

## Dog Training — the Basic Steps!

### Part VIII

I hope that everything I wrote last month regarding the more advanced stages in the recall would have inspired and encouraged many dog owners, trainers and instructors to aim for a high standard in their dog training and one of which to be justly proud.

One of the most demanding recalls seen in police dog trials is where the police dog is released on command to pursue, at top speed, a person acting as an offender, in order to stop him. As the police dog closes in, his handler finds it necessary to recall his dog. This requires great control by the police dog handler and the utmost respect from his dog. Imagine the eagerness in the dog's mind as he chases after the person, wearing a padded suit for protection, who has refused to obey the officer's challenge to stop seconds before. Suddenly, the dog hears the next command to leave whom he is chasing and return immediately to his handler. It is truly a thrill and a pleasure to watch!

You can do a similar exercise by encouraging your dog to run after a dog or group of dogs on the other side of the park. When it gets about half way, and at a later date three quarters of the way, recall your dog and praise. Then dismiss your dog and allow it to play with the other dogs. If your dog responds instantly, then you will know that you've trained your dog to an extremely high standard. Performing such an exercise like that will keep everything in a right balance. Your dog will know that you are being very fair in allowing it to play with other dogs, but if you call it, it must immediately switch on to your recall command.

When I was a guide dog trainer and instructor, my colleagues and I had up to eight dogs to train in a four month period. Every dog went through the steps of recall I have explained. In the final stages I would take all eight dogs into a paddock where they romped around with each other. Then I would recall one while the other seven played. Having praised and dismissed it, I would call another. The process went on until all eight dogs had been recalled in turn. Each day they would be called in a different order.

I've given these examples in the hope that all dog owners will strive to achieve the rewarding results which lie before them. If the exercises are carried out in a step by step process with great emphasis placed on sincere praise, you should achieve success and have no trouble. It matters not how pleased and overwhelmed you are with your successes, never use food as a reward, not one tiny bit! It is most unreliable and, if used, it is very likely to be your downfall in dog training as many have found out. For those who have found themselves in that dilemma, I have assured them that all is not lost! I then take them through the training programme, which I have written about over these past months, showing the dogs the exercises and rewarding most sincerely and immediately they respond. That praise is given by the correct intonation of voice and the slow, gentle stroke with the hand.

### Recall from the sit-stay position

I expect by now, many readers would have been wondering when I would be writing about training the dog to come as is required in an obedience trial. Well, thank you for being patient. The reason why I have left this until now is that first and foremost it is vitally important to teach a dog to come under as many different conditions as possible. When that has been achieved and the dog has also been taught the sit-stay exercise, then the two exercises can be put together.

Start by getting your dog to sit at heel. Command it to "Stay", turn around to face it and, holding the handle of the leash, step back a little so that the leash is in a loop between you and your dog. After a few seconds call, "Millie, come!" and walk backwards slowly. Praise immediately she responds, i.e. as soon as her first front paw strides towards you. After three or four steps backwards, take up the half way point of the leash into the same hand, keep your hands together in the centre of you and just above the dog's eye level, so that it is looking upwards as it comes to you. Walk backwards at a casual pace— don't run which will tend to excite your dog. That may lead to jumping up or running past you. Sit your dog accurately, praise and dismiss as indicated in previous articles.

If this is successful and you haven't had to make any corrections on the leash with your spare hand, try the next recall from the sit-stay position without the leash. When you call your dog and praise it, use your hands one after the other in the centre as you walk backwards, as if you were gathering in an imaginary leash. The position of your hands should greatly assist in getting your dog to concentrate in coming straight to you.

Another reason why I advise people not to run backwards when teaching the recall is that if handlers slipped, usually on wet grass, they could have some nasty falls. We cannot afford to have any accidents. I say this advisedly for instructors conducting classes. The old theory was to run backwards in order to get a speedy recall. Before you get speed, aim for accuracy. You will find that speed comes later anyway, when you lengthen the distance of the recall.

### Correcting recall problems

Although handlers have trained their dogs quite well in the recall exercise, problems do arise from time to time. These would include: the dog being inattentive at the start, coming too slowly, sniffing en route, coming so fast that it nearly knocks the handler over, sitting crooked or too far away, anticipating the recall, running past the handler and other problems, all of which are correctable.

Whenever I am invited to take a class I always ask handlers if they have any problems. In most cases I know what to advise them to do before they do a recall. With other cases I watch each dog do a recall to see the problem, then advise handlers what to do in the next recall.

For inattentiveness, I advise the handler to leave his or her dog, turn and face it and walk backwards in a very irregular fashion. This arouses the dog's curiosity, so much so that when called the dog is so interested, its speed improves. I would use the same method on

a dog which is slow, and would do two more things: one to make the distance quite long and, two, instruct the handler to fall straight down as he or she calls the dog! In the dog's mind, it thinks, 'My owner has fallen through the ground!' So it races up to investigate. With eyes constantly on the dog, vocal praise must be given and as the dog gets near, the handler should stand up to receive and sit the dog.

With sniffing en route, I advise the handler to do one recall on the leash and be extremely quick in correcting the dog as soon as it attempts to sniff the ground. Many handlers are too slow in giving corrections, with the result that the dog knows it has time to get away with it. One has to be just as quick to praise on every favourable response.

With a dog which veers left or right as it is recalled, I advise the handler to side step in the opposite direction, which attracts the dog over to be in line with the handler, who then walks backwards. This might have to be done a few times in the same recall.

With extremely fast dogs, I would advise a short distance for the recall. Also, to give the command, "Sit" when the dog is a few yards away. Provided the handler uses correct timing, the dog should apply its brakes to come into the sit position within a few inches of the handler.

The usual cause of a dog sitting too far from the handler is where the handler has suddenly taken a step forward when teaching the dog to sit. Quite simply, the dog has become foot-shy. The remedy here is to first make the handler very conscious of keeping still after walking backwards in the recall. Second, to get the handler to kneel down on one knee and lean backwards as the dog is coming in and maintain that position until the dog sits in front. This is very effective as the dog shuffles up to the handler's face! More tips next month!

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