



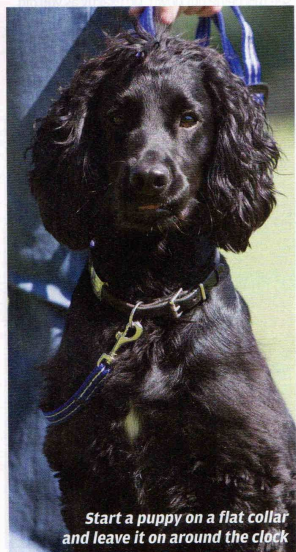
Bring your dog to heel

Lez Graham offers advice on heel training and the best kind of leads and collars to keep your dog by your side

It doesn't matter what command you use – whether 'heel', 'close', 'here' or 'side' – they all mean 'walk beside my leg and keep walking beside my leg until I tell you otherwise'. Dogs are traditionally taught to walk to heel on our left, as when we took (and still take) them into battle with us we had our dog under our shield arm, keeping our right side free for wielding our sword. Now we have the gun on our right and our gundog on our left, unless you're left-handed in which case your dog would be on your right.



Dogs traditionally walk to heel on our left, so we can carry our guns on our right



Start a puppy on a flat collar and leave it on around the clock

IN THE BEGINNING

I always start heel training, regardless of breed, on a flat collar and I tend to leave the collar on a puppy around the clock so that if it isn't doing what it's supposed to then I have something to get hold of other than a handful of puppy. That isn't a great idea, as it will just make the puppy dodge and be wary of hands.

If this is a new concept to you, then it's worth giving it a go as it makes life so much easier. If you condition a puppy or dog to a collar being held by giving them a treat occasionally while holding it, you'll never have problems putting the lead on when calling your dog to you. They will have learned that good things happen when the collar is being held.

PUPPY TRAINING

I always train puppies to 'hang out' beside me using treats, my voice and by turning away from them if they get too far ahead. I then progress to holding treats by my left leg to keep the puppy in the right position for a few strides before relinquishing their reward.

Once a puppy can maintain a heel position for roughly 10 paces then I pop a lead on and start them walking to heel on a loose lead,



You should be able to train a puppy to 'hang out' beside you

although I hasten to add that this is far from the end-point in the training.

When I find that I am not having to give food rewards every 10 or so paces while walking my puppy, then I start to introduce twists and turns, normally a 'fat' figure of eight – not only is this great for walking to heel but it helps to develop muscle evenly on the puppy.

DOMINANCE

Even with the best will in the world, when your puppy reaches adolescence, boundaries will be pushed and lead walking is no different.

At this point, my dog will generally still be walked on a flat collar and to keep my dog with me I'll be doing left-about turns whenever needed to keep the dog behind my stride. By cutting across the front of my dog, not only am I making it look to me to see where we're going next, but I'm very clearly telling the dog by my actions, that I'm important enough to walk in its space, something that, in their world, only a more dominant dog would do.

When I'm training on a flat collar, I tend to use left turns and left-about turns more than any other correction for heel work. I've found that, more often than not, my double flick technique makes the clip bounce up and catch the dog on the chin, which is not good.

A word of warning concerning left-about turns – be careful on wet uneven ground as the last thing you want is for your dog's hind legs to slip away from them on a hill. Protect your dog's cruciate ligaments at all costs and use a different technique in very wet weather.

The main thing with a flat collar is to not let your dog lean into it as it may, over time, put too much strain on the windpipe, changing it from a lovely round shape to an oval. You only need to remove a ring and see the indentation

Making left-about turns, cutting across the front of the dog, will help to stop it pulling ahead



on your finger to see what pressure on the same place can do to our bodies over time.

SLIP LEAD

I tend to introduce a slip lead once my dog is about five months old, simply because I prefer using slip leads to regular clip-to-collar leads. They are much easier to use, especially on those cold winter mornings when my icy fingers can't get the freezing-cold clip to work.

I also find that using my technique of double

The number of people I see being dragged down the street by a Labrador is shocking – the dog is quite simply being strangled



The Gencon collar is efficient and easy-to-use for handlers

flicking the lead, combined with a quick about turn, can get even the hardened pullers to give up the game and walk to heel. The key being a loose lead or a little loop in the lead – if there's nothing to pull against then the dog can't pull.

As soon as a dog starts to get ahead I change the rules – flick, flick about turn, left-about turn or step back and call the dog to sit in front of me. By changing the rules and not putting any pressure on the dog's neck, it learns that not only does it have to pay attention, but that it can be nice being with me and my left leg.

Unfortunately, the problem with slip leads is, like all equipment, giving them to someone who doesn't know how to use them and allows their dog to pull into them. The number of people I see being dragged down the street by a big Labrador on a slip lead is shocking – the dog is quite simply being strangled.

HEAD COLLARS

There are so many head collars on the market these days, though over the years I've worked with three of them – the Dogmatic, the Canny Collar and the Gencon.

The Dogmatic is a good head collar that doesn't ride up into the dog's eyes and cause irritation to the tear ducts – something that we definitely don't want to cause as the tears drain into the nasal cavity, potentially affecting the efficiency of the nose. Unfortunately, I found that the Dogmatic pulled the dog's head around to the side, allowing the dog to brace its neck, which may cause stiffness down one side.

The Canny Collar is another good one that, like the Dogmatic and the Gencon, doesn't rub or irritate eyes. Unfortunately, due to the design of the Canny Collar, the determined dog can arch and brace his neck, putting all of his weight on to the head collar, making it really difficult to walk them.

The Gencon, as I've already noted, is my preferred head collar for remedial work – the original figure-of-eight head collar is, in my eyes, still the best and although many people have copied it, they just don't meet the original in terms of comfort, efficiency and quality. It's easy to use, comfortable for dog and handler, doesn't ride up or allow the dog to brace into it and you can easily put a muzzle over the top, which I sometimes have to be able to do in my behavior modification work.

When training a dog to walk on a head collar, you should never jerk or yank the lead, instead it's a more subtle movement of gently drawing

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the lead back until the dog feels slight pressure and then I would about turn and walk the other way or side step to get the dog to come closer to heel. If the dog was to throw a tantrum, which a lot do when you first put a head collar on, then simply draw your hand up, which in turn will bring the head up, encouraging the dog to sit. The second the dog backs off the pressure then you ease off the pressure completely and carry on with your walk.

As with all equipment, it's important to use it in the way that it's been designed for and although many handlers are flipping their slip lead into a head collar, it wasn't designed for that use. It really isn't a good idea to wrap rope around your dog's face – I know we do with horses but their face is structured differently! **SG**



When using head collars, never jerk or yank the lead, instead gently draw it back

NEXT MONTH: Lez explores the psychology of a gundog on the hunt.