

Training- Tips by: Linda Myers

(The following ideas are taken from an article that I (Linda Myers) wrote for The Spotter several years ago that I hope will help you.

The three keys to success in training a Dalmatian to compete in a road trial are

- 1) Work BASICS, and progress only after your dog has mastered each preceding step
- 2) PROOF each exercise thoroughly on the ground before you ever ask for it mounted on a horse, then PROOF again on horseback
- 3) BE consistent WITH CORRECTIONS.

First of all, work the basics **first**, on the ground, and progress gradually only after your dog is solid on each step along the way. By the same token, work dogs together only after they have proven themselves out alone.

With recalls, for example, the progression would be from recalls on a six-foot leash to recalls on a long line ten feet back, then twenty, then thirty. Once your Dalmatian is solid on the long line, take it off and start training off-lead recalls through the same gradual progression. When your Dalmatian comes on a single command (which is the only response you should accept) lavish on the praise and make him think that coming when you call is the most fun thing he ever did! Call him when he's out sniffing in his yard and immediately run the other way. As soon as he comes charging in your vicinity, release him, praise him in happy, pleased voice and let him go on about his business. You don't need perfect "fronts" here with a square sit at your toes as in the obedience ring ... you need happy, willing, charging recalls to your immediate vicinity. Make it a wonderful game and repeat the exercise until coming when you call becomes an automatic response. Now your dog is programmed for success, but you're still not ready to mount a horse and call your dog.

Now you should go back to each step along the way and PROOF your dog. Take him to a shopping center or park and repeat the progression. Six-foot leash, ten, twenty, thirty feet back on a long line until he's tuned in to you, successfully blocking out all the distractions, and coming on a dime. Correct the first time, EVERY time that he caves in and pays more attention to a distraction than to you and praise, praise, praise, and lots of FLJN when he gets it right. Make sure that the first off-lead recall you try with distractions is in a fenced, no traffic area, and be prepared to silently walk your dog down should he decide to explore rather than come to you. Do NOT repeat the recall command until you have a firm grip on his collar, and then back up several yards, giving a tug and a firm "Come" command each step of the way. Then change your voice back to a happy "good come" praise mode, release your dog, and call him again immediately. Praise him again and give him a break.

Once you're confident that your dog will willingly come to you when called, find some woods, do a few high-praise long line recalls, nonchalantly unsnap the lead and hike off.

Once your dog is busy sniffing, call him and run the other way. When he charges back to you, don't insist on a perfect "front", but release him as soon as he has demonstrated his willingness to subjugate his wishes (sniffing) to your command ("come"). Lavish on the praise and continue your hike. Repeat this a few times, but DON'T OVERDO IT! Let your dog romp and have fun.

Now you're ready to call your dog from up on your horse, but once again you've got to assure that you can be CONSISTENT with any needed corrections. Don't put your dog in a situation where he can successfully disregard your command. If you're not comfortable holding your horse while correcting your dog, enlist the help of a friend who is willing to hold your horse in case you need to demonstrate to your dog that he must listen to you whether you're walking OR riding. If your Dalmatian learns that you're not going to correct when you're on horseback, or

even that you're willing to repeat your command (he gets one chance to respond to any command), before long he will LEARN that anything goes as soon as your foot hits that stirrup. Yes, it's a pain to dismount, correct your dog, and re-mount your horse, but it's well worth the effort in the long run.

The same principles apply to teaching the Heel/Hock, the Long Sit/Down and the Distraction exercises. Work the BASICS, progressing one step at a time **only** after each dog is solid on the preceding step. PROOF

And be CONSISTENT with corrections, never giving a command that You're not prepared, willing, or able to re enforce, no matter how much of an inconvenience it may be at the time. If you lay this solid, basic, consistent groundwork, you won't have to go back and undertake the dreadful task of re-training.

Then, come time to compete in a road trial, you'll be able to welcome the day as the exciting, enjoyable performance event that it's intended to be, watching your Dalmatians demonstrate their ability to answer that inbred call to escort you and your horse, and knowing that they have the training to do you proud.

P.S. It is also very important that you **READ THE RULES** before exhibiting in a road trial. Read chapters 6, 7, and 8 many times. You must understand exactly what is expected of you and your Dalmatian(s) to be able to exhibit.

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