recall you cannot progress to do other exercises like, the retrieve, scent work, jumps and, of course, free running your dog in a safe off-leash area.

In obedience trials a dog must remain in a sit stay position until it is recalled by its handler. I don't intend to explain here the rest of the details. Those rules and regulations can always be obtained from the Victorian Canine Association. In the past dogs had to be taught the stay exercise before they were taught to come. That of course took more time. So, is it necessary to teach a dog to stay before teaching it to come? No, actually it isn't. Furthermore, many dog owners only wish to teach their dogs to heel, to come when called and be reasonably well behaved pets.

#### Recall on the leash

I like to teach handlers and dogs this exercise in the third lesson. One of the best places to teach this is on a long, straight, concrete footpath in a quiet street. Let the dog walk freely out in front on the full length of the leash as you walk in a straight line in the centre of the footpath. When the dog is least expecting it, command in an enthusiastic tone of voice, "Millie, come" as you step backwards. As soon as its head turns, praise, "Good dog!" When you have walked slowly backwards for about three steps, take up just half the length of the leash into the same hand. Keep both hands together in the centre of your body and slightly above the dog's eye-level. As your dog comes straight to your hands, keep praising quietly. If the dog should veer slightly to the left or right, take hold of the clip part of the leash with your spare hand (not the hand which already has the other two parts of the leash), repeat the command, "Come" and give a little jerk accurately and horizontally at the dog's height to the centre of your body again, let go of the clip part with your spare hand and praise, "Good dog!"

When you consider the dog has done reasonably well, put the clip part of the leash into the hand which already has the other two pieces, place your spare hand over the dog's hindquarters, as you are still walking slowly backwards, give the command "Sit" and guide the dog's hindquarters down and towards you as you hold the short leash up at 90 degrees towards your stomach as you lean over your dog.

Holding the clip part of the leash in one hand let the rest drop on the ground. Stand with your feet apart to give yourself good balance; let the dog rest its lower jaw in the fingers

of both hands with finger tips facing each other; stroke the dog slowly with your thumbs only from its eyes to its ears. Keep your body up as high as possible so that the dog looks up to you and praise by quietly and slowly repeating, "Good dog, very good!" This vocal and physical praise has a calming effect on the dog. If the dog is suddenly distracted, cease praising; say "Leave it" and correct with a quick shake using both hands on each side of its neck, then praise immediately it looks straight at you again. Finally, dismiss the dog by casting your right foot back out of the way and slowly draw both hands in the direction the dog is facing, saying, "Off you go and play!"

In the early days of teaching the recall, always prolong the praise, so that the dog feels that there something well worth coming for; don't just give it a couple a quick strokes and think that's enough, otherwise you can imagine your dog thinking, "Well, that's a big deal, isn't it! I came when called, yet that's all I get for it!" So be generous and convey your pleasure when you praise your dog.

Whilst praising don't allow your dog to look around at, let us say, another dog on the opposite side of the street. If you continued to praise at that point, you would actually be praising your dog for looking round at that other dog. That is how your dog would interpret it, and if you allowed that to happen even a few times, you can expect a big problem in the future. Imagine you are free running your dog in a park, you call it and it responds. It may have got half way towards you, and then all of a sudden it sees another dog! In your dog's mind, it says to itself, "Well, you have praised me in the past when I looked around at another dog, so today I'll go one better— I'll run over there to play with it!" And that is precisely what happens. Whose fault is it? Yes, the handler once again! So remember, never praise your dog when it is doing something incorrectly. Correct it first, then immediately praise it when it responds favourably.

Many dogs tend to sit crooked in front of their handlers. This often occurs when a dog is willing and happy to come to its handler, but at the same time wants to have a crafty look around at someone or some activity. As soon as this occurs the handler should command again, "Come, good dog," step backwards about two short steps and, with the accurate use of the leash and spare hand, ensure that the dog sits straight and not in a floppy position. So much depends on how well you use your hands accurately to mold your dog into the correct position.

As I said earlier, a long straight footpath is a very good place to teach your dog the recall on the leash. The two edges will help you to keep straight. All you have to do is to walk backwards in the centre. There will be many scent distractions on the nature strips one side and fences or open gardens on the other side. When and if your dog attempts to veer towards them, show it with accurate corrections that it is not to go in those directions and be sure to praise sincerely when you get it to come straight. It is a good idea to space out your recalls as you work your way further and further up the street, so that your dog will learn to do them at anytime, anywhere and in different situations. You will also be giving your dog a break between each recall, and that is important. With sloping footpaths, free walk up hill, so that the dog is recalled downhill. That makes the sit in front easier. The other way is difficult for the dog. It is important for you to walk backwards at a slow to

moderate pace. Never run backwards as that is likely to excite your dog and it may well start jumping up at you. Also, you could slip and have a nasty fall if you were ever running backwards on wet, slippery grass. Finally, just before you do a recall, check that there is no one walking behind you! Pedestrians following wouldn't be expecting you to suddenly walk backwards into them, so avoid having an embarrassing accident!

The big difference between teaching the recall like this during free walking and recalling from a sit stay position, is that the command is given when the dog is least expecting it. In the case of a dog doing the recall from a sit stay position, it has already obeyed the commands to heel, sit and stay. The dog is fully alert when the handler has walked a certain distance away and is about to call it. Countless times over many years, I have seen dogs perform brilliant recalls in the trial ring, yet when they were running after other dogs or playing with them in a park, they would not come when called. But dogs which have been trained to come immediately and under all circumstances, find the recall in the trial ring very easy.

Now the question is, do you want to have a dog which will gain full points for a recall in the trial ring, but not be reliable outside it, or, have a dog which will come under all circumstances, even if you have to occasionally give an extra command or some words of encouragement? I know which one I would prefer!

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