

## Shooting Sportsman Magazine

### Training with Today's Electronics

Long before today's advanced e-collar systems changed the world of dog training, various methods of "shock training" had been used. Eons prior to the variable level remote training collars manufactured by D.T. Systems, Dogtra, Sport Dog or Tritronics, cattle prods and even wires attached to batteries had been used. The days of harsh methods and high voltage represent the dark ages in dog training. Today's top trainers are developing stylish and confident dogs. No dog looks better or trains easier with more pressure.

The e-collars that are top shelf, offer a multitude of low levels as well as momentary, continuous, jump, or rise modes.

As with any dog training tool, whether a check cord, prong collar, voice, or treats and clickers, the more knowledge and understanding a trainer commands, the better the timing and implementation of proper collar methods will result. The comprehension of how dogs learn is mandatory if a trainer is to progress a dog to more advanced pinnacles.

Timing of positive or negative reinforcement is critical to the dog making the association the two-legged mentor intended. After 1.3 seconds, the canine's ability to make an association of cause and effect rapidly deteriorates. Rewarding or correcting a dog fifteen seconds after the behavior occurred is counter productive. Rewarding desired behavior and correcting undesired behavior should take place immediately. No matter what methods of reinforcement are employed, timing is important. A huge advantage of e-collar training is that the dog's undesired action can be corrected within the mandatory time frame. A dog that does not respond to a command or cue at a hundred yards can be instantly corrected. A dog that gets away with a lack of effort to a learned cue will continue to test. We as trainers are dealing with learned behavior. We do not want to "learn" the dog, he has to be good while on a lead but can give us the proverbial finger when out on his own. A dog that gets away with non-compliance just a few times will need more pressure to understand the errors of his ways. More pressure does not create more style. Ever!

The correct time to purchase a remote training collar is not the day before the opening of the grouse season. It is a mistake to introduce the dog to e-collar training in the duck blind or your bird coverts. Introduce the dog to e-collar stimulation in yard training, NOT IN THE BIRD FIELD. It is necessary to ensure the dog knows how to turn stimulation off and how to avoid stimulation in basic obedience training before seeing how Fido does in the hunting arena. If the dog has not been properly collar conditioned, a trainer is opening Pandora's Box by exposing the dog to the e-collar in the bird field. A trainer runs the risk of the field becoming a dark alley way where the Boogie Man lives. The dog may become apprehensive. An apprehensive dog is much more likely to develop a problem with the flush, or blink birds altogether. This is a place we never want to be. A bird problem is serious business.

E-collar training is the bridge from transferring compliance in the yard to a desired response in the field. There is no other way to reach a high level of achievement in the hunting field with birds other than by incorporating avoidance training. Avoidance training means that by performing the desired response, the dog avoids a negative. The e-collar is by far the most effective way of implementing avoidance training in the field.

A genetically talented gun dog is possessed with birds. A bird is not a matter of life or death to a bird crazed hunting dog. Birds are far more important than that. Praise, touch, biscuits, etc., simply do not work when the dog is around birds. Try putting a piece of steak as well as a flopping quail on the ground. The dog is going to go bonkers over the quail. Commanding whoa or sit to a dog in pursuit of a hot footing pheasant by offering a biscuit as a reward is pie in the sky thinking.

In order to prepare the dog for e-collar training in the field, there are a few guidelines that should be followed. Firstly, a dog should absolutely understand what the command means. Additionally, the dog should exhibit a response to the command most of the time when in the yard free of distraction. The e-collar is not used to teach the command. The e-collar is used to teach excellence of response to a command. Teach the command first by using treats and praise. The dog will not be reliable, but will be prepared for e-collar introduction.

I start e-collar conditioning with the kennel command. A kennel is an exact location and it is easy to teach. Plus there are no kennels in the bird field so there is no risk of an undesired association. Additionally, the first thing a dog has to do to find a bird is leave your side. Thus the first command I teach the dog is leave me and go into a crate.

We start off by clicker training the pup to “Kennel.” We put the youngster in the kennel and click and treat. No verbal is used at this point. In no time at all, the pup is running into the kennel to get the click. Once we have the behavior we add the verbal command “Kennel”. We command “Kennel”, put the dog in and click and treat. It is indeed but a few repetitions before the dog is running into the kennel with tail-wagging enthusiasm.

Once the dog is exhibiting the behavior, I introduce the e-collar. I find the level of stimulation the dog first acknowledges. I am not looking to make the dog vocalize. I simply want to see the level the pupil feels. Maybe the dog looks around with a quizzical - what’s that. Any sign the dog feels the level is the critical step. Now I am referring to dogs that have never felt stimulation prior to this session. In our five day schools, we encounter dogs that were improperly introduced to the e-collar. I will comment on these dogs later on in this article. In all my years, I have never seen a dog that grew up in our place that could not feel a level three. The vast majority feel a level one or two. The first level I feel is a six and I would say most people feel from level five to level twelve. I use a D.T. Systems 2400 series. I have fifty levels of stimulation available. This means I have a multitude of low levels at my finger tip. The range of intensity and the hotness of the e-collar will vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. The more low levels a system offers, the more I like the collar.

Once I have determined the level the dog feels, I put the low level on followed by the verbal command. When the dog goes into the kennel, I click and treat. (Eventually I wean the dog off

the treat.) With just a few repetitions, the dog anticipates the verbal will follow the stimulation and goes in the kennel on the cue of stimulation. Now the dog knows how to turn stimulation off himself. I believe it is easier for a dog to learn to avoid the stimulation if pupster first knows how to turn stimulation off. That is what the pupil learned in stimulation command.

Now I am ready to teach the dog to avoid the stimulation altogether. I am going to teach the dog that by complying to my command the first time I give the verbal, he will avoid the stimulation. I say "Kennel" and then follow with the stimulation. The stimulation must follow the command for the dog to understand that the verbal means the same thing as the stimulation. Go into the kennel. Do not think of this as punishment. By using low level stimulation the dog views the two cues as identical. After a few sessions of command stimulation, I would only stimulate the dog if he failed to kennel upon command. I have now taught the dog the concept of avoidance training. For the flushing/retriever breeds, I repeat the procedure for the "Sit" and "Here" commands. For the pointing breeds, I teach "Whoa" and "Here".

I mentioned earlier that a dog first introduced to the e-collar improperly may have some baggage. Such a dog needs to be re-programmed. A good percentage of dogs that were exposed to the e-collar via punishment training become case hardened. A case hardened dog is one in which higher and higher levels of stimulation are needed before responding. He used to respond to a three but it now takes a five to get his attention.

I will start with the kennel command and stimulation command. Sometimes a dog fights the stimulation. By gradually going up in levels, he can become tougher. Eventually, he will take the highest level and say "Give me more, I ain't doing it". You cannot strap a car battery to his neck. The objective is to get him to respond to the lowest level he feels. D.T. Systems have new remote collars (the 2400 series and the 1800 series) that incorporate a jump mode. I can set the jump mode at any level from two to fifty in the 2400 (the 1800 has sixteen levels). I may determine the dog feels a two, but is case hardened. I can set the jump mode at twenty for example. I command kennel. The dog gives no effort. I press the continuous button set at two. No response. Okay, Bang. I hit the dog with the jump. The dog goes in. The next time he feels the two and says I better respond because the two is followed by the hot level. Eventually, I phase out the jump and the dog responds to the two. With enough repetitions, the dog responds to the command and has learned to avoid the stimulation altogether.

The new D.T. Systems 2400 also has a rise mode. In the rise mode, the stimulation increases from level one to level fifty over six seconds with no break in stimulation. If stimulation goes off while the trainer is turning a knob to go to a higher level, the dog may perceive his lack of response is what turned the level off. With fifty levels of stimulation, momentary and continuous, rise and jump, the D.T. Systems 2400 and 1800 are state of the art training collars. The optimum word here is training.

No matter what system you choose, properly introduce your dog to avoidance training in the yard. Select a system that offers a wide range of stimulation. All of today's e-collars will "shock" a dog running a deer. Some further away than others. Some e-collar systems are training systems. Technology in the case of dog training is a good thing.