

## Dog Training — The Basic Steps!

### Part XIX

Last month I wrote about a number of things in connection with the early days when training dogs in obedience. My advice was particularly directed to trainers and instructors, but equally as well to handlers, so that all may achieve the best results. Hopefully, many would have thought deeply about what I had to say, then tried the things out and achieved much better results. This month I have decided to write about a number of the most common problems seen and explain the root causes of them.

#### Speed Control in heelwork

A huge number of problems stem from handlers walking far too fast in heelwork. Unfortunately, instructors are largely responsible for this as they tell handlers to start off at a cracking pace. This excites the vast majority of the dogs in a beginner classes. The results are that the dogs pull ahead, jump up at their handlers, twist around, start mouthing the leashes, some bark, some want to play with next dog, a few may show aggression with the closest dog and many more unacceptable things. All these different problems make it very difficult for the handlers, who become frustrated and quite worn-out by the end of the training session. When instructors give the order for the class to suddenly halt in order to sit the dogs, the handlers are quite unprepared and make many mistakes whilst trying to do their very best in teaching their dogs to sit properly.

In any Beginner Class handlers should be taught to keep calm, have a slack leash held in the right hand only, give a quiet inviting tone "Millie, heel" and step forward slowly, praising quietly, "Good dog" as soon as its first front paw steps forward. The handlers should walk abreast of each other, so that if anyone needs to stop to correct their dog they will not be holding up everyone else. To sit dogs the instructor should help the handlers by preparing them, saying, "Get ready to sit your dogs; put the clip part of the leash also in the right hand; have the left hand poised above and close to the dogs' hindquarters; now say 'sit' and guide the dog into the sitting position keeping your own feet facing straight the way we are going". This should be followed immediately with calm slow vocal praise and slow gentle physical strokes on the side of the dog's face with the left hand. All these fundamental points are aimed at keeping the dog calm and attentive. Also, the handlers become more relaxed and grow in confidence, as they are guided, step by step, by their instructor.

The instructor should also tell the handlers to keep their feet straight when coming to a halt, not to turn in nor step into the dog. This will make a dog afraid of being trodden on by the handler's left foot, which will make the dog sit wide and/or crooked. Handlers who have this tendency should be advised to stop on their right foot first and draw the left foot in close to it. As dogs and handlers walk at varying paces, in order to halt everyone in a straight line, the instructor only needs to tell the class, "In line with your leader, handlers sit your dogs! So whoever happens to be out in front does it first, then as each member catches up they do the same. Thus the whole class is in a straight line again. This also gives the instructor the opportunity of watching many handlers sit their dogs one by one. The instructor should also advise that the command, "Sit" should be said only once. That one command is then upheld by the handler physically guiding the dog into the sit position, showing it exactly what is required. Floppy sits, which are a sign of laziness, should always be corrected. If a dog sits with its right hind leg underneath to lean up against the handler, this should be gently lifted out with the left hand so that the dog sits up straight, then it should be praised. The same thing should be applied if the dog flops away to the left with its left hind leg underneath. Never praise a dog if it is sitting incorrectly. Correct the error first, and then praise the dog. When teaching a dog to sit, stand or drop, its name should not be used. If it were, then the dog is highly likely to turn a bit to the right on hearing its name and consequently sit crooked. When heeling, *keep the left hand off the leash,*

unless of course an instant correction needs to be made. Those who hold the leash continuously with the left hand don't realise that they are putting even a little tension on the leash, which will be enough to make the dog pull ahead.

Years ago most dog club classes always walked around in circles which, although people did not realise then, presented many problems. When walking around in an anti-clockwise direction all the handlers were walking into their dogs. Of course this did not occur when they were walking in a clockwise direction. But in both cases, because each dog had one in front and one behind it, there were many problems. Some were highly distracted; some were aggressive whilst others were afraid. The whole circus, as I called it, became very boring for the handlers. The instructor more often than not stood in the centre, from where he or she could only watch about one third of the class at any one time.

When giving instructions, those who were behind the instructor could not hear clearly. If the instructor had halted the class and gave instructions or made comments by continuously turning around, the handlers only heard part of what was being said. That was no good to anyone, and therefore the instructor was wasting valuable time and was not getting the message across. However, if the instructor was just outside the circle he or she could observe the whole class all the time, and the handlers could hear what was being said. The wind, if any, had to be taken into consideration for the instructor's voice to carry. Figures 1 & 2 illustrate these points.

So obviously the best way to conduct a class is to have everyone in a straight line abreast of each other. As mentioned in a previous article, the basic heelwork, which includes, forward, heel, sit, and right -about turns can be taught with absolute ease. When satisfactory results have been achieved the next exercises to be taught are the right and left turns. Figures 3 & 4 show how these can be conducted so efficiently, getting the maximum results with the minimum amount of effort. The instructor stands in one place, is able to observe the whole class and most important of all give individual tuition to handlers as they approach him or her. The whole class training and the audience watching can hear everything which is being said.

### Recall

One of the unfortunate mistakes made in the recall exercise is where the dog recalls well, but sits a bit too far away from the handler's feet, instead of being close and straight. How has this fault been caused? In most cases it has been caused by the handler having walked backwards in calling the dog, has then, at the last moment and without realising it, taken a step forward, to sit the dog. The dog has then become reluctant about coming straight up to the handler, fearing the handler will tread on its front paws. So to prevent this fault happening it is most important that when the handler walks backward in the recall, his or her feet when they come to a stop should keep quite still, then the dog will be quite willing and confident about coming up close. Another cause of the dog sitting too far away from the handler is where the handler has leaned down and forward as the dog has come in. The dog has come as far as the handler's head. To correct this, the handler should kneel on one knee and lean backwards on the heel. This posture will entice the dog to come up close, possibly lick the handler's chin! Not to worry! Perhaps a welcomed act in this case!

In all these points I have written about today, I hope readers will become very much aware of how footwork plays a very important part in dog training. Good footwork will help the dog to gain confidence, but poor footwork creates many problems. Yes, we have to think very carefully how we conduct ourselves and how our dogs see us. Enjoy your dogs and your training! Cheers for now!

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