

Positional Obedience and Tactical Movements With The E-Collar

By Doug Roller

Well it has been a while since my last article and I apologize for that. Life got busy on me so I will try and make up for it in this article. In this segment, as the title suggest, we will be teaching the canine positional obedience, which will be the foundation for advanced tactical movements with your canine. Before I begin lets go over the last article and make sure we are ready to move on to this advanced work. I will make a few assumptions here as far as where you should be with your canine before we can move on to this training. Your canine should have a complete understanding of the E-Collar, as described in previous articles. This will include the forward down at a distance, the use of the prey toy for targeting, and an understanding of hand signals, which should have been paired with the E-Collar for off leash control. If these behaviors are locked into your canine (and maintained with the E-Collar) then we can move on to some really neat stuff. One caveat I think is important to mention, if you are new to my article I would highly suggest you go back to the April / May 2014 issue and read the article titled (Motivational Obedience With the E-Collar) and have a complete understanding of my training concepts before you move on.

So what exactly do I mean by "positional obedience." Let's examine this concept. Remember as I stated in the previous article I firmly believe that Police and Military canine training should incorporate behaviors that are going to be used during real world encounters. Too often trainers forget this concept and saddle themselves with traditional methods that root themselves in the dog sport world. Do not get me wrong, much of what is done in this environment is good but much does not apply to the tactical world. One concept would be the out and guard after a contact. I speak from experience, being involved in thousands of apprehensions, either with my own working canine or the investigation side of it, this behavior often causes problems in real suspect apprehensions. Following a apprehension with your canine generally causes fear and pain with the normal suspect. Having your canine out and guard next to him will place both canine and suspect in a conflicted state. The canine is in "high drive" and the suspect is normally in a state of fear or defense. Suspects will move yell and scream elevating the canine into an even higher drive causing an additional contact (bite). This merry go round event eventually has to be dealt with, and sometimes results in the complete loss of good tactics. Handler and or team leaves cover and places hands on the canine for control. Your great tactical tool (the canine) just went out the window because of this. It is much better to recall the canine, either back to your side if the situation warrants it or place the canine on a forward down at a distance (say 8 to 12 feet) de-escalating both canine and suspect. This my friends is reality. I will tell you that the vast majority of canine contacts, will place most suspects in a heightened state, expecting them to keep completely still is just not realistic. Remember in this world of litigation you are going to be the expert during an unfolding tactical incident, the reading of a suspect screaming and yelling in fear and exhibiting defensive movement must be judged by you at the time. There may be a time during the contact that you have to make this judgment call and recall your canine even when the suspect is not completely still.

With this mindset lets talk about what you should be able to do with your working canine during a tactical search. Your should be able to recall your canine from any position. During an off lead search the ability to place your canine in a forward down is also imperative. This position keeps the canine in

hunt as well as keeping him ahead of you and the team. This ensures your canine will range out during the off lead search and not be stressed because of continued recalls back to your side - creating an invisible ranging area. You should be able to down your canine during the search and work within any given environment. Your canine should also be able to be recalled to a heel position to either the left or right side of you. Many canines cannot do this because they have simply never been shown how. You should be able to recall your canine to any position even if he cannot see you, voice commands only. An example of this requirement would be following a contact in an open environment may require you to move a distance to cover. The ability for your canine to follow your voice during this dramatic movement is something that most canines have to be taught and many cannot do naturally. During my workshops I will find that most canines take some time to learn this concept. Additionally, ask yourself this, can you as a handler move with our canine with gun in hand, in a solid shooting platform, be it low ready or front sights and still control your canine. If you and your canine are not solid as a team in these requirements then you need to work toward them. With the E-Collar this can be accomplished and maintained, giving you an elevated state of control and freedom during your off lead search. Let us break down these behaviors in the training environment.

Review - When To Correct

As I mentioned before, if you have read and followed the steps in previous articles the subject of when to correct was covered thoroughly. I would be remiss not to hit on it briefly. Remember the E-Collar should be recognized as a communication device and not punishment. Is the E-Collar used for negative reinforcement - you bet it is when needed. However, just like the leash it was first used to shape and chain behaviors. So now that your canine has a complete understanding of the E-Collar in low drive obedience we can use it in higher drive exercises. With the prior training you completed you should be using the E-Collar intermittently, as a shaping and maintenance tool. Correct when needed but also read your canines mood. If he comes out in high drive wanting to run the show then by all means get on him. Place him on lead and do some paring with the E-Collar as you did in the beginning. Get his mind in the game so to speak. Also read his mind and get ahead of him. For example if you place him on a down and he continues to break, correct the behavior before it happens. This is the magic of the E-Collar. Very often you can glance at your canine and say - he is going to screw up - I know it. So if he appears to want to break from that down, give him a nick with the E-Collar, coinciding with the verbal down as a reinforcement. Proper use of the E-Collar by now has allowed your canine to develop tolerance and acceptance of it. With no conflict between you and the canine he will feel an instant correction that sends a clear message to him that cannot be disputed. He will not break his down if the E-Collar is used correctly. Remember when reinforcing commands the verbal and E-Collar must be married together for him to learn and respond correctly. He will then learn to beat the correction - he will beat the press of the button. Keep these concepts in mind as you move forward in this training. So let us move on to some advance training.

Beyond the Forward Down

With your canine solid in the forward down we can move on to more advanced work. If you have been consistent with your hand signals your canine should already have an understanding and a sense of these movements. Make sure your hand signals are consistent and clear to read. **I have attached some photos to exemplify them.** A pronounced flat hand - pushing down toward the ground should be used for the down position. As I stated in previous articles this position must be solid and ingrained in your

canine. I have found that the down position to be one of the most important positions during off lead search work and tactical movements. The heel command should also be paired with a pat on your left side. This hand signal can easily be accomplished with weapon in hand. Once the canine is in position you can quickly go back to a two hand low ready or front sight on target.

Remember if you have been consistent with hand signals and paired them with the E-Collar and verbal commands you can now move beyond the left hand heel. During training I often suggest to run your canine either on a long tab or short waist leash - something to grab on to for hands on manipulation when teaching or correcting behaviors. Remember the E-Collar sometimes cannot teach precision, we use the leash with the E-Collar for that. Start off by placing his prey toy 30 yards out, place him in a down position and move away to another position. With the use of the E-Collar recall him toward you by patting your side. As he approaches and is looking at you, extend your hand out and give him a hand signal for the down position and allow him to down slightly ahead of you. If he is the obedient type and marries to your side quickly step forward and place him slightly ahead of you. This process must be completed quickly to keep him focused on the prey toy you just tossed in front of him. This will stimulate most canines into a slight forward down near you. Your hand signal will indicate the exact spot and assist in communicating this position. You are allowing the canine to down in a position indicated by the hand signal ahead of you. Once he is in the down position looking at the prey toy, pay him quickly and send to the toy for his reward. The secret to accomplishing this is timing and reading your canine. Most canines pick up on this quickly. This is why the forward down must already be locked in before we can move on. Repeat this process several times from varying position, allowing the canine to down on your hand signal. Incorporate the E-Collar correction with your verbal and hand signal. If he is solid and compliant a low level nick will usually suffice. One thing to remember, even with a very complaint canine, utilizing a low level automatic correction (verbal, hand signal and E-Collar simultaneously) is good to do once in a while to keep him compliant. This is especially true for the very driven canine who will start creeping toward the ball without this reminder.

As your sessions advance start being more creative in your demands. You can move two or three times if the canine stays focused on the prey toy, and then reward him for the forward down. It is imperative that all your hand signals continue to be used. Placement with hand signals each time you move is required at this point as we lock in behaviors. When you step away from your canine a quick hand signal with the down and E-Collar is a good reminder if the drive level requires it. Remember to stay ahead of your canine. If he continues to break each time you leave him followed by your correction, he is not learning. Stop the behavior before it happens, you will extinguish this disobedience more quickly and with less conflict. Remember conflict creates confusion and takes away from learning, try to avoid it. When you send him to the toy remember to give him a solid full hand signal pointing toward the toy. Even if he is not looking at you, complete the hand signal. If he turns and looks you do not want him to catch you, making him respond to the hand signal - it should already be there. Remember canines learn by anticipating events, with the hand signal already there, he will anticipate it and stop looking - believe me when I say this.

So after several sessions of this you should be able to gauge when it is time to move on. Be patient and make sure he is solid before we add new things to your bag of tricks. As your canine starts to utilize your hand signals and the paring process is understood, we can move toward the right hand heel. Now when I say right hand heel, I am not referring to walking and heeling on the right, although that is something you may want to teach. All I am striving for at this point is to have your canine heel on the

right side into a down position. You might be saying "Why is this important!" Well once again let's examine real world off lead search work. Many canines have never been exposed to the right hand heel, however, you could easily encounter an incident that forces you to take a tight left hand barricade. During a tactical incident - say an armed suspect. A recall back to your left side might be a problem because the environment does not allow for it. During workshops I have seen many canines be very confused when I've placed the handler up tight against a left hand barricade. This could be very problematic in a high risk encounter. You surely do not want to take your eyes off the threat with your canine spinning in circles looking for the left side. It all has to do with conditioning and exposure - the time to fix this is in the training environment, not real world encounters.

There are many ways to start this and it all depends on how adaptive your canine is. This is an individual thing with each canine - much like us. There are people that have trouble going off the beaten path because they have been conditioned to not step on the crack - if you know what I mean. This is true with your partner. Some canine adapt very easily. You can place your canine on a down and move toward a long wall and take a left hand barricade. Recall your canine and pat your left side, move slightly forward into a kneeling as he approaches and usually he will guide into a right hand heel into a down. Some canines will have trouble as they try and push their way into the left hand heel. This is where leash work comes in. If needed grab hold of the leash and spin him around into the right hand heel into a down. Having someone you trust with the E-Collar may assist as you pair the hand signal, leash and E-Collar together for this new position. Even if it does not look pretty at first stick with it and it will smooth out with repetition. A prey toy can be used if needed - say after several right hand heels pay him with the toy. It is important to continue solid hand signals during this process.

Some handlers have concerns that if I teach him the right hand heel he will come to both sides and be confused. This does not occur for many reasons but most importantly because the left hand heel has already been imbedded in your canine. Additionally, you are not going to use the right hand heel and down very often and only when needed. This right hand heel will always be demanded by a strong pat to your right side followed by the solid down hand signal. Absent these movements your canine will heel to your left - especially when it is available - he will learn the difference. Your canine will become situational proficient and learn to read and adapt to varying environmental conditions - if you allow him to. He will learn to quickly problem solve unfolding events - if you allow him to. During my workshops I utilize blinds in a controlled environment to create varying environmental conditions to allow the team to learn together. As the team becomes more proficient I will yell out different positions as the team moves from blind (barricade) to blind - using the prey toy as a target. After this is accomplished we move to a decoy which adds to the canines drive level. Using the prey toy first allows us to lay a solid foundation in lower drive. Once you and your canine get the hang of these exercises you will be amazed at how fast your team will catch on. One caveat I'd like to mention and that is to take a slow. What I accomplish in a day or two may take you much longer. I have trained thousands of teams so please take it slow and move on when you feel like you and your canine are locked in.

Situational Awareness

As we progress and your team is smoothing out we must move on. "Situational Awareness" as the title suggest means you and your canine must be aware of your surroundings during dynamic fast moving events. You have to train for this skill, both you and your canine. During my workshops I make a point of placing teams in stressful situations. For example, if you have a chance, video tape a session of

protection and control work with your training group or unit. You will most likely see each team (canine and handler that is) constantly looking at each other. Handlers will be focused on their canine every second - and when each command is given he will look at his canine. If the canine is next to him and he breaks from his down - our imprinted behavior is to immediately take our eyes off of what's in front of us and look down at our canine while we give the command to down and stay. Sometimes this is necessary but we must train beyond this and break these habits. It is kind of silly to think we have to look at our canine, because usually the event that causes our canine to break causes him to look forward, so as we look at him it is making no difference at all. Our looking at the canine is not making him look back because he is in drive looking forward. Additionally this is what you want to instill - I want my canine to look forward that is where the threat is. What I really want is him to be obedient and look forward - so shape that behavior. In my humble opinion this is not a finished team. You react as you're trained - what you do in training will manifest itself in real world encounters, both you and your canine. This is especially true in high stress situations.

You must learn to not look at your canine. You may ask well how do I see him. If your canine is in a down position, slightly ahead of you and you're looking forward, believe me you can see him without titling your head into him. Your peripheral vision can do this very easily if you train for it. The hardest part is breaking the habit of looking at your canine every time you give a command. With hand signals, verbal and the E-Collar to assist, you have all the tools needed to accomplish this. It just takes training. During my workshops each team learns to stay focused on forward threats while maintaining control of his canine. Sometimes this means actually getting on the front sights of your weapon as you control your canine. If you have accomplished all the above tasks of this article then this advanced training should not be a problem. By working in this manner your canine will also learn something amazing - he will utilize his peripheral vision to read you as well. He will maintain focus on forward events, while reading your hand signals for placement. After reading this article have someone you trust watch you work your canine and try and work him without directly looking at him during obedience and control work. You will see how ingrained you are in these habits. Now before some of you trainers get ahead of me - I am not talking about motivational obedience. I am talking about tactical obedience, which is much different. If you are working a new canine or even a seasoned one in fun type obedience then so be it. However, remember that this can bite you in the you know what during real world encounters. Demanding the canine to look up at you as he slightly leans into you during heeling can have a very negative impact tactically speaking. Let me explain, your canine just had a contact as the suspect tried to leap over a block wall. The suspect is supposed to be armed but you see no weapon. Your suspect and canine are now on the ground by the wall. You decide to approach closer and recall your canine back to your side. He comes back to his obedient heel, looking straight up into your face, the suspect quickly gets up and moves toward the block wall to jump over. You scream at your canine to fass or attack, this elevated voice somewhat confuses your partner and he submissively looks up at you confused. You keep telling him to attack but he is locked into his heel position looking at you. The suspect jumps over the fence and yes you have just had a failure. I have heard this story many times from teams I've worked with. It can happen. A recall into a forward down would have done the trick and allowed the team to maintain a safe distance from the armed suspect. The canine could have been downed close to the suspect for a quick resend because you trained for this very event. You get my point.

Movement and Placement Training

This is my last section I will cover. Utilizing the blinds again you can now incorporate more movement type training during your ball work. Here is something that many canines have trouble with, and that is sending on the prey toy with you in a blinded position say 20 yards away. Some teams are so ingrained in doing everything next to each other that the canine has to come back to the handler before he will go to the prey toy. Worse yet he will not stay in a down as you move away - he has been ingrained to stay next to "Dad" and will not leave his side. This has to be fixed. Once again real world encounters. Would it not be nice to place your canine on a down in an area where your canine alerted as you move to cover. You could leave your canine in that forward position for a tactical diversion. This places additional stress on the suspect. Now his field of stress has increased from not only you and your team but also the canine which is close by. Suspects generally surrender when you have overwhelmed them with good tactics. Suspect's also read bad tactics, very naturally by the way, and will test you to be sure.

So back to training - your canine should be able to down away from you and then resend to a given area and not return to you in the process. We start off once again with the prey toy and advance to decoy work. As you work through these exercises you will see your canine get better and better. He will read your hand signals with just a glance and respond quickly with no confusion. You can move from blind to blind utilizing hand signals forward downs, recalls and resends - mix it up. One question is often asked is when do I mix things up. Well this is a good question - once you have established a pattern for learning and the canine has it down - then break the pattern. We use pattern to train and mix it up to lock in leaning. This also accomplishes something very important. It makes your canine responsive and allows him to adapt quickly to changing events.

Once these behaviors are locked in we can move on to my last subject that goes hand in hand with situational awareness and movement training. We will now show the canine how to respond to voice commands with movement training. Let me clarify this, you will send your canine to one area while moving to another, completely out of sight of the canine. The handler then recalls his partner to this position as he stays concealed, making the canine respond to voice only. This discipline once again lends itself well to real world encounters during off lead work. Again we will utilize blinds to teach this exercise. During my workshops I usually place blinds in a smaller triangle using three blinds or a **linear fashion - see photos**. I will start off small and work into a larger area. There are a few ways to start this training. One is to toss the prey toy out in front of the canine say 20 to 30 yards. Send him on a forward down, move to another blind and then send canine to toy. Hide yourself quickly in the blind and recall using your voice only. Most canines at first will look and return to your original location. A second recall will refocus him and he will respond to your secreted position. You can also place canine inside blind and move to additional blinds and do recalls.

This is beginning and will lead to advanced work that will follow. Utilizing decoys works well with this - by placing separate decoys in different blinds you can mix and match quickly making the canine really focus on voice commands and voice location. This will enhance your canines off lead search capabilities and fine tune him during directional control work. I am sure you have noticed I have not said to much about decoy and bite work and that was done by design. It is difficult to write about canine training because as you know there are so many variables and nuances with each particular team. So I wanted to really lay the foundation leading up to this next subject (bite work). This will be covered in the next article. If you complete the steps laid out in this and previous articles then decoy, bite work and outing

issues should not be a problem. This will also include direction and control work with the E-Collar that will ready your canine for off lead searches. Until next time be safe and train smart my friends. You can reach me at offleashtrainer@aol.com or my web site www.tacticalk-9.com.