

## Sure Steps to Steadiness! – Part III

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After going through Part I and II Spot should be full of fire in the bird field, leaving skid marks in the dirt when you blow your whistle and retrieving like a champ. If not, then you should back up and revisit those areas. If Spot has all of the above with no problems then it is time to move on to the real thing.

### THE ACTUAL STEADINESS TRAINING

Now that Spot is ready, let's move on to the real subject here—steadiness. It sure did take a long time to get here, didn't it? Believe me, these steps will make the road much shorter and you will have a better dog in the end.

Start by teaching Spot to be steady to fall. Throw a retrieving dummy (bumper) for Spot when he isn't looking but so he can see it fall. Have your whistle in your mouth and ready. As soon as Spot sees the bumper and starts after it then stop him in his tracks. Pick the bumper up yourself. Hold Spot with a leash and throw the bumper for him. Let him go retrieve it on command. Let him make the comparison: "I don't break, I get to retrieve. I break and Dad retrieves." Repeat this a few times until Spot is stopping to fall without a command. As long as he does OK, then don't blow the whistle. If he takes one too many steps then blow the whistle and don't let him retrieve. Spot will probably start stutter stepping or hesitating after the first couple of commands. If you see a little progress, then give the FETCH command in a timely manner as positive reinforcement.

If Spot is a flushing dog and you're training him to traditional standards, then you will want him to sit to flush, shot and fall. If Spot is a pointing dog, then standing up is probably fine. It is really the preference of the hunter unless you are in competition. A point to note here though is that if you want Spot standing during steadiness then don't force Spot to a sit or halt if he stops moving his feet. As soon as Spot figures out that stopping is what you want, you can stop giving the command. If you want Spot sitting or laying down to wing, shot and fall, then what you want to do is make wing, shot and fall the stop command. This is done by chaining the already known command to the new one (wing, shot and fall). If Spot doesn't obey the visual command (flying bird, bumper or gunshot), then give a second verbal command and reinforce it with the e-collar.

Remember: from now on Spot never gets a retrieve unless he does what he is supposed to do. Consistency is very important. Spot will teach himself to be steady. Instant negative reinforcement (halt, sit or whoa) if Spot doesn't do what's expected and instant positive reinforcement (retrieve) if Spot does comply. There is no middle ground here. Either Spot is correct and gets the retrieve or is incorrect and gets a time out.

You can do the same exercise with a dead pigeon if you want. Something that will tempt Spot a little more. My last dog got really excited when the bumper hit the water so I used that as a stronger temptation. Test Spot and set him up to fail. That way he can make a

comparison between correct and incorrect. The key after every failure is an immediate success. Build Spot's confidence!

Now chain a gun shot to the stop command. Every time Spot hears a gun shot he is commanded to stop. After a couple repetitions Spot will likely stop on his own. Next go to shot and fall. Just repeat the above with the addition of a shot when Spot sees the retrieve object falling. Use the same corrections and only a retrieve when Spot does OK. If he goofs then make the next one easier for him so he sees the comparison and teaches himself the difference between correct and incorrect. If Spot's feet do not stop moving quickly enough then stop him with no retrieve. This is very important later on and should be used even when you are hunting!

Now add in a wild flush with a buddy in the bushes or a bird launcher or whatever else you can think of. Start off chaining the sight of the pigeon with the stop command. After Spot is stopping on his own then add a shot to the flush. A shot pigeon that flushes wild will be the ultimate test for this phase. If he goofs, then pick the bird up yourself and throw a dead one for him so he makes the comparison. As always test Spot and set him up to fail so he can make comparisons. Do not move on until Spot is solid as a rock to wild flush, shot and fall of a live bird. If you have been thorough in your previous steps this will only take a few birds and it may be tough to get Spot to break.

Hopefully, if Spot is a pointing dog, he points well already. If not then some pointing training or check cording is in order before proceeding. That's a separate topic.

Now let Spot point a bird. You flush it and let it fly. If Spot doesn't chase, then give him another and throw a dead bird at the same time. No shots yet! As always, only retrieves when Spot doesn't break. If you ever blow the whistle, it should be followed by you picking up the bird. This means you have to have a sufficient amount of stimulation to stop Spot under these very tempting circumstances. With the repetition done previously this will all be much easier than it sounds. The last step here is letting Spot point, flushing the bird and shooting it in front of Spot. If he fails at any step then back up one step and make it easier for Spot. As always, give Spot a comparison.

One way to make it easier here is to throw an already dead pigeon and shoot when Spot is pointing. It will not be as tempting and Spot will make the comparison.

Remember: don't miss any of the steps mentioned above. If no steps are missed then Spot will be feeling much more success than he is failure. He will probably get many of the steps correct on the very first try. His confidence will increase and he will be much more eager to learn, stylish and happy.

Consistency and repetition is all that is needed now. Spot is well on his way to being a fine gun dog. You have a dog that is steady to wing, shot and fall without a single command. This includes wild-flushed birds as well. All that is needed now is repetition in the bird field with consistent corrections. This very technique can be used with flushing dogs as well. The only step that is left out is the very last one, pointing.

Happy hunting!

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