

TRAINING A DOG FOR HGH

THE PLACEMENT BEFORE THE FLOCK

By Ulf Kintzel

The placement before the flock is done in order to have a flock of sheep slow and settle down in a pasture. There are various reasons to execute this exercise. One important example would be that the sheep are in a pasture that can cause bloat (alfalfa, clover) and it is the shepherd's intention to slow down the flock or even stop them from going further in order to have the sheep eat a certain part of the pasture clean, or force them to eat the parts with more fiber to reduce the risk of bloat. Another reason can be to keep them from rushing through a pasture and wasting it, especially on a wet day.

The idea is to slightly turn the "head" of the flock. Usually, that causes the sheep to stand still and eat rather than continue walking. In order to do this, the dog, who is working the border at that time, is sent along the border past the flock, then sent over to the head of the flock which he will approach in intervals and slowly in order to turn the head of the flock but without disturbing it. Once the job is done the dog is sent back the same way it came - first away from the flock, then back over to the border it came from. In case the scenario has changed in the meantime the dog might also be sent over to the other side of the field to the border but not before it has moved straight away from the flock first. Any other procedure such as going straight back to the side border without moving away from the flock first might cause unnecessary disturbance.

This exercise is mainly an obedience exercise. The dog is sent along the border (first command), over to the head of the flock second command), put in a stand (third command). However, when the dog is called off the border and has to approach the flock it is put into a conflict for two reasons. Firstly, the dog will be asked to come off the border into the graze. That is something the dog was not allowed to do at the beginning of training. Secondly, the dog will be asked to walk straight into or at least against the flock. This is also a procedure that the dog was previously taught not to do. The dog was taught to move along the flock. In other words, there are two reasons why the dog can feel nervous, insecure or unsure because they contradict previous training. I purposely used the word "ask" to come off the border and into the flock. It should not be tried with control or force, it should be done in a way that the dog sees it is permitted, it is okay to walk off the border and into the flock.

When training the placement I "cut" the exercise into pieces and train each piece individually before I let the dog do an entire placement. The command for moving along the border ("Go" or "Go on") and how to teach the "Stand" command were described in a previous article. Now I use both commands to send the dog along the border, use the cross border in order to have the dog come over to the head of the flock and then I stand the dog for a while without actually calling the dog off the border. The goal is to be able

to place the dog (I am using “place” and “stand” as synonyms) at any given moment at any distance.

In order to have the dog come off the border one can start as simply as calling the dog into the graze after a training session is ended. In order to do that the handler should not stand further than a few yards away from the border.

During the next step of training the dog will have to learn to approach the head of the flock. I usually start with a small group of sheep standing not too far away from the border. At that point it is totally irrelevant whether or not this group is actually the head of the flock. However, the distance of this group of sheep to the border is in my opinion critical. If the group is too far from the border the dog has to go a long distance back to the border after the placement is done. If the group is too close to the border the dog has to break the border and walk against the flock at the same time. That too is difficult. A good rule of thumb would be to start when the sheep are at distance of about five to ten yards from the border.

The handler should put him-/herself behind this group of sheep, put the dog in a stand when the dog, group of sheep and handler are in a straight line. Then the dog should be called in. When the dog comes in too fast, I like to put the dog in a stand again before I let it continue to approach the flock. I totally avoid an “Easy” command. If the dog does it well I stand the dog once these sheep have turned. If the dog hesitates I let it walk all the way up to me (through the flock) and pat it to let the dog know it is now okay to walk into/against the flock. I teach the dog the way back with firm commands again in order to push the dog back out. I do this because most dogs have the tendency to angle on the way back out instead of going straight. It can eventually be so inaccurate that the dog will cut right across the field, going back to the border it was sent from instead of going back to the border it was called in from. Of course, this should be avoided since it causes disturbances of the flock. A little guide and help to teach the dog to go straight back out could be a little track leading into the graze that the dog can “hold on to”.

Once the dog has the concept of how to approach the flock, the handler can bring more distance in between him-/herself and the dog and also put the whole exercise with all its elements together. Also, the handler can start to guide the dog against the head of the flock without standing in the flock in a straight line with the dog. However, this part is not easy to teach.

I also would like to point out a training mistake that I run across quite frequently. One should not practice this exercise too often. When the dog does a placement quite frequently it will start to approach the flock by itself when sent to a cross border instead of working on that border. When a dog starts this behavior the handler should immediately stop practicing the placements for a long time. The dog won't forget how it is done but should now learn again that there is a job to do on the cross border and not always a placement.



Caro vom Quasliner Moor is executing the placement.