

Soonerorlater,youwillprobablyhaveto“force -fetch”

Ifyouplantoparticipateinhunttestsorfieldtrials,soonerorlateryouwillprobablyhavetoforce -fetchyourdog.

Whatisforce -fetch?Itessentiallyteachesthedogthat“fetch”means“fetch,”evenifitis analuminumcan,afrozenduck,an“over -ripe”duck,adumbbellorabumper.Ifyou haveparticipatedinthehigherlevelsofobediencessuchasCDXorUD,thenyouhave probablyalreadybeenintroducedtoaformofforce -fetch.Ifnot,thismaybeaforeign concept.

Youneedthedogtounderstandthatfindingthebird(ordummyordumbbell)isonlyhalf oftheprocess.Theotherhalfisdeliveringtohand.Thatmeansaquick,deliberateline tothebird,apromptpickupandapromptreturn.Itdoesn'tmeanrollingontheduck, pickingitupanddroppingitseveral times,ortossingitintheairlikeatoy.Andsincethe dogwillbecompletingtheseretrievesdozensof yardsawayfromyou,gettingtothedog quicklyforacorrectionisoftendifficult.Hencetheforce -fetch.Ifthisisdoneproperly,a sharp“fetchitup!”shouldbethenonlyreminderneededintrainingforthedogtopickup thebirdandreturntoyou.

Therearemanydifferentapproachestotheforce -fetch,andIamnotpreparedto providestep -by-stepinstructions.WhatIwanttoaddressiswhyitisimportantand howtogetgoodadviceonhowtoproceed.

Themainconceptistoputsomesortofpressureonthedog,withthe“release”being thecorrectbehavior —pickingupthebumper.Somepeopleuseanearpinchwhile othersuseateoelooporanothermethod.Someteachthe“hold”commandbefore “fetch,”whileotherstreatthemasonandthesame .Whatevermethod,youneedto makesurethatthedogunderstandsthepressureandwhattheexpectedbehavioris. Youcannotsimplystartpinchingthedog'searandexpectthedogtoreachforthe dumbbell.Youmustproperlybuilduptotheconcept.ThisiswhyIwillnotattemptto provideinstructions here, butIwilltellyouof findsomeoneexperienced,withhappy, nicelyperformingdogstowalkyouthroughtheprocess.Ifyou don'twanttodoit yourself,getrecommendationsforaprofessionaldog trainerwhohaslotsofexperience withtheforce -fetchforfieldwork.Again,alwaysmakesurethatthetrainerhaslotsof goodreferencesandasktoseeatrainingsessionofthetrainer'sclientdogsworkingit intheyardorfieldbeforemakingyourdecision. *Ifthetrainerwillnotallowyouto observeatraining session, considerthisaredflag.*

Force-fetchisnotapleasantorhappyprocess,sodogssometimesgetdepressedinthe earlystages,beforetheygetthe“bigpicture.”However,thefinalresultshouldbea happydogwillingtoretrievewithlotsofenthusiasm.You don'twanttoseeadogthat cowersorlooksafraidtobenearthehandlerorafraidtofailforfearofthe consequences.

Myfirstfielddog,BJ,hadneverrefusedaretrieve.Ihadtrainedforoverayearwitha groupusingpigeonsandducksasdeadbirdsandlivefliers.Iwenttomyfirsthunttest

excited and confident in my dog. The first landmark was a dead bird, tossed into some moderate cover across a ditch. BJ took a nice line down through the ditch, popped up a few feet from the duck, grabbed it and returned to my side. The second mark was across the ditch in a different spot to retrieve a live flier. BJ happily left my side, traversed the ditch and approached the duck. She had her mouth open, ready to grab the duck, when all of a sudden the duck reared up and flapped its wings furiously in BJ's face! BJ was visibly startled. She thought about it for a few seconds, and then decided to hunt for a more cooperative duck. I had to call her in and call it a day. That was when I realized that she had never been introduced to a live, flapping bird and that we might need to go through force-fetch after all. Maybe I just needed to train with people who weren't good at shooting sows or go to a more wounded bird stop to practice with!

At any rate, I asked one of the people in my training group to explain the process and walk me through the steps. Then I followed those steps with BJ. She learned "hold" quickly and learned to reach out and take the dumbbell from me when I held it out in front of her and told her to fetch, but she couldn't quite understand picking it up off the ground when I placed it in front of her. I had to beg one several days on a business trip at this point in her training. When I returned, I headed out to the kennel to pick up where we left off. I wasn't looking forward to it, because it was difficult for me to watch her struggle to understand — and I worried that I was causing that confusion.

I put her on a leash and told her to "heel." I placed the dumbbell on the floor and before I could straighten up, she had snatched it up and was presenting it to me. Her tail was wagging furiously and she was smiling around that dumbbell in her mouth! She had used her four days without me to think about that puzzle and figure it out. I don't know which one of us was more relieved, but it was a happy day.

Since BJ, I have force-fetched five other dogs and have one at the end of the process now. The stronger the retrieving desire, the easier the task, but eventually in field work, you will run across a situation where your dog hesitates or refuses to retrieve. Without the force-fetch training, you will have a hard time overcoming that situation.

Reading about the process and looking at diagrams is a good start, but I still feel the best way to truly understand the process is to watch someone and have a person you trust to rely on when questions or problems arise.

Happy training!

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