

Training with the Electronic Collar - "Electronic Check Cording"

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs and Alice Woodyard

Welcome to the world of electronic dog training. In this series of articles, we will show you proven training techniques we've developed at the Tri-Tronics Training Center. Our articles will take the pointer trainer step-by-step through the process of applying proper techniques of electronic collar usage.

Some people fear that the electronic collar inhibits a dog's style. In fact, just the opposite is true. Our techniques enable you to enhance style by eliminating corrections that worry the dog. In the field you can maintain the dog's immediate response to commands without upsetting him.

Collar Training Theory

The purpose of this method is to produce a dog with "collar understanding." This dog knows that his response to a known command or situation turns off electrical stimulation, and a prompt response avoids the stimulation altogether. Having control when the check-cord comes off is the pay-off for the time you invest in the foundation of collar understanding.



The Tri-Tronics Model 500/LR11 series features both continuous and momentary stimulation, and a range of more than a mile.

Teach the command first

Teach the command *before* you start training with the collar. Do not overlook this sequence. If the dog does not know what to do in a situation, you cannot expect him to know it any better because you use an electric collar.

As a trainer, you must be able to determine whether the dog failed to respond because he did not know what he should have done, or because he thought he had the choice of not responding. The role of the collar is to address the second problem, not the first.

Collar conditioning

After the dog has a basic understanding of what a command means, you can teach him that *he can turn off low-level electrical stimulation--by performing the command you have given*. Dogs don't automatically know this when presented with stimulation, no matter how well they know their basic commands.

Teaching the dog to turn off the collar is called "escape training." It is the first step in collar training. During this stage, the dog is learning to have a strategy for success. He learns whenever he feels the collar turn on; there *is* something he can do to *make* it turn off.

After the dog understands how to turn the collar off, he is ready to make the transition to understanding how to prevent the collar from turning on at all. The dog learns that *prompt compliance avoids* stimulation. This step is called "avoidance training."

The Three-Action Introduction

We start dogs' escape and avoidance training with a program known as the "Three-Action Introduction." This program introduces your bird dog to the collar by using commands that represent three distinct actions:

1. Bending (turning in the direction you are going), and the "Here" and "Heel" commands all require the dog to *move toward the handler*.
2. "Kennel" requires the dog to *go away from the handler*.
3. "Whoa" requires the dog to *become stationary*.

You should teach your dog to turn off the collar by performing each of these actions even though he is already obedient to the commands. This strategy will keep the dog in behavioral balance when you use your collar to reinforce commands later.

If you don't train for behavioral balance early, you can encounter problems later. For example, if you only drill the dog on "Whoa" with the collar, the dog will think that every time he feels the collar turn on he should stop. Later, if you try to use the collar to get the dog to bend or come to you in the field, he will become confused and stop. He believes that stopping is the only way to turn off the collar no matter what command is given.



After a dog has a basic understanding of what a command means, you can teach him to turn off low-level electrical stimulation by performing that command. Use your collar as an "electronic check cord" to teach the dog to bend or change directions.

Equipment

So much for training philosophy, now let's talk about equipment. To use the program outlined in these articles, you should have a collar with the following features:

- *Continuous stimulation*--The stimulation stays on as long as you hold the transmitter button down.
- *Variable intensity*--The trainer matches intensity level to the dog's temperament by changing the plug in the collar.
- *Selectable intensity at the control unit*--The trainer selects a stimulation level within the range set by each intensity plug by pressing different buttons on the transmitter.



To bend the dog, turn and walk in the direction you want the dog to go. If he fails to turn on his own, press the button and give the command. Release the button the moment the dog responds. Follow him for awhile before turning in the opposite direction.

The Tri-Tronics Model 100/LRII Series and Model 500/LRII Series have all three of these features. These are the models that we recommend for all basic training procedures. If you plan to own only one training collar, select one of these models.

The Tri-Tronics Model 70/LRII and 80/LRII Series have the first two features, but not the third. Neither model has selectable intensity at the transmitter. To increase or decrease the level of stimulation, you must interrupt your training to catch the dog and change the intensity plug in the collar.

"Continuous" vs. "momentary" stimulation

Continuous stimulation stays on as long as the button is down. Momentary stimulation is different. It is a brief "tap" of stimulation with a preset duration (different duration for low, medium and high). This type of stimulation is much shorter than you can get by tapping and releasing the button on a continuous unit. Momentary stimulation has an attention-

getting effect on the dog. It is superior to continuous stimulation for eliciting a quick response in the field without distracting the dog, provided the dog has had basic training with continuous stimulation.

The Model 200/LRII Series, the Model 500/LRII Series the Model 300II produce momentary stimulation. Each has low, medium and high tap buttons. The Model 300II has a 200-yard range. The Model 200/LRII Series has a range of one mile-plus, and has a reserve high to stop unwanted chasing. You should not do basic training with these collars but they are excellent for advanced work.

The Model 500/LRII Series has both continuous and momentary stimulation, and a range of one mile-plus. It is the most versatile and complete unit made. Since it has intensity plugs, you can vary the strength of the momentary as well as the continuous stimulation, something you cannot do with other momentary units.

In these articles, we will describe methods that use continuous stimulation for basic training. We will also tell you how we use

momentary stimulation for advanced work.

Getting started

Fitting the collar

To fit the collar on the dog, select contact points that will reach through the dog's coat so that they will be in contact with the dog's skin. Position the collar so that the contact points are on the underside of the dog's neck and the external flexible antenna is on the dog's right side. Placing the antenna on the right will cause it to tighten up as it rubs against the brush, instead of unscrewing as can happen if positioned on the left.

Buckle the collar *snugly* on the dog. A snug fit ensures consistent contact which is essential for effective training.

Finding the dog's sensitivity level

After the collar is fitted on the dog, you will need to learn what level of intensity to use when you start training. You want a level that is high enough to cause the dog to react, but not high enough to cause him to overreact, for example, vocalize or jump. Use a collar that delivers continuous stimulation for these

To find your dog's sensitivity level, start with the # 1 intensity plug. When the dog is just standing around relaxed, press and hold the bottom button. Observe the dog's expression for a reaction. You want to see him cock his ears or quickly turn his head. If you do not see this reaction, change the plug in the collar to the next higher one, and try again, pressing the low button.

You should find your dog's sensitivity level using the low button so that the medium and high buttons are available if you need a higher level of stimulation to overcome distractions.

Teaching The first action -- Moving toward you

Bending -- "electronic check cording"

Start off by check cording your dog to get him to turn on your verbal attraction. If you are training a field trial dog, remove the check cord only after you have done enough to pattern the dog to make his turn toward the front.

Now begin work with the electric collar, using continuous stimulation. The first step is "electronic check cording." In this first lesson, the dog learns to bend from side to side without a check cord, but at about the same range.

To do this, walk through the field, turn and walk in the direction you want the dog to go and keep walking. Give the dog a moment to turn and go with you without your verbal attraction. If he turns on his own, leave him alone. If he does not, press the bottom button as you give him the command to turn.

Release the button the moment the dog changes direction. Follow the dog for awhile after he runs across in front. Following the dog's direction keeps him "freed-up" and prevents him from sticking close to you.

After a few repetitions of electronic check cording, let the dog extend his range as you walk about the field. Try to change your direction when you see that the dog is pottering or has become distracted and is investigating something other than bird scent. Give the command to turn when you change direction. If the dog doesn't respond immediately, press the bottom button and repeat the command. Keep walking! Release the button as soon as the dog turns.

Practice the lesson on bending in at least five different locations over a period of several sessions, so that the dog can generalize from his experience.

A note about timing

It is important that the stimulation does not start *after* the dog has heard and is trying to respond correctly to a command. If this happens, the dog may become confused. Therefore, during the initial training phase, concentrate on pressing the button *just before* you give a

command.

At first, it will seem odd to use the collar *before* you give the command. However, in escape training you are not "correcting" the dog. By using *low-level* stimulation that the dog does not perceive as painful, you are teaching him how to *turn off* the unpleasant sensation through his own response. Learning to turn off stimulation is essential to the dog's future understanding of corrections in the field and around birds.

Coming in future articles...

In the next article, we will finish the action of coming toward you by covering the "Here" and "Heel" commands. In the future, we will cover the second action, "Kennel" (turning off stimulation by going away) and the third action, "Whoa" (becoming stationary), which includes stopping to flush and backing. We'll also discuss bird work--standing off the birds in the field, and answer questions in such areas as establishing a pattern and turning toward the front.

Training with the Electronic Collar - Completing the First Action

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs and Alice Woodyard

If you followed the procedure in Part I, by now you've properly introduced your dog to turning off mild electrical stimulation. You have become comfortable yourself using the equipment, and your dog has mastered bending in the field. The next lesson is teaching the "Here" command (coming all the way to you) and the "Heel" command (staying with you).



Teaching the dog to come

This exercise should be taught in the yard. If you teach it in the field, some dogs may believe you want them to stay with you and won't feel free to hunt.

Begin by letting the dog wander around the yard. When the dog is looking away from you, press the bottom button and command "Here." Release the button the moment the dog starts toward you. Praise the dog when he gets to you.

When teaching "Heel," turn 180 degrees away from the dog, press the button and repeat "Heel." Hold the button down until the dog is back in the four-foot circle.

At first, lean over after you call "Here" to invite the dog to come all the way to you. Be sure to remain in one place as the dog comes to you. By standing still, you make it easy for the dog to tell the difference between when he should come all the way in and when he should bend to continue hunting. Remember when you want him to bend and not come in, you keep walking.

After you call the dog, watch him as he comes to you. If he should veer off or fail to come all the way, or if he should immediately wander off after coming to you, press the button again and repeat the command, "Here." Release the button the moment the dog heads toward you and always be sure to remain stationary when calling the dog to you.



Remember, right now you should press the low button with *each* "Here" command. The dog already knows the command, but what you want him to learn now is *how to turn off stimulation* by obeying it. Repetition is required for the dog to learn this concept.

Soon your dog will be responding quickly to turn off stimulation. Now begin working him around more distractions.

Stand still as you command "Here." Release the button the moment the dog starts toward you.

Teaching the dog to heel

To begin teaching "Heel," call the dog to you several times in quick succession, using low-level electrical stimulation each time. Doing these repetitions close together will temporarily cause the dog to want to stay right with you, which will make it easy for him to learn the "Heel" command.

With the dog off-leash, start walking. Tell the dog "Heel" once, *without* using stimulation. As you walk, visualize a circle around you, four feet in diameter. Any time the dog leaves this circle after you've given the first "Heel" command, press the bottom button as you repeat "Heel." Just as you do this, turn 180 degrees away from the dog and continue walking.

Turning away from the dog puts distance between you and the dog. Adding a little distance magnifies the dog's error and this makes it easier for him to identify where he must be in order to turn off the stimulation.

Hold the button down until the dog is back in the four-foot circle unless he has moved farther than ten feet away from you. In that case, use the "Here" command instead of the "Heel" command, and release the button the moment the dog starts toward you. If the dog is farther than ten feet and you hold the button down until he gets to you, it will take too long for him to turn off the collar. You want the dog to be successful fast.

During the first few sessions on "Heel," do not correct the dog if he sometimes gets on the wrong side of you, so long as he's within the four-foot circle. In these early sessions, you are just teaching the dog that beside you is the place to be.

After a few sessions, you can begin to refine the dog's understanding of the "heel position." Now if the dog tries to heel on the wrong side, make that side less pleasant. The dog will choose to move back to the correct side if you shake a rattle stick on the incorrect side whenever it tries to go there. However, to avoid confusing the dog, do not use the rattle stick before the dog has had at least three sessions on "Heel."

You can make a rattle stick from a two-foot long piece of bamboo. Wrap six inches of one end with strong tape so that the handle won't split, then split the remaining length of the stick at least six ways.

Remember to give the dog lots of praise when he is in the heel position. It won't take long before he discovers that right beside you is exactly where *he wants* to be when hearing the command "Heel."

Teaching a release command

Using a release command is very important in training. By using a release command, you remain in charge. Then, when you give the dog a command, he will remain under the control of that command until you either give another command or release him.

If you don't formally release the dog, he has no way of knowing when a command is no longer in effect. He's likely to interpret things his way and decide that a command is over whenever it suits him. Soon, you'll have to repeat commands over and over again. So be consistent and *tell* the dog when he's "off duty;" don't let *him* decide.

The word, "Okay," is popular as a release command. We prefer the word "Break" because "Okay" occurs so often in conversation that the dog is likely to hear it and release himself when you least want it.

An ideal time to teach the dog a release command is at the end of a lesson on heeling. Give the release command in an excited tone of voice, take a step sideways and play with the dog for a few minutes. Remember, when introducing the idea of a release command, you must make it real to the dog by giving him some free time before you start training again.

Teaching the dog to avoid stimulation

After a few sessions on the "Here" and "Heel" commands, your dog should be responding quickly and the length of time you press the button will have become shorter and shorter. It is now time to stop using stimulation with each command. You're going to give the dog the opportunity to avoid stimulation so he can make a comparison and discover that if he responds *promptly*, the electrical stimulation doesn't turn on at all. He will think he "beat the stimulation." This process is called the "avoidance transition."

Your dog is ready for the transition to avoiding stimulation when you see him moving more and more quickly to turn off the stimulation when you command "Here" or "Heel." You should see this response after three sessions. If not, the intensity plug in your collar is probably too low. You should increase it and give the dog more repetition on the "Here" and "Heel" commands until you see the dog moving quickly to try to turn off stimulation.

When you see the dog moving quickly to turn off the collar, allow him to avoid stimulation by giving the "Here" and "Heel" commands

without electrical stimulation. However, any time that the dog fails to respond on the first command, quickly press the button and repeat the command. The dog will learn not to wait for a second command.



When to use higher buttons

After your dog has made the avoidance transition, so that you are no longer pressing the button with the first command, you should usually *increase* intensity any time you must repeat the command. Follow this sequence: give the first "Here" or "Heel" command without stimulation. If the dog fails to respond, press the *low* button and *repeat the command*. If he still does not respond, press the *medium* button as you *repeat the command again*. If he still does not respond, *repeat the command* and press *both* buttons. Using both buttons causes the collar to deliver high level stimulation. If you find you are using the medium or high buttons very often, you need to put the next higher intensity plug in the collar.

Use the rattle stick whenever the dog tries to heel on the wrong side. There is another time that you may need to use a higher level of stimulation while training the first action. Some dogs tend to "freeze up" when they first feel electrical stimulation, making it more difficult for them to learn. Use a quick burst of higher-level stimulation to teach this type of dog that it can turn off stimulation *through action*, not inaction. When this dog understands that "action works," you should drop back to the lower-level stimulation for normal training.

The best time to teach the "freezing" dog to speed up is when working on "Heel." Use body motion (jogging quickly while still moving at a walking pace) to simulate speeding-up while you press *both* buttons. As the dog bursts forward, release the buttons and give the dog excited, animating praise. When the dog will speed up to turn off the collar whenever you speed up, you will know that he has learned not to "freeze."



Give a release command and play with the dog for a few minutes.

Teaching the whistle for "Here"

After your dog knows how to avoid stimulation by responding to the "Here" and "Heel" commands, you have an ideal opportunity to teach the whistle command for "come to me." You can teach the whistle command by "chaining together" the new (unknown) whistle signal with the original (known) verbal "Here" command.

As the dog is headed away from you, give the whistle signal, hesitate a moment, then press the bottom button and command "Here." Release the button as the dog turns toward you. After a few repetitions, the dog will try to avoid stimulation by turning quickly toward you when he hears the whistle. From now on, you should use either the verbal "Here" or the whistle *without* stimulation, and only use stimulation if the dog doesn't respond correctly the first time.

In the next issue

In the next issue, we'll discuss the second and third actions: the action of going away from you, "Kennel," and of becoming stationary, "Whoa."

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The Second Action - "Kennel" and "Whoa"

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs and Alice Woodyard

In the last two articles we covered some basic principles for using the remote trainer in pointing dog training. We covered fitting the collar on the dog, selecting the right intensity level and the different types of equipment.

We also discussed introducing your dog to low-level electrical stimulation by teaching the first action of the Three-Action Introduction. In the first step, the dog learned to turn off low-level stimulation by bending toward you in the field and by responding to the "Here" and "Heel" commands.

If you haven't read Parts I and II of this series, we suggest you do so before going on to Part III. In Part III, we will continue your dog's "basic training" program. Remember, this program is called the "Three-Action Introduction" because the dog learns the strategy of turning off electrical stimulation by performing three different actions: coming towards you ("Here" and bending), going away from you ("Kennel"), and becoming stationary ("Whoa").

Introducing "Kennel"

Before you begin this action with command that means he should to use for this action is whatever into the truck or kennel. In this

Step 1-The dog

The place we've found that works easily run your rope through the move it to various locations. end of the rope through the back of run the rope around a post and back so that he is familiar with it. Now

As soon as the dog steps out of the "Kennel." As he re-enters the crate, back into the crate if necessary. repeat this procedure several times

Step 2-The dog stimulation by

With the dog about six feet in front of the low button and give him the as he steps into the crate. Use your him calmly when he is in the crate.

Remove the rope when the dog the previous lessons. To get the dog the collar. If you call your dog and lead him out.

Step 3-The dog learns to turn off stimulation by moving away from you on command.

Now gradually start farther away from the crate, until you are standing about 20 feet away. Start each repetition with the dog at your side. Press the low button and command the dog to get in his crate. Release the button as soon as the dog leaves your side.



As soon as the dog steps out of the crate, press the bottom button, command "Kennel" and use the rope to guide him back into the crate.



With the dog about six feet in front of the crate and you standing behind him, press the low button and give him the command to get in the crate. Release the button as he steps into the crate. Use your rope to guide him in only if necessary.



Remove the rope when the dog doesn't need its guidance and repeat the previous lessons.

the remote trainer, the dog needs to know some leave your side. The most convenient command command the dog already knows that means get article we will use "Kennel" as that command.

learns to stay in a crate.

best for most dogs is a large wire crate. You can back of it to guide the dog, and it is easy to Snap a rope to the dog's collar and run the other the crate to a helper. If you don't have a helper, to you. Have the dog enter the crate a few times leave him in it with the door tied open.

crate, press the bottom button and command release the button. Use the rope to guide him Praise him calmly when he is in the crate, and until the dog will stay in the crate.

learns to turn off entering the crate.

of the crate and you standing behind him press command to get in his crate. Release the button rope to guide him in only if necessary. Praise

doesn't need its guidance any more and repeat to leave the crate, bring him out *without using* he doesn't come, just walk back to him, reach in

If the dog stops part way to the crate, press the button again and repeat the command. Release it when he moves in the right direction.

The schedule for training the second action.

Spend at least a week on the second action. *As with the first action, it is very important that you do these sessions in at least five different locations.*

Make sure the dog truly understands how to turn off stimulation by moving away on command. At the end of each training session, include a refresher on commands used in the first action so that the dog does not get out of balance.

You should see the dog responding more quickly as he begins to understand that moving away from you on command will cause the stimulation to turn off. As the dog becomes quicker, you'll be holding the button down for a shorter time. This is your signal that it's time to begin giving the dog a chance to *avoid* stimulation completely if he obeys your first command. The dog should have reached this stage by the end of a week's work on "Kennel." So now give the command without using stimulation. Press the button only if you need to repeat "Kennel."

Introducing "Whoa"

Before introducing "Whoa" with the remote trainer, teach your dog what the command means by using your leash as a "suitcase handle" around the dog's flank, as shown in the photo. With the leash in this position, it is easy to teach the dog that "Whoa" means stand.

Once the dog understands "Whoa," place the remote trainer around the dog's flank with the contact points under his belly. Use only the No. 1 intensity plug when you first place the collar in this new position.

Step 1-Start with the dog in

Put the dog on a leash and place him in the standing position. Whenever he moves forward, press the button. Use the leash to stop him from moving toward you. Move out to the end of the leash in front of the dog and move. Whenever he steps forward, press the button resisting your light tugs on the leash, praise him the leash. If the dog tries to sit or lie down, press the into the standing position.

After the dog will stand still, use a raised platform to platform should be raised a few inches off the stand on. The dog can readily identify the difference the platform, because as he creeps forward, he also

Walk the dog up onto the platform and command him so that his front feet are at the front edge of the platform. Move back to the end of your leash and give a tug to tempt the dog to step forward. Whenever the dog steps forward, press the button and hold it down as you walk the dog back onto the platform. Repeat "Whoa" and release the button.

As soon as the dog is no longer trying to sit or lie down, move the collar back to its normal position on the dog's neck and repeat the previous procedures. The dog will soon learn that "Whoa" means stand still and don't creep.

Step 2-Teach the dog to stop from motion.

Put the dog on a 6-foot leash and walk with him beside you. *Without* using the remote trainer, command "Whoa" and quickly step in front of the dog to block his forward motion. It is important to familiarize the dog with this new exercise before using the



Use your leash as a "suitcase handle" around the dog's flank to guide the dog into a standing position.

the standing position.

position without using any stimulation. command "Whoa," and step toward the dog. Release the button when he stops moving. and gently tug on the leash to tempt the dog to and command "Whoa." When you see the dog calmly for his correct decision and put slack in button and repeat "Whoa" as you guide the dog

teach him that creeping is not allowed. The ground and just large enough for the dog to between right and wrong when he starts out on steps off the platform.

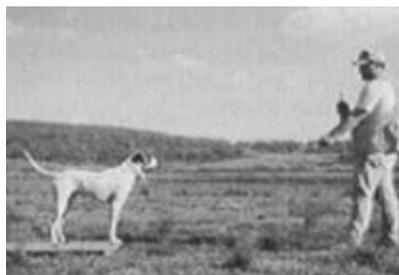


Place the collar around the dog's flank with the contact points under his belly. Move out to the end of the leash and tug on it to tempt the dog to move. If the dog steps forward, press the button and command "Whoa."

remote trainer.

After stopping the dog several times without using the collar, begin pressing the button as you give the "Whoa" command. Step in front of the dog to block him, and release the button when he stops. Then move to the end of the leash and gently tug on it. If the dog moves, press the button, repeat "Whoa," and step at the dog to make it easier for him to understand he is not to move forward.

Gradually phase out stepping in front to block the dog as you command "Whoa." The dog should learn to stop quickly when he hears the command "Whoa" even when you continue walking.



Use a raised platform to teach the dog that creeping is not allowed. The collar can be moved to the dog's neck when he is no longer trying to sit or lie down.

Remember, when the dog is stopping quickly, you should start to phase out using stimulation with each "Whoa" command. You should be able to accomplish this after about five sessions on the command "Whoa." Once you have phased out using stimulation with the first command, only use stimulation if you must repeat the command.

The schedule for training the third action.

Spend at least a week on the third action, working in at least five different locations. Most training sessions should include practice on some of the commands used in the first and second actions to keep the dog in balance.

When you see the dog responding quickly to the "Whoa" command to turn off stimulation, you can begin giving him a chance to avoid stimulation completely if he obeys your first command. From now on, just command "Whoa" without using stimulation, and press the button only if the dog moves after being told "Whoa." A dog is usually ready to make this transition by the end of a week of practice on "Whoa" with stimulation.

Coming in the next article...

In the next article we will cover stopping to flush and honoring.

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