

## T.O.P. TIPS – Part 4

### Tracking

*Love, Lines, Angles and Rhymes*

Most plots of ground are laid out in rectangles. So it is that most of us mow (or plow) our fields and lay our tracks in the direction of a rectangle, going up and down, back and forth, making right angle turns.

Dogs become easily pattern-trained. A dog that has been tracking with the lay of the grass, with 90 degree turns across the grain, becomes very comfortable



***Most fields are layed out as rectangles and mowed that way.***

with this orientation. The first time they encounter tracks that are laid at an angle to or across the grain; however they are likely to struggle. This is not only a function of the earlier pattern training but also a result of wind currents which tend to follow the cut of the grass (or plowed rows of dirt), confusing the dog as to the true direction of the track.



***Lay your tracks at an angle to the “grain” of the field.***



***Angular tracking will force your dog to concentrate harder and teach a new level of skill.***

Laying tracks at angles to the grain of the grass (or rows of plowed dirt) will both teach dogs to deal with this phenomenon and build their skills by forcing a higher level of concentration. Corners can still be laid at right angles, but acute and obtuse angles can also be incorporated (a subject for a future TOP Tip article).

It may be helpful to introduce angular tracking with easy straight line tracks, praising the dog for following the track correctly, and encouraging it to search when scent is temporarily lost. The track should be laid initially with the wind behind the dog to minimize the effect of changing air currents as the dog moves forward.

## Obedience

### *What Would Colonel Most Think?*

When motivating a dog through a system of positive rewards, the choices are many, with the primary reinforcers being food and toys. Both of these, in turn, present multiple options. What to choose?



***If you're going to use food, learn to spit . . .***

only a split second to administer. Third, it's easy to conceal. And fourth, it's in ready supply. If you do use food, you can get the dog to look up by learning to spit the food and teaching the dog to catch it. This may, of course, affect whatever you choose as a food source!

On the other hand, many dogs have a higher prey drive than food drive, and will work at a higher level



***. . . and teach the dog to catch.***

A lot depends on what motivates your dog the most. I try to find that which gives my dog the greatest incentive - not only to work, but to work with intensity.

If your dog has good food drive, the use of treats has some significant advantages. First, it offers the opportunity to give rapid-fire multiple rewards when learning a new exercise. Second, it creates less interruption in the training by requiring



***A game of tug is a great interim reward.***

of intensity for a toy than for food. Other dogs with a high food drive will satiate quickly or only work in high drive when hungry.

When using a toy, it is advantageous to find something that doesn't have to be thrown. Having the dog leave you for an object interrupts training and breaks up the consistency and repetition which is so important for

learning a new exercise. A jute roll or a ball on a string make good incentives, and stimulate both prey drive and the desire to play fight with the handler.



***Use chase games for a finale.***

Chase toys are, of course, one option for dogs who work at their highest level out of prey drive. If possible, use this incentive at the end of your session. Try to build drive for other motivators so you have multiple choices in your arsenal. This will keep the dog guessing about what's next and may keep him more motivated.

Above all, be creative. Don't be too quick to fall back on compulsion. Let your dog's natural drives tell you what motivates him best.

## Protection

### ***What's Good For the Goose, May Not Be Good For the Gander.***

When building up a young dog, a common practice is to put the dog on a pole and frustrate it by doing run-bys with the rag or sleeve just out of reach. The intention is to frustrate the dog by making it miss, driving it's intensity and desire for the bite to a higher level.



***A "miss" can frustrate the dog . . .***



**... or create uneasiness.**

For some dogs, this is a very useful technique. But for others, it can actually be counter-productive. Young dogs that lack confidence may feel more comfortable “on the bite” than confronting the helper. This can be true even though the helper is using only prey to stimulate the dog. Each time the dog misses, it can become more unsure. When finally given the rag or sleeve,



***Sometimes it's better to give the bite right away and let the dog carry.***

the dog may be reluctant to bite firmly, or may simply fall off. This may in turn, elicit a reaction on the part of the helper to frustrate the dog more, making the problem even worse.

When working a young dog, care should be taken to first know the dog's temperament and read its reaction to bite work stimulation. If the dog appears to be insecure, it should be given the bite immediately and encouraged to “possess” and carry. Only after it shows willingness to confront the helper should an attempt be made to build intensity through frustration.

• USA



**... and hold.**

#### **About the Author:**

*Steve Robinson has been involved in Schutzhund since 1975, and has been a USA member since 1978. He is the only person in USA history to have been selected for World Teams with two different owner-trained and -handled dogs—Granit vom Wolfshagen, 1986 and 1988, and Masa von der Lindenhalle, 1996-2000. Steve presently runs a professional training and behavior counseling practice in Ortonville, Michigan and is an advocate of positive reinforcement training. Steve especially enjoys working with puppies, as this provides the opportunity to optimize the dog-handler bond and mold the desired behavior from the beginning.*