

# Retired Guns

by Jackie Mertens

Retired Guns can be one of the best ways to test a dogs marking ability. The dog has to mark the area where the bird fell. He cannot rely on a thrower station to jar his memory of the bird? We all know that dogs can be taught to hunt the area of a gun station. Some of us even do drills to teach our dogs to hunt off the left or right side of the gun station. A trained dog can be sent to a gun station that has not even thrown a bird and will hunt off the left or right side of the station depending on his handlers cues.

Teaching a dog what retired guns are all about can begin at a very young age, even an older pup that has had plenty of previous marks. Some times when throwing singles for the young dog or any dog for that matter, have the gun throw, and as soon as the dog is sent, the gun starts walking away from the throw to another area. Most of the time when this procedure is tried for the first time, the dog starts to hunt in between the mark and where the thrower was standing and then hunts toward the moving thrower. After a couple days of doing this the dog learns to concentrate on the fall of the bird and not the thrower. I believe this also improves the dog's desire to watch the entire throw of the bird from when it leaves the throwers hand until it hits the ground. He must concentrate on the mark itself or he will end up following the moving thrower.

Also have the throwers carry camouflage umbrellas. If doing singles, the thrower can immediately open the umbrella and presto, you have created a retired gun. If there are multiple guns in the field, retired guns can be created or deleted quickly with the ease of raising or lowering the umbrella. (be careful on windy days-or the thrower may become Mary Poppins).

When teaching young dogs retired gun memory birds, spread the thrower stations out so the dog is not tempted to go back to the area of the first bird retrieved referred to as the "diversion bird". If he has trouble remembering the retired gun throw, the thrower can raise the umbrella for the dog to see him and then lower it again as the dog is sent. These things are best carried out with handler and thrower using some form of communication equipment such as walkie talkies or headsets.

For dogs that are having a lot of difficulty remembering the retired gun throw, do it as a single, put the dog away, and bring him out later and throw a double using the same mark you did as a single as the retired bird on the double. The dog should do pretty well now, as he has previously been to the retired throw mark previously done as a single. As he gains confidence, discard converting a single to a double. Do cold retired gun doubles but make them widespread and easy for the dog to find and have experienced throwers for the retired gun to help the dog if necessary.

It may take several weeks or months of working on Retired Guns to give a young dog confidence on even the simplest ones. It can be especially hard for dogs that have learned to mark off guns. Up until now, these dogs were mostly relying on the gunner to remember their memory mark. Now there is no thrower to mark off. Don't despair, be patient and your dog will catch on.

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