

Field and Feather
The Retrieving Game
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Don't forget your whistle!

Ever gone to the line at a test without your whistle? Do you go to the line with it around your neck but not in your mouth?

I try to never walk to the line without the whistle in my mouth. Why? Quite simply, things happen so fast that in the time it takes you to find your whistle and get it in your mouth, the opportunity to use it has passed. And that may mean the difference between that short ride home with a new ribbon--or that long, miserable ride home without one.

I have just trained myself to stick the whistle in my mouth when I leave the last holding blind and head to the line—even for blinds. A dog that runs fast on blinds can be way off course before you get that whistle to your lips. I have also learned how to talk around the whistle, so I can still give commands when needed. One woman told me that to get comfortable with her whistle she practiced in the car on the way to work. She kept the whistle in her mouth and sang along with the radio. It doesn't really matter what your approach is. What matters is that the whistle is an integral part of any communication with your dog.

There was one test where I was running three different dogs, plus I had the "test" dogs for Junior and Senior. I was running back and forth to the truck and to the different stakes and to the line all weekend. When I got up Monday morning, I couldn't figure out why my teeth were sore—until I realized all the "clamp time" I had with my whistle over the weekend!

There are all different types of whistles. The right whistle for you is the one that your dog responds to. Even though my husband and I use the same type of whistle, his projection and style are different enough that the dogs don't always listen to him. This happens even with the professional trainers—if the dogs have been trained with a different whistle than the pro trainer uses, there will be a transition period until the dog learns the new whistle, or the trainer has to remember which whistle is for which dog. Even if the whistle is the same, but the handlers use a slightly different style, the dogs will have a transition period.

My first whistle was a metal one, like referees use and like you can get at the 5 & dime or a sports store. I quit using that the first cold day that it stuck to my lips!

The second whistle was that same basic style, but in plastic. It worked ok, but the projection wasn't great especially in windy conditions. Then the "mega" whistle came out. It is shaped kind-of like a little megaphone so the majority of the sound is directed away from you and it projects farther than the conventional whistle. This is the one that I have stayed with. I have had the "pee" freeze on me a time or two, but a good whack to the whistle usually loosens it back up.

Now there are oblong whistles, and one called the "green monster" that projects farther and has a higher pitch. I was with some professional trainers the first time they tried the "green monster" and the dogs were not recognizing it at all. It took a few days of training for the dogs to queue off of the new sound.

There are also "silent" whistles, but I have never seen one at a hunt test. Actually, how would I know? I wouldn't be able to hear it!

I actually have several whistles on lanyards stashed in strategic places. I try to keep a backup in the glove compartment of my truck in case my other whistles get misplaced or shifted to another vehicle. Sometimes they all end up in the house, or in the kennel and NONE are in the truck! "Whistle" is certainly on the hunt test check list—along with bug spray, hand wipes, chair, umbrella, duck call, etc--when we are packing for a weekend trip.

So, take a little piece of advice, KEEP THAT WHISTLE IN YOUR MOUTH!
Happy training!

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