TRAINING A DOG FOR HGH

EXIT FROM THE PEN

By Ulf Kintzel

When the dog is able and experienced enough to work in the graze, takes directions at a distance, is able to move the flock and stands on command we already have a dog that is very useful in herding.

In this and future articles, I will focus on a few additional exercises which the dog will have to execute in real life and in a competition such as the exit from the pen, sharp corner, traffic, bridge, placement, re-pen etc.

The herding day and the competition start with the exit from the pen. Although it is in my opinion a rather easy exercise it is apparently very difficult when I look at the previous HGH trials and AKC C course trials. There seem to be two main reasons why it does not get executed properly: First and foremost a lack of control. Secondly, too strong a focus on the dog (often because of the lack of control) and the forward motion gets stopped over and over again by the handler and/or dog because this exercise is not seen as a whole picture.

One can do a lot of "dry" training without sheep since this exercise has a lot to do with pattern training and very little with actual work, just like many exercises in SchH or other sports.

Just like any pattern training one can "cut" the training for the exit from the pen into separate exercises. First the jump. I start this by just letting the young dog jump over the electrical netting. Depending on the dog's age and experience I lower the netting, either by hand or with my crook, and encourage the dog to jump. I find it to be a big mistake to start the teaching of a jump by starting with obstacles that the dog can step over. No matter what jump I use the dog will
still have to move all 4 feet off the ground. Even though the jump is low - it must be a jump and not a stepping over.

At the beginning I always stand on the other side of the netting since my dog wants to come to me (which is easier than the dog jumping away from me). I also suggest to do the beginning of the training on leash. Especially the weaker dogs will want to avoid the command. Also, one can apply a little force with the leash while the handler is still using encouraging words. The better the dog jumps, the higher I let the netting stand (which is 35 to 36 inches at the most). Since it is flexible material the dog will need to clear it. One advantage of flexible material is that the dog is not getting hurt when the jump is unsuccessful. The disadvantage is that some dogs will try to push through the netting or go underneath. This requires an immediate correction since the dog should not experience what this is like. Panels (livestock panels) are easier since the dog can't go through them,

can set its feet on top while jumping but can also get hurt and has to jump higher since these panel are above 40 inches high.

The better the jump gets, the further I move away. At some point I add the command "Steh" (Stand) right after the jump. This too I would like to become a pattern since I can then focus on what the dog is supposed to do after it jumped into the pen (for instance going back along the flock or coming to the gate and guarding it). There is just one tricky part to this. When the dog is not jumping reliably yet the stand command will add to hesitation and might cause avoidance. Therefore, I praise the dog first after the jump before I put it into a stand.

Another exercise to teach is to send the dog to the place it has to jump in. The dog usually jumps in from the far side (in relation to the gate). Again, this can be taught separately by just sending the dog along fencing that is put up in a way that we have a right angle. This is actually a bit easier with sheep since it is easier for the dog to stay along the fence. The command is a plain "go" or "go on" which the dog has previously learned. At the corner the dog receives a "come over" command, supported by hand signal and body motion. That too is not new to the dog.

The next part needed for the exit from the pen which can be taught separately is the command "Komm Ecke" (Come corner, come pick), something that will be needed for other exercises too such as the bridge, sharp corner and re-pen. This exercise can be basically taught at any gate, panel, fencing etc. The dog will be placed at a distance and in an angle to the obstacle. The handler stands at the obstacle using the crook as a funnel to get the dog to come to the obstacle using the command "Komm Ecke". The handler has to stand far enough back that the dog can move with its shoulder up to the end of the obstacle where it receives a calm stand. The handler should not stand too far back that the dog is able to go too far.

I would suggest not to just call the dog with a "come" command since the dog will try to come to the handler, will not understand what it has to do, might even get corrected for coming to the handler. This will put the dog in a clear conflict. Instead I suggest to use the new command and use a few encouraging signals like petting the hand on the leg. The dog needs to make the connection between the command "Ecke" and standing with the shoulder at some kind of obstacle.

Once the pieces are put back together and done with sheep in the pen one will realize that my previous statement about pattern training is not entirely true. Now we are dealing with a dog in drive (and necessarily with a dog that wants to obey less) and the dog does not only have to jump into the pen, he also jumps "into" the flock, something the dog has previously
learned not to do. Therefore, I suggest to start the practice when the sheep are somewhat away from the fence.

In addition, the dog needs to learn three more things: Control, control and control.

Anton vom Quasliner Moor is being placed correctly at the gate of the pen.