

One direction

This month, Lez Graham has been doubling down on Emrys's training by moving him on to distance and direction control

What a month! After doing a bit of stock taking last month, I not only upped the ante in relation to the memory retrieves that I was doing with Emrys but also decided that it was time to introduce some direction control.

Split memory retrieves

For a little while now, I've been leaving Emrys in a Sit/Stay while I've walked out and put a dummy down, and then either returned to him and heeled away parallel to the dummy, or walked out in a different direction to it and recalled him to heel, before lining him up and sending him for the retrieve. As he's been great going out straight to the dummy, I've been playing with ways of adding a bit of complexity to the memory retrieves.

One of my favourites has been to walk down a

V-shaped track with white grass in the middle, turning back on the V, and leaving a dummy on the track. Then heeling back the way we came before sending Emrys straight across the white grass for the retrieve. We've also been walking around the field dropping a dummy in each corner and then sending him in varying combinations, working the dummies either side of us as short 'Get On's, and the ones at a distance as split retrieves – great for the old grey matter as well as for proofing a young dog's training.

Introducing distance control

Something that I really enjoyed doing this month

was introducing Emrys to distance commands. Although traditionally this is trained against a fence line, I've always shied away from doing that as most of my clients train their dogs on public land, and the fence line is normally where the dogs go to the toilet and bunnies go to ground, which can really work against young dogs. So, just as my clients do, we started training in the middle of the field.

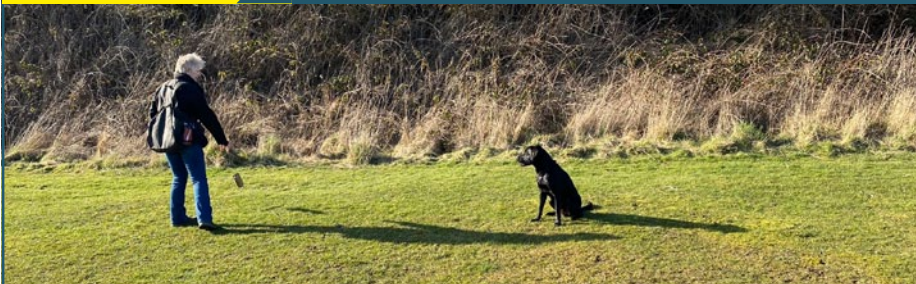
Popping Emrys in a Sit/Stay, I walked out to his side and quietly put down a shape biscuit level with his shoulder, then returned to the front of him, with around 6' between us. I then sent him with a 'Get Out' combined with the hand signal to get his treat, before calling him to sit in quietly in front of me for another reward.

For the first handful of sessions, I use shape biscuits as I want my dogs to go out really punchy and get an instant reward for doing so – because distance control is about following direction rather than retrieving, I tend to train them as two distinct exercises. Then came one dummy... again leaving him sitting quietly while I place a dummy out level with his shoulder and casting him out. After a couple of weeks of quietly placing the dummies down on one side and then the other, I upped the ante and started to throw them. This is where all the steadiness training around thrown items over the last few months really comes into its own, as Emrys has developed self-control sitting away from me as well as by my side.

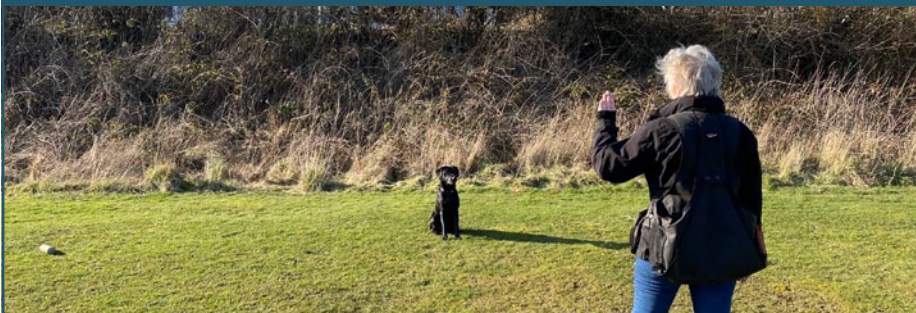
'Fingers crossed that by the time Emrys gets to the shooting field, he'll be well in control of himself'

Missed the start of Emrys's diary? Head to magsdirect.co.uk for previous issues of Sporting Shooter.

ONE DUMMY DOWN



Leaving Emrys in a Sit/Stay, Lez quietly places a dummy out.



Returning to stand in front of him, Lez repeats the Sit hand signal.



Looking to the dummy, Lez sends Emrys with a clear 'Get Out'.

PICTURES: LEZ GRAHAM

LEZ'S TOP TIP

Don't be in a hurry to move on to a new exercise. Instead, shake up an old one. For example, turn a simple memory retrieve into a ladder and add natural barriers for dog. Things like retrieving across different length grasses, going from the sun into shadow and crossing paths can all add a little bit of complexity to a straightforward exercise.

ABOUT LEZ GRAHAM

Lez Graham is author of The Pet Gundog series and a canine behaviourist and gundog trainer. Focused on training the next generation, she runs the Accredited Pet Gundog Instructor programme, which is now its sixth year.

Every book in The Pet Gundog series comes with one-year access to The Pet Gundog Online training app (£19.99, amazon.co.uk)

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Back to the club

Being a 'lockdown dog', Emrys hasn't really been exposed to the same things my other dogs have been. All of them, with the exception of Ziggy, have been trained in competitive obedience as I love the precision of the handling and the focus; it's great for learning about motivation, timing and steadiness – plus you get to train around other dogs too which means our dogs have to learn to just settle down beside your chair.

Unfortunately, when the rules in Scotland allowed training clubs to be reopened, I was just about to have my elbow operated on, so we had to wait for that to heal sufficiently and then for a new round of classes to start. Thankfully, because I knew the trainers, we were able to enter the intermediate class rather than starting in the beginners, which was great as it meant we were able to start precision heelwork and putting in the foundations for the more advanced exercises.

It's always so interesting when you start going somewhere exciting with a dog; the first week at club Emrys was excited but calm, a bit overwhelmed which was to be expected as not only were there lots of dogs, but it was his first time in a sports hall.

The second week he was more excited but last week, which was week five, he was very over-the-top and had to be told a few times 'that's enough' and to settle down. It made me think about how when inexperienced dogs first go shooting – they're generally on their best behaviour as it's so overwhelming, but give them a few times on the field and they get to know how exciting it is, the anticipation and adrenaline is running so high they can lose the plot a bit. So fingers crossed by the time Emrys gets to the shooting field, he'll be well in control of himself. ■

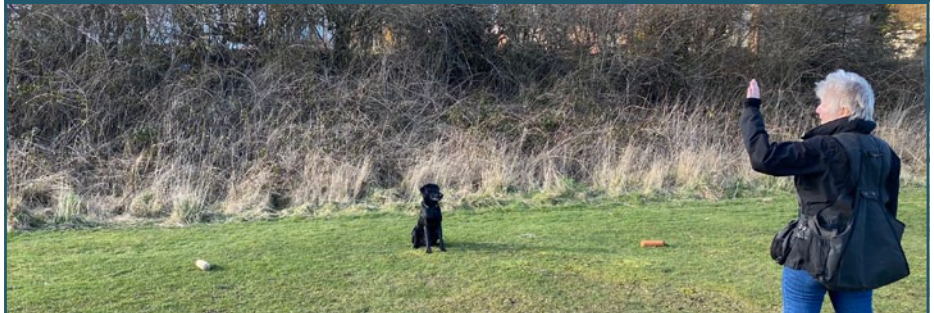
TWO DUMMIES DOWN



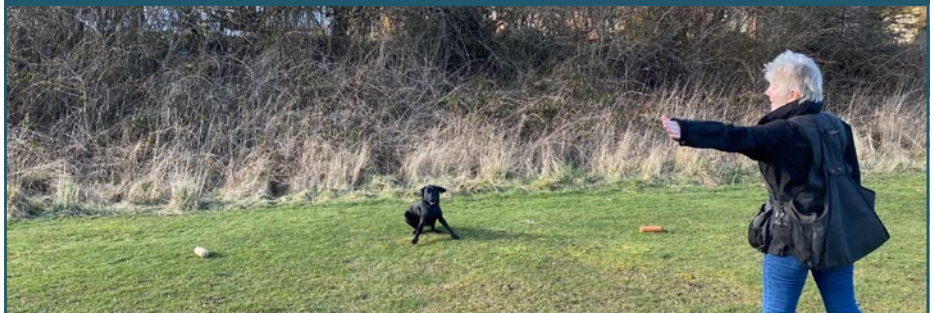
First, Lez walks out and drops a dummy down, before walking back a few feet in front of Emrys.



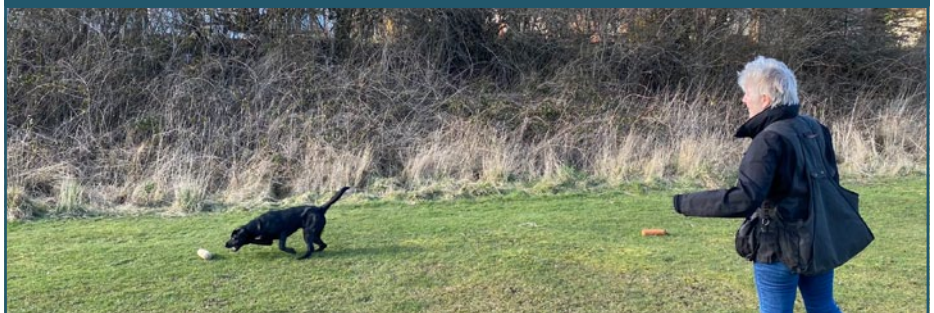
Keeping the dog in a Sit/Stay, Lez throws the second dummy in the opposite direction.



Keeping the dog focused on her, Lez ensures Emrys is steady to the fall of the dummy.



Using a Get Out command and arm signal, Lez sends the dog for the second dummy.



Once Emrys is confident with this type of retrieve, Lez can build in slight changes to the ground she works on.