



Starting Doubles by Danny Farmer & Judy Aycock

The next step in advancing the dog's marking ability is to introduce him to multiple marks, starting with doubles. At this point, the dog should be comfortable with walking singles and have had singles with two guns in the field in various configurations. Our philosophy, which differs from some others, is that doubles should not be started until the dog is through his "basics" program. This means the dog should be force-fetched, introduced to the collar, forced on back, through the double-T, and forced on water. He should be familiar with casting and lining wagon wheel, and should have started cold blinds.

We feel very strongly that it is important to have the tools in place to be able to easily and quickly deal with the normal issues that arise when doubles are started. Some of these issues include: not going on the second bird; leaving the hunt of one mark and going to the other mark (switching); leaving the area of the second mark and returning to the first bird retrieved (returning to an old fall); and going directly back to the first bird. Other issues that might come up include: popping (stopping on the way to a bird or stopping while hunting and waiting for directions from the handler); creeping or moving on line as the handler moves to show the second bird to the dog or as the dog is being lined to get the second bird; or dropping the first bird retrieved in anticipation of getting the second bird.

And just so we're all on the same page the "memory bird" is the first bird thrown but the second, or last, bird retrieved; the "go bird" is the second bird thrown but the first bird retrieved.)

We can't emphasize enough how important it is to be able to address any of these problems quickly so they don't become habitual. All too often people compromise their standards so that their pup will be successful getting the memory bird. We have often seen people tolerate movement on line, dropping the bird at the handler's feet, not sitting on delivery of the first bird, and other faults – all so that they will not distract the dogs memory of the second bird. They think it is more important to have a pup complete a double retrieve than to build proper habits. Usually, the pup isn't far enough along in his training to be able to deal with these issues because the handler is too anxious to start doubles before the necessary tools taught in basics are developed. We have never found that waiting to start doubles until after the dog has finished basics has hindered its ability to develop a good memory. Starting doubles too early, on the other hand, can lead to creating bad habits, especially movement on line.

We are now ready to run our first double. Our dog has had lots of singles, is through basics, and has a rudimentary idea of handling and blinds. The two guns should be placed in the field relatively short and spaced quite some distance from each other. We are not trying to set up a hard test, just trying to establish the mechanics of getting two birds.

If the dog heels on the left side of the handler, I would throw the left bird first (memory bird, second to be retrieved), and then the right bird (go bird, first to be retrieved). The reasoning here is that after getting the go bird, it will be easier to block the sight of the right gun when sending the dog for the memory bird. In general, when you come to the line, you want to sit the dog facing the go bird; then step up or back, depending on whether the first bird thrown is on the left or right, to turn the dog's head toward the memory bird. It is *very* important that you do not allow the dog to move his body. Only his head should move to see the birds when they are thrown.

In our hypothetical first double, the memory bird is on the left and thrown first and to the left; the go bird is on the right and thrown second and to the right. The dog should be brought to the line and told to sit facing the go bird on the right; then the handler, not the dog, moves up to focus the dog's attention on the left toward where the first bird will be thrown. Signal for the left bird and remain standing up on the dog to keep his attention on the memory bird. After that bird has landed, the handler, not the dog, should move back to allow the dog's focus to go to the other gun. Do not be in a hurry to signal for the second bird. Try to keep the dog's attention on the first bird thrown before you move to draw the dog's focus to the other gun. Again, we only want his head to move to see the birds thrown, so if he moves his body, correct him immediately with a "sit" command.

Once the second bird has been thrown, send the dog for the go bird, and when he returns with that bird, receive him and now point his body in the direction of the memory bird. Be sure he is lined properly and facing toward the memory bird before you take delivery of the go bird. Put your hand down and send the dog to the memory bird.

Be sure to have the memory gunner stand when the dog comes in with the go bird. We want these first doubles to go well. If the dog looks unsure, have the gunner make some small movements or even simulate a throw in the direction of the mark if necessary. Repeat the entire double if the dog has a problem.

If the dog tries to return to the go bird when you send him for the memory bird, either have the memory bird gunner help, or handle the dog. If the dog doesn't leave the line to retrieve the memory bird, send him on "back" while facing the memory bird, and either

have the gunner help by shooting the gun or yelling, “Hey, hey!” or handle the dog to the bird.

Repeat the double if this occurs. If the dog leaves the hunt of the go bird to try to get the memory bird, have the gunner help immediately. If dog doesn't respond to the gunner's help, then handle the dog back to the go bird. Do not have the gunner walk toward the bird; just yell or shoot the gun, or, if necessary, throw another bird.

At this stage, we are most concerned about teaching the mechanics of a double. Keep the tests simple. We are working on the fundamentals, not trying to challenge the dog's marking. The dog should not move on line; the handler should move by pushing (moving forward and into the dog) and pulling (moving back toward the dog's tail) as necessary to help the dog. When the dog comes in with the go bird, line him in the direction of the memory bird *before* you take delivery of the bird. Do not allow the dog to move when you take the bird from him. If his focus is not on the memory bird, then step forward or back as needed to direct his attention where it should be. Do not allow the dog to move his body while you are moving to get him to look at the memory gun. Do not fiddle a lot with the dog, either, as this will only make him worry. If he doesn't focus quickly, have the gunner make a small movement and then send the dog. Only after the dog is comfortable with getting two birds should you make the doubles more difficult.

The most important issues at this stage are not allowing any movement on line and getting the dog to stay focused on each mark. Do not call for the go bird quickly; let the dog really concentrate on the memory bird. Developing these two traits will pay big dividends in the future. Remember: Keep your first doubles simple, and don't be anxious to start doubles before your dog has the necessary tools to deal with potential problems. If you follow these simple guidelines your dog's attitude will remain positive, and that is the key to a good marking dog.