

Teaching to Recall, Quarter, and Cast

By David Molyneaux

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On a recent trip to Michigan, I had an experience that inspired me to insist in preventing fellow hunters from going through some of the longest days of my life. When one of the guys reached to open his crate for the morning's hunt, I heard some discretionary comments from behind me, referring to a dog named "quarter mile". The remainder of the day was spent screaming, searching and cursing a wirehaired pointer that was never trained to come in nor search within a comfortable distance. By the end of the day, I was willing to purchase a GPS collar for a fellow I barely knew.

The process of training a dog to check in, to pattern, and cast into the direction of your choice is relatively simple. This discussion refers to the dogs who the trainer request that their pup immediately responds to a command to check in, or compliant about a change in direction. Obviously we are not talking about young pups that have been taught to come when called by the use of the check cord and whistle but this should be a prerequisite.

Let us first cover how to encourage a hard headed dog to respond immediately to our request, which will be the most difficult task. We want to first make sure when he hears and sees our pleas there will be little question about the outcome. All of this training has got to be done in an area with no distractions. This includes any places the dog can call security such as a home, or vehicle. We are going to teach the pup to acknowledge and come running when we call his name or whistle.

Attach an e-collar to the dog's neck (not the flank) and set the transmitter on a medium stimulation along with a check cord. Take your dog to the field and wait until your pup relaxes and is approaching the end of your check cord and is under motion and not standing still. It is important to be fair and honest with your request telling your dog to come in. If your dog decides to bolt, prevent it by holding on to the end of the check cord and reel in your pup.

First begin calling, whistling, and motioning to your pup to come to you. If and when the pup ignores your request, begin using your e-collar. How you use it is of utmost importance. Begin pressing the nick/momentary mode button intermittently giving your pup time to rationalize your pleas between electrical pulses. Continue this sequence until he begins coming to you, all the while vocalizing and motioning your pup to come in. When he gets to you, be sure to comfort and reward him enthusiastically for making the correct decision. Repeat this sequence a few more times noticing that each time will require less and less

persuasion. The next time you go out do not have the check cord attached. You now have taught your pupil to have your total respect. With pointing dogs it is always advisable to use only the nick/momentary function on your transmitter. We are training—not punishing—so hit your button much the same as Morris code.

We now have the dog convinced to come in on our command and request. Ideally we want to also train him to hunt out in front of us. The course he takes has got to be in a sweeping motion, not a straight line away from us. If he wants to really cover ground, fine, but it has got to move in a back and forth motion in front of you, referred to as quartering or patterning.

With a check cord attached to the pup's collar we want to work our dog in a hyped up manner. Everything has got to be, in simple terms, happy-happy. You will want to walk in a brisk manner, allowing the dog to run past you. As he passes you by, give the rope a sharp snap say "hup" and make an abrupt about face, and keep walking. Each and every time he runs past you go through the same sequence each time. In no time at all, you will notice the dog spinning an about face before you can snap the rope. It is advisable to intermix the verbal cues with two tweets on a whistle as well. In open country the sound of a whistle carries further, but if you are hunting in the woods remember the whistle sounds deflects.

Notice nothing has been said regarding pointing in the direction you wish to travel. It can be done, but it is much simpler to point your torso in that direction and take a couple of steps. We now have our pup taking notice when we wish to change our course of direction. So, we venture to a field with no birds and teach him to listen to us and work back and forth in front of us. Once the pup has demonstrated he knows what is expected of him the e-collar can be introduced to ensure he is compliant in the event a deer or rabbit is sighted.

There is a simple cure for the dog that hunts for himself and makes it a practice to blow off the owner's commands. There is nothing quite like the pleasure of hunting behind a dog that covers ground nicely and in your comfort zone.