



THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER...

The end of season is a time when you and your dog become twitchy through lack of exercise and mental stimulation, but it doesn't have to be the way, says Lez Graham

So here we are at the end of another season, stories to be told, jibes to be had and a bit of head scratching as to what to do to get us through the next seven months. Hopefully you and your dogs got through it with nothing more than aching knees, bramble scrapes and a bit of nettle rash.

It's a time when we, and especially our dogs, can get a bit twitchy through lack of physical exercise and mental stimulation as well as a little bit portly around the middle. It doesn't have to be that way, and to be honest it shouldn't be. Our dogs have worked hard over the season, have built up stamina, muscle and a need to work; to turn them

straight back into sedate pets is not only going to drive them to distraction, it will drive us to despair. What we need, is a training plan. We need to either "rough off" our dogs to be couch potatoes again to regain focus on us and control on the whistle or a combination of the two.



Long memory retrieves will keep your dog thinking and focussed

Memory retrieves

Finding an area with a track, especially one that has twists and turns in it, is the best for doing long multiple memory retrieves. Initially give your dog a "heads up" as to what you're doing by either walking him to the end of the track or making that wonderfully exciting "buurrrrrruppp" noise as you put the dummy down. Although if you're taking your dog

shooting, he'll be experienced on blind retrieves so when you send him the first time he doesn't go self-employed and start hunting as he would have done throughout the season.

Put down three or four dummies between 10ft and 15ft apart, then, when you've gone a suitable distance for your dog, send him for the first one; really set him up to succeed by focussing on the dummy, even it's around the bend, put your weight forward and then when your dog is also focussed, send him. When he brings it back insist he delivers to hand and then sit him up in front of you. Look over and around his shoulder and down the track, again really focussing on the dummy, and then send him using the hand that you want him to turn towards. Repeat this sitting up in front after delivery and send him back to the other side.

This exercise will keep your dog thinking and focussed on you as well as keeping both sides of his body toned and his legs strong. You can develop it further by throwing a dummy off the



track prior to sending your dog back for the memory retrieve, then upon his return, sending him for the mark. The only restriction to this exercise is your imagination; remember that you need to set your dog up to succeed, to fail to do this straight out of the shooting season may well motivate your dog to go self-employed and disregard anything you have to say.

Hunting the garden

Regardless of how small or big your garden is, you can very quickly turn it into the most amazing hunting ground for your dog by getting a bit inventive.

Hiding small rabbit dummies (the mini rabbit dummy from hilost.co.uk is perfect for this) behind bushes, around corners, and even under or behind upturned flowerpots or bucket is great fun for you and your dog and it keeps them hunting within a confined area and working for you. You can have pots/buckets dotted around the garden, or patio, with only a couple of them hiding a dummy and, using your stop whistle



Insist your dog delivers it to hand and then sit him up in front of you



Left: When your dog is focussed, put your weight forward and send him
Below: Step outside of the clock and send your dog for lefts and rights

"By tiring out your dog's mind, you'll be able to reduce the amount of physical exercise"

and hand signals, handle your dog to the correct area.

The clock

This has got to be my all-time favourite training exercise; for novices it's a fantastic way of teaching the dog to go only for the dummy that you're pointing at and for the more experienced dog it can be adapted to include all kinds of steadiness and control.

If you haven't come across it yet, think of an analogue watch and pop your dog at the centre. Throw, or place, dummies at 12 o'clock, three o'clock, six o'clock and nine o'clock. Then decide how you're going to get your dog to pick them up. The easiest and least challenging way is to send your dog from your side for each dummy in turn. You can up the ante by sending him for one, stopping him on the way out and then redirecting his attention onto another one.

You can step outside of the clock and send your dog for lefts and rights or a go-back for the one behind him or call him to you and ask him to pick the one up in front of him. As he brings back the dummy you can challenge him further by throwing a dummy out to the side of over his head and then sending him for one that was already on the ground,

ignoring the one that has just landed.

As with the memory retrieves, the only restrictions on the clock is to always set your dog up to succeed; even while setting ever more challenging retrieves.



More complex retrieves will tire the mind

Tiring the mind

By tiring out your dog's mind through giving him more complex retrieves and working at your behest, you'll be able to reduce the amount of physical exercise slowly over a few weeks. Once you've got the daily exercise routine manageable again you can

then start to cut back on the complexity of the retrieves, unless of course you're planning on doing working tests over the summer, in which case you need to keep them there. But, vary the locations and only do them a couple of times a week so your dog doesn't get a bit stale or bored. **SG**

Lez Graham works full-time as a gundog trainer and behaviour practitioner and is the author of the Pet Gundog series of books. For details of her training days, visit www.trainedforlife.co.uk.

Got a question for Lez?
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