

Building Steadiness on a Foundation of Obedience for UTILITY DOGS

RMC NAVHDA – March 10, 2018

Our chapter's mission is to help you develop your versatile dog into an efficient, well-adjusted hunting companion. Remember that you are the primary trainer – and we can provide the tools and support to ensure that you reach your goals. This work list is one of those tools. It provides a training regimen to lay a solid foundation of obedience in your dog – all exercises can be completed in your home and yard. **Consider this your homework**; use it as guidance in the coming months. Once your dog masters all these exercises, it will be well on its way to future success in both field and water!

Obedience Check: Remember your homework from February 24? This set of drills will be a way to check on each dog's progress, and allow the leader of the UT training group to assess and offer suggestions on continued progress with basic obedience training for each dog.

1) Drill 1 for UT dogs:

- a. Line up all dogs parallel to the training table, and about 30 feet away; dogs about 6-10 feet apart. Have all handlers stand with their dog on-leash, at heel.
- b. Handler at rear of line heels his dog along the line (check on heel in the face of distractions – other dogs), then up onto table.
- c. Handler stops dogs on table (check on 1 “whoa” command to stop).
- d. Handler picks up a bumper, presents immediately in front of stopped dog, commands “fetch” and dog should immediately take and hold bumper (check on progress with trained retrieve from February).
- e. Handler commands dog to hold bumper (or takes bumper, depending on training progress with individual dog) and heels dog off table and back to line, taking up a position at what is the front of the line (end position opposite of the end that the handler/dog started from in (b) above).
- f. Repeat the above set of instructions for each of the dogs in the group.

2) Set up stations to continue obedience training in the field:

- a. **Heeling stakes** for practice

- b. **Remain by blind:** Set up blind to place dog nearby, with a berm, tree, or other object nearby to shield handler if needed.
- i. This can be used to progressively work on remain by blind (which is nothing more than a sit/stay).
 - ii. Initial efforts with a dog should be to heel dog up to the blind, position dog in a (sit/stay, whoa, or down) and back away...correct dog as soon as it moves; praise for remaining in place until handler returns to dog's side. This is repeated with incremental increases in the distance the handler moves away from dog (have each handler do about 3 repetitions, then move on to next handler in turn).
 - iii. If handler and dog have experience and confidence in the dog staying for a basic walk-away, and want to introduce gunfire, repeat the above with handler holding a shotgun with blanks. Have handler move about 30 feet away from dog, then fire one shot. If dog stays, handler returns to dog and praises; if not, correct dog (helpers are important here and may be needed for timely correction of dog); repeat 2-3 times/dog.
 - iv. Dogs that have been through the remain by blind may be ready for the sequence of handler leaving dog at blind and moving behind an object that obscures the dog's sight, then firing a shot. Correct/praise depending on dog's performance. Repeat, with an increase in number of shots before handler returns to dog's side. Have handler count to 10 between shots to draw out sequence.
- c. **Steady by blind sequence:**
- i. Set up blind for dog/handler to position themselves, as in the UT test (no water body needed – this can be run on dry land).
 - ii. Initial exposure to this drill should be without gunfire: have handler position dog next to blind, with handler inside/behind blind nearby.
 - iii. The handler commands the dog to stay (sit, whoa or down, as desired).
 - iv. A concealed helper throws a bumper or dead duck high into the air, with a desired landing zone that is only 20 yards away from the blind.
 - v. After the bumper lands, the handler commands the dog to fetch. Dog is expected to stay at blind until commanded to fetch. Correct or praise the dog as appropriate; repeat 3x for each dog in the group.
 - vi. Dogs that perform the above drill well, or are experienced and perform the UT test scenario well, can be run through this drill with gunfire; the handler and dog are positioned as in (ii) above, and the handler is instructed to mount the gun and fire at the thrown bumper or duck. The dog is expected to stay until after the bumper/duck has landed, and it is

sent for the retrieve. Correct any breaking, whining, or retrieving issues (including delivery to hand) immediately; praise for a job well done.

Repeat at least 2x for each dog in group.

- vii. If a dog is flawless under scenario (vi); a distraction gunner can be added to the drill, along with multiple shots. Start by having dog/handler positioned at blind; have distraction gunner fire a shot off to the side. If dog stays, have the duck/bumper thrown, and handler shoot while bumper is in the air. Dog is expected to sit until sent for the retrieve (after the duck/bumper has landed). Correct/praise as necessary.

d. Steadiness on birds:

- i. Tether a chukar or pigeon with a 10-foot string and long pole.
- ii. Heel dog up onto a training table; whoa dog in middle of table.
- iii. Swing bird onto end of training table – dog is expected to stay steady. Move/twitch bird; tease dog by lifting bird away from table top, then returning it. Correct dog for any movement of feet; praise for steadiness.
- iv. The above scenario will only be conducted for a few minutes/dog. Dogs that are steady under this drill should be moved to the ground; place bird upwind and allow dog to point it. Sweep bird skyward, allowing it to fly to end of string and then land. Correct any movement of dog's feet; praise for steadiness. Repeat this process several times, but keep the drill short (5 minutes or less/dog).
- v. Dogs that are steady under (iv) should be brought back with the introduction of gunfire (cap gun or shotgun/blanks); correct any movement as required; praise for steadiness.
- vi. Dogs that are steady under the drill in (v) should be sent on to the field to work with planted birds and gunners. **STRONG RECOMMENDATION: Initially, do not allow dog to retrieve shot birds!** This is set of drills to instill steadiness; retrieving birds at this stage will be counter-productive. Only after SEVERAL iterations of the dog remaining steady to shot and fall should the dog be allowed to retrieve the shot bird, and then only 1 of every 5 or so birds. Following this sequence of drills, over several weeks, should ease steadiness on birds in the field.

e. Drags:

- i. This will be simply running drags of increasing length to assess each dog's capability; initial drags should be kept short (less than 40 yards), straight, and with the duck/bird placed in full sight of the handler.

