

DOG Training

In Part II of this series, I wrote about teaching dogs the right-about turn, the right turn and the left turn in heelwork. I decided to leave the left-about turn until now, because I do not consider it necessary to teach it to handlers and dogs unless they become interested in competing in obedience trials. Most people who come to me for training or join dog training clubs do so for the specific purpose of learning how to train their animals to be obedient and most manageable pets. They have no intention of entering obedience trials and dog shows. Therefore, what is the point in teaching them lots of exercises which they don't need? It is not only a waste of their time, but also a waste of the instructors' time. The basic exercises of to heel, sit, down, stay and come are the important ones. For enthusiastic handlers who wish to continue further, all other exercises can be shown in higher classes. So I hope that what I say here will be of help and guidance to both clubs and instructors generally.

Left-about turn

Prior to immigrating to Australia forty years ago, I had never seen a left-about turn in Great Britain, even though I had been training there for sixteen years. Soon after our arrival, I attended quite a few obedience trials in Victoria, not only to learn what was required, but to see how handlers performed and how the judges judged the contestants. I noticed that when handlers received the order, "Left-about turn", they would either turn 180 degrees very quickly and bump into their dogs, or, walk around carefully and gradually in a large U turn in order to avoid having collisions with their dogs! Either way, the judges seemed to delight in deducting marks!

Then came the introduction of what soon became known as the pivot turn, whereby the handler turned left-about while the dog turned right-about. All you have to do in this process is to transfer the leash from one hand to the other behind you and back again as soon as the turn is completed. I understood at the time that this turn originated in South Australia. Well, this was good because it prevented a dog being bumped and the handler could pivot and return on the same straight line. But had the dog been taught anything new? No, it hadn't really! It was still doing a right-about turn. So I decided to devise a method whereby a dog could be taught to revolve its body 180 degrees to the left with little head movement.

Having taught my own dog the Continental Finish (explained in last month's *VicDog*), I used it in teaching the left-about turn. It is quite simple really. As you walk with your dog at heel, take hold of the leash next to the metal clip (with your thumb on the top), say, "Millie Heel" in a slightly drawn out and inviting tone of voice and quickly step round in front of your dog, so that you are both face to face (fig.1). Then apply the continental finish by casting your left foot back in an arc and guide with your left hand at the dog's height and praise as it turns into heel (fig.2), then step forward with your left foot and keep walking (fig.3).

The Left-About Turn

Fig. 1

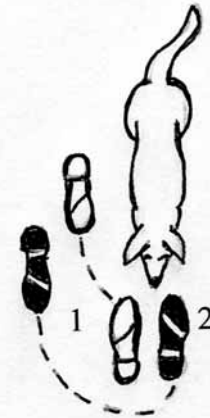


Fig. 2

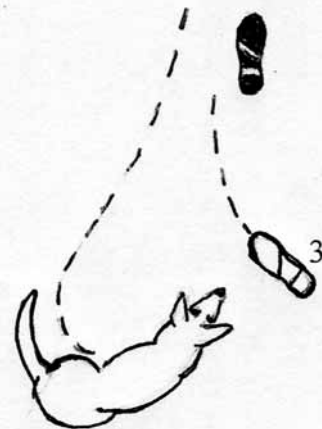
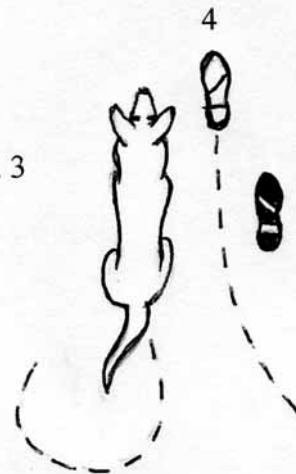


Fig. 3



It does not take long for your dog to learn that it has to revolve with you and it will soon know which turn you are going to make by the intonation of your command. Later it will recognise that it is a left-about turn by the way you turn your entire body around 180 degrees to the left. Eventually, you will not even have to give your dog the clue with your voice, left hand and foot. It will just revolve with you as it sees you turn in that direction. This turn is very easy to do when you know how, but I would advise handlers not to try it until they have mastered all the other basic moves in heelwork.

It is optional as to which way handlers wish to teach their dogs the left-about turn, i.e. this way I have just explained or the pivot turn, personally I would prefer to use this way I have just described with the three diagrams. My reason for saying this is that I just like teaching my dogs as many different exercises as I can. They add variety to the dog's repertoire. A lot of them are not even included in obedience trials.

Recall to heel

Another thing I noticed, when I came here four decades ago, was that in the recall exercise, the dog was required to come on command and sit automatically facing the handler, then to complete the exercise with a finish to heel. There was no recall exercise whereby the dog was recalled to heel, from either a sit or drop position, while the handler was still walking in the ring under the orders of the judge or steward. Apart from that exercise being included in obedience in the UK, South Africa and New Zealand, I have always considered it to be a very useful exercise and I use it every day when I am out with my dog in an off leash park. Perhaps readers would like to try it.

To make this very simple, using the four points of the compass, tell your dog to stay at point W facing East. Take up your position at S facing North. Call your dog to heel by saying in a joyful tone, "Millie, heel!" Cast your left leg back in an arc, also your left arm with fore finger pointing to the ground. Hold that position until your dog reaches you and turns into you. Then bring your left foot and hand forward and keep walking for a few yards in a straight line to the North and have your hands ready to sit your dog. Praise your dog and repeat the exercise. You will notice and your dog will recognise that your initial foot work in this exercise is the same as when you carry out the correction of a crooked sit, the continental finish and the left-about turn explained earlier. I feel sure you will find that this recall to heel is very useful indeed. Depending on the recall you wish to use, make sure you use the correct word, namely, "Millie, heel" if you are walking, and "Millie, come" if you are standing still.

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Apart from teaching dogs to do all these basic and useful exercises, handlers learn how important it is to use the correct words of command and the appropriate tones of voice. Also, the correct way to use the leash, hand work, foot work, preparation, co-ordination of all those things and correct timing, especially when giving praise. In order to carry out all these things, keep your eyes on your dog. Remember, your eyesight is your number one resource. Without it you cannot do the job properly. So, enjoy your training and make it enjoyable and interesting for your dog. More tips next month!