

K9 COP

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K9 training

Traffic Stops

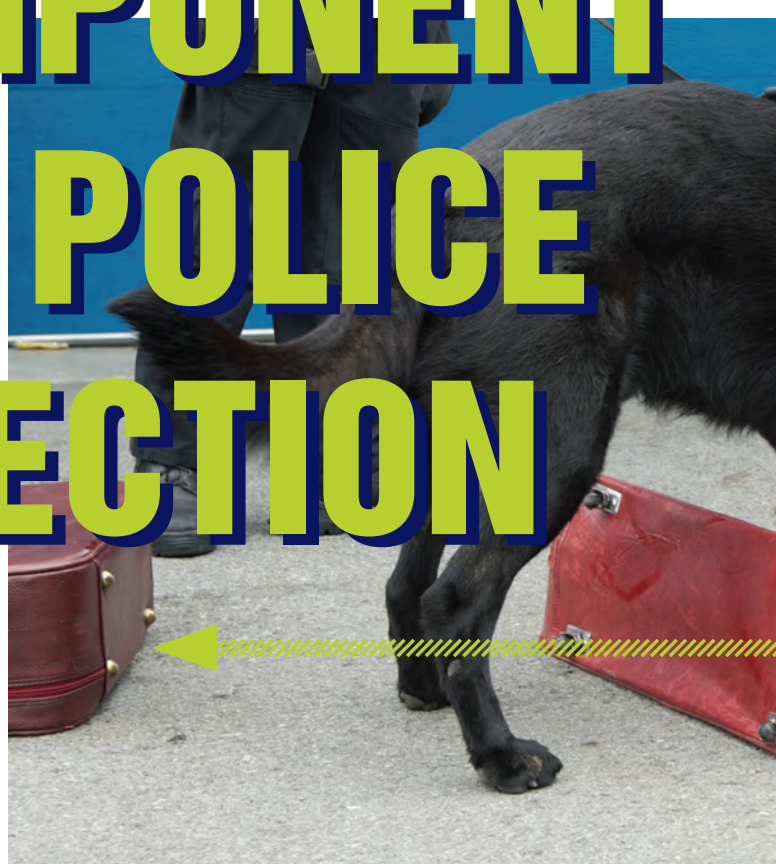
K9 e-collar training


E-Collar 101





COMPONENT FOR POLICE DETECTION





This is the final installment of a series of articles on component training in the important disciplines of Police K-9 Training. Detection training is a complex exercise on the whole and is best understood by deconstructing it into components for easier training. Like most training, once you break it into manageable pieces, and understand the proper progression, training becomes more efficient and the dog takes less time to understand the concepts. Having too many variables changing at once will confuse the dog and stunt training progress.

Just like in the building search, detection can be first deconstructed into three components: the start, the search (hunting), and the alert (final response). In this article I will explain to you how we conduct the training at our academy, and why we may do things a little differently than you may be used to.

Pre-Requisite: The Role of Obedience

When starting out with a green dog, we prefer to have as little obedience on the dog as possible, as obedience if too stringently pressed with a young dog, can detract from the independence we need in the dog's hunting. Many classes start with obedience drills and we just don't do it that way. I want the dog's drive work to be well developed, his hunting and searching in detection, tracking and bitework must be confident and developed before we start putting limits on the behaviors with too much control.

Having said this, we do need at least one obedience command in detection, and that is for the final response in a passive dog, which is traditionally a "sit." However, training the dog to sit out of drive will not help you when you need to get the dog to perform the sit in a high state of drive, which is where the dog will be at the point of finding the target odor. At our academy, we call this process training "sits in drive." We start by training the dog to sit, usually with a food reward, out of drive as the first level of the dog understanding the sit command. Once we add the distraction of the dog's favorite toy, which is his motivation to hunt for the contraband, this exercise changes drastically. We must now get the dog to understand that he is to sit when he is in a high state of drive. When we have progressed through the sit command, out of drive first, just with food, and gone through the learning stages of acquisition, fluency and generalization, and taught the dog to understand how to process corrections at the right time, we can then focus on teaching sits in drive.

TRAINING K9S:

**BY JERRY
BRADSHAW**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEREK CAIN

We must start in levels, going from lower intensity rewards to higher intensity rewards. Food is usually a lower value reward relative to a toy, and will incite a lower intensity prey response. If the dog's favorite toy is too enticing, pick a toy he likes but that is not such a draw. This will put him in a less intense state of prey drive when asking for the sit behavior. Many dogs get "prey blind" or "locked up" when in a high state of prey, so we want to get the dog to show the sit behavior gradually, using the toy to reward correct responses. If we have to correct the dog for not sitting, at first we want to guide him with the corrections before going too hard at him with a correction. Even if we must use the leash and collar to correct, we still reward the dog when successful. He must understand that correct responses always get a reward at this stage. Assume the dog is in progressive states of understanding and use your tools appropriately.

We normally tease the dog on a short leash, leash in the left hand, toy in the right, making him miss it once or maybe twice, and then ask for the sit (which we taught him with food) when the toy is put behind the back out of sight. If the dog sits successfully, release and drop the toy in front of him. Play a few seconds and then take it away. Start again, getting his level of intensity a little higher and ask for the sit. If he doesn't sit, use the leash to guide him into a sit the first few times before making an actual correction, always rewarding him when he gets his butt on the ground.

We continue this sit in drive process up to the toy the dog likes most, and when the toy is in sight usually on the ground in front of him. This is important because when we teach the



detection alert on the reward from source boxes, both the toy and the target odor will be paired together and it will be in front of him just below nose level. Understand that it is not worth skimping on the sits in drive. If you end up teaching the final response to a highly driven dog and you have to correct him at the alert box too hard, you can create an avoidance response in odor that will haunt you for a long time and really set your progress back.

I also suggest you wait to train the sit in drive (you can do the motivational sits for food right away) until you have done some hunting work with the dog. When you do start training sits in drive, if possible do it away from areas where you do your

detection training. Never lead with obedience when it comes to detection work. You may have had it pounded into your head that obedience is the foundation of good police K-9 work, and I will tell you that is complete nonsense. What catches bad guys is well developed drive work. Obedience if done too soon makes for hesitancy. If your dog's default behavior is to be obedient, it will cause cross over effects into all his other work, making him more tentative about exercises that rely on his independence and full expression of his drives. Dogs that half search cars on a stop because they are worried about being in heel position or dogs that won't search in front of you and are handler dependent in



As the dog gains comfort with the process, you should vary the environments where the dog hunts.



If you recall from the other articles in the series, for searching we make use of the process of “Hot, Warm and Cold” to get the dog to search for the odor on command from the handler. We use hide placement to build the desire to hunt and to teach the dog where the productive areas are in the search areas, so the dog uses his nose to explore these productive areas where in training the dog has previously found his reward. As we move through the training progression of the starts (trainer activation to handler activation and from HOT to WARM to COLD), just remember the importance we need to pay to the hunting behavior.

One of the variables we need to work on is where the dog hunts. As the dog gains comfort with the process, you should vary the environments where the dog hunts. I recommend using vehicles early and often as they are great self-contained search areas. Portions of rooms, and then rooms, schools, warehouses, and storage facilities are great environments. When your dog hunts well on cars, start adding in variables such as hunting cars in parking lots with people around like in a shopping center parking lot. Then on the side of roads with minimal traffic, up to roads with heavier traffic. Remember to only change one variable at a time and know where you are in the training progression so you don’t do too much too soon.

Variables you need to adjust during training are height, depth, temperature, ventilation (at first control it if you can and then later make the dog work in areas where you cannot control the ventilation).

building searches or on tracks, or dogs that anticipate recalls, are created by poorly timed and ill-conceived obedience training.

Once the dog is hunting like a champ for decoys, tracking with a deep nose and confidence and independently searching away from you in detection, with focus and understands these tasks completely, you can begin folding good obedience training into your training. Not yank and crank obedience, but well-conceived, thoughtful training that will preserve the drives of the dog and hold him to a standard of performance needed to pass certifications and be reliable in deployments. Everything should take place in its proper time.

Hunting: The Searching Portion of the Exercise

In the components of the start, search, and the alert, the “search” or the hunting the dog must do is the most essential piece of the sequence. The final response will be an obedience command we teach later, the start is fairly easy to teach as I just explained, so for me the hunting is what separates the best detection dogs from the average ones. We want the dog to hunt and keep hunting. The purpose of this article is not to teach you how to train detection dogs, but rather how to think of training them in a component training process, whatever your methodology.



Training the Start

The way we start the dog in detection is meant to give a cue to the dog about what we are doing. We begin with what we call trainer activation, where the dog starts the search by first being teased by a 2nd trainer. The first trainer holds the dog's long line (normally a 15 footer). This 2nd trainer will get the dog excited into a high state of drive before the dog is released to search. Over time this will morph into what we call handler activation, where we remove one of the two trainers from the equation. Most people think the trainer holding the leash is the "handler" and the trainer

tapping around is just that - a trainer assisting (like the decoy in the building search). But actually the trainer doing the tapping can easily become the handler of the dog by simply starting the dog with a presentation. The dog is allowed to start the search and the "tapper" takes the line and becomes the handler as the process advances, throwing in a presentation when needed, managing the search pattern in general. After doing this for a while, passing the dog to the "tapper," we can begin cold starts by simply having whomever brings the dog to the search area show the dog the toy, making some circles to the right, making him miss the toy

a couple times, and flow into the search area where the pipe with the target odor is hiding. Just as in the building search, when transitioning to these cold starts (without the tapping in the search area), make the search simple and obvious so the dog can start hunting and be rewarded quickly. This will solidify the dog to become handler activated without relying on the "agitation" from the tapper and will mimic an actual search for narcotics. We finish off the start eventually by making the dog miss a couple times and then asking the dog to sit/stay, capping the dog's hunt drive and then releasing it with the search command and the first presentation!



The placement of the hides is of critical importance.

HOT Starts

We start the hunting training using a PVC pipe with odor in it. We can adjust the process if the dog doesn't like PVC to use a ball or Kong, but we prefer when doing a group of dogs, to use the same reward toy to make the training process go faster. After a couple throws with the dog just retrieving the object, we begin doing free-hunting drills in tall grass, indoors in a big pile of cardboard boxes and suitcases. Let the dog see the object, and toss into tall grass or into a sea of boxes. The dog is given the search command. This is a hot search, just like when we had the decoy in a building search agitate the dog and run into a single room.

The point here is to get the dog to go forward and use his nose to locate the toy with the odor associated. When the dog grabs the pipe with the odor, we allow him to carry it. Play with him with it in his mouth to let the associative odor permeate into the dog's olfactory system. We repeat the drill 4-5 times.

WARM Starts

After about a week of this, we move to the warm searches using what we call "Tap and Hide". Here we take the pipe with target odor and hide it in an area in a room or on a vehicle. The placement of the hides is of critical importance. Just like the building searches, decoy placement teaches the dog to look to productive areas. Where we hide the odor in these beginning drills will teach the dog to search high and low, shallow and deep and be rewarded early in the hunt or later in the hunt. If we have say 4 areas where we place hides, one might be very early in the search, one further into the search area, and one in the middle, ending with one at the beginning. This teaches the dog that there is value to continuing to hunt.

If he doesn't find it fast, it is likely to be further on. Sometimes he finds it at the first spot presented.

The dog is taken to the search area, one trainer holds the dog and the other trainer taps around with a blank pipe (we call this type of start trainer activation), exciting the dog. It is important to not cue the dog as to where the pipe will be found. The trainer taps around the area, moving away from the dog and then moving to the beginning of the search area, gives the command, and as the hand comes down to present where the dog is to start, the dog is released by the trainer holding the line. The line is held up out of the dog's way and the presenting trainer fades into the search area and then away from the objects in the room, so the dog is hunting without presentation, independently. Fight the urge to assist him as much as possible. The dog will learn through self-discovery to hunt hard and for a long time.

Allow the dog to work the odor. He should have some familiarity from the first week of hunting in the tall grass. When he finds it, make a big deal and one or both of the trainers can play with the dog.

The dog is asked to release and the pipe is put back into the same place and the dog is moved to the next search area. The trainer taps around and the dog searches on his own again. Doing it this way teaches the dog to move from one find to the next and not become obsessed with the area where he first found the reward pipe. Over time we extend the permeation time and give the dog breaks between watching the trainer tap around and being asked to start the search, just as we did in the transition to cold starts from warm starts in building searches.

COLD Starts

In a cold search, the training aid is set out to permeate. The handler takes the dog to the search area, makes some misses with the toy getting the dog up in drive, and then asks for a sit. The “sit” is meant to “Cap the Drive,” using the obedience to hold in the desire and allow it to really build before releasing the dog to express that drive. In real life detection, unlike in a real life building search, you can stimulate the dog at the start of the search every time with his toy which then goes out of sight as you flow into the first presentation. This makes the transition to the cold start really easy.

The Final Response: The Final Component

When you embark on training the final response, you must have already trained sits in drive, and have the dog’s hunting at a high level of intensity. The obedience that you will now demand at the odor source and the process of using reward from source boxes will have a stunting effect on the dog’s hunting. By giving the dog a small number of options to hunt (starting with one box and then progressing to additional boxes, some blank and one hot) we make it really easy for the dog to get to the source and as such, we eliminate a lot of the difficulty for the dog so we can concentrate on the behavior at source. If the dog’s hunting behavior has already been well developed, we can return to a high level of hunting behavior as soon as we get through the alert training.

Many trainers start with odor imprinting on the boxes. I experimented with this approach once with a fair number of dogs to see if I can make the process faster.

With all component training, you approach a complex chain of behavior, such as a detection search, a track, a building search or obedience routine by breaking them down into smaller pieces (components) and training them individually.

What I found was I got the alerts and the odor recognition trained quicker, but it had the side effect of also making the dogs more handler dependent on presentation and the dogs were less independent in their hunting. Everything in dog training is choices and tradeoffs. I prefer to take a little more time developing hunting and stamina in hunting as I work from hot to warm to cold, and train the alerts last when my dogs are all hunting powerfully with a lot of stamina. It makes going back to this level that much easier.

After we train the final response on the four hole variable system, we put the boxes back out into the search areas, blank boxes, boxes with distractor odors (some with plastic bags, balls, kongs, PVC), and move right back into asking the dog to hunt, and instead of finding a pipe containing his odor, he must final respond on the hidden and inaccessible odor source. The odors are then moved into other hiding places with both blank areas and areas with target odor.

Putting it all Together

With all component training, you approach a complex chain of behavior, such as a detection search, a track, a building search or obedience routines by breaking them down into smaller



pieces (components) and training them individually. The four articles in this series touched on keys to successfully training the pieces and then putting the components together. In evaluating your dog’s training, think of breaking his performances down into these components and ask yourself where the dog is strongest and what components can use some building. Simplify the problem by making some of the components easy (such as removing the hunting to train the alert in detection) so you can focus your efforts on the component you are teaching or if your dog has a weakness, building that component stronger. If after reading this article you think your dog’s hunting behavior



in detection needs some building, take a few steps back and do not be afraid to go back to some hot or warm starts to increase the dog's drive and desire to hunt with some stimulation. Then carefully wean out of the stimulation back to cold starts using the gradual elimination of the stimulation as explained in this and the other articles after working on the problem area. Knowing how a training progression works and knowing your dog was component trained, will make a huge difference when you have to remediate any part of a complex chain of behavior. You can always break the issue down and go back to the fundamentals and make improvements.

If your dog is getting sloppy on his final response, simplify your starts and your hunting and do repetitions of alerts where you can isolate the problem area and get repetitions of successful final responses that you can reward.

The beauty of component training is that understanding it makes it easier to problem solve weaknesses in your dog's performance on the street. Suppose your dog is getting out on car stops a little distracted and isn't beginning the search with intensity. You can isolate the problem (start) and practice repetitions of traffic stops, but make the hunting super easy, placing the target odor within a couple feet of where you

begin the sniff on the vehicle, with a long permeation time, and when he is successfully starting with intensity, make a big deal rewarding him. If your dog is locking up on the final response, go back to some sits in drive foundation, away from detection, and make sure that the dog is still quick to give you this behavior. After some remediation on sits in drive, again set up an easy search so you can concentrate on the final response being correct and getting a big reward, multiple times. Too often we do training in a cookie cutter fashion with all dogs doing the same problems. With a little focus on components, we can make the problem tailored to each dog's specific needs. ■