

Hard Mouths and Poor Retrieves

by Dave Molyneaux

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This is not an article on how, but why force fetch training should be considered for your dog. The vast majority of gun dog owners are not content with their dog's retrieves. Many of us compromise with the retrieving problems, not realizing that the dog can be taught to have an intense, professional looking retrieve. Most of us have either owned or have seen where the dog runs over to the bird and leaves it for the next find. Or, how about mouthing problems? Like the "pluckier", the "tenderizer", the "crusher" or even worse, the "eater". Why own one of these dogs when the annoyance can be cured easily at home?

There is a total misconception of retrieve training often referred to as 'forced retrieve training'. The process of achieving the perfect fetch is obtained not because the dog has been overpowered by being intimidated or by pain. Training by repetition over a period of fifteen minutes a day is all it takes. When you are finished you will have control over such things as rolling a bird in its mouth or playing with it prior to picking the bird up and dropping on the retrieve. First and foremost, this is not an overnight fix. The concept of force fetch is that you are no longer ASKING your dog to retrieve, but COMMANDING it to do so. Go get the object, not fumbling around, and present it to me and open your mouth on my request.

The process of force retrieve training will fix all of these problems. There is also even a command taught to freeze your dog's mouth from a distance. Thus, allowing you to stop and prevent any future bad mouth habits from occurring from several feet away in the future. If the pup refuses to comply, it can be reprimanded with an ear pinch or an e-collar stimulation. By stimulation, I don't mean a painful ZAP. For this would cause the dog to drop the object, mentally shut down, and desert the whole retrieving situation. Incidentally, when force fetch training is being done with the e-collar, the receiver is placed on the back of the neck, not on the throat area we are so accustomed to seeing it. Dogs move away from discomfort, so this teaches them to reach down and pick up the object selected. Often times a vibrator or tone is all that is needed as persuasion.

To achieve an ideal looking style retrieve, which is straight out and straight back, it takes about fifteen minutes a day for approximately six weeks. Obviously, if you spend more than one lesson a day this process would take considerably less time. The dog learns through consistency and repetition. All commands are obeyed and without any exceptions. If a "test of wills" occurs, use repetitions without losing your temper, which will succeed over all else. One word of caution though, once you begin the force training program you cannot stop till the

dog is fully trained. This is a commitment that cannot be dropped mid-stride in the training program. Your pup will learn that he can beat you by using bull-headedness, which he will intensify whenever he wants to get his own way, like not retrieving.

An e collar is not totally necessary to conduct force retrieve training; for years, dogs have been trained without the use of one. Oddly as it may seem, there is a lot less stress on both the teacher and the pupil when using the e-collar. Simply put, the timing of the corrections can be more correctly applied with the e-collar. It is wise to also install the long probes on the collar so it doesn't have to be as tight and more comfortable for the dog.

There are several good books available, but the videos are much better because they allow you to see the process and view the importance of the timing of the corrections. What they say holds true here, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Whether you choose to force train your dog yourself or use a professional trainer to do the task, there is no reason to compromise, or make up excuses when bad retrieves occur. Retrieving problems, like all bad habits, get worse with time.