

Restraining Canine Drives: Capping and Neutrality, Part 2

by Jerry Bradshaw

(NOTE: Part 1 of this 2-part series appeared in the Spring 2016 issue of the Canine Professional Journal.)

Drive Neutrality

There are times in training where we need to not just cap drive temporarily, but reduce the dog's arousal in prey to a lower level. In the sport of PSA (Protection Sports Association) for example, decoys are present on the obedience field. In PSA 1, the decoy sits in a chair in a full suit during the routine, and the dog heels past the decoy a couple times before performing a down about 2 feet in front of the decoy prior to the recall exercise. During the down the decoy will toss distractions in front of and behind the dog. The mere existence of the decoy on the field creates prey attraction. The decoy moves during the distraction throw as well.

In PSA 2, there are 2 decoys standing and moving around the field, talking to the handler as they move. The handler must negotiate a figure 8 around the decoys, and food refusal, heeling, and changes of pace with the decoys on either side shadowing the handler's movement and passing in front and behind the dog multiple times are tested. On stationary exercises like down in motion followed by change of positions and a recall to heel, the decoys will position themselves near the dog, walking around and tossing balls to one another, and various other movements of a "non-agitating" variety. Decoys will stand beside the jumps as the dog is called over them. This is a higher level of attraction than the PSA 1.

In the PSA 3 obedience routine, the highest level of prey attraction, the decoys can make eye contact with the dog, agitate, run at full speed near and by the dog in any position, incite both prey and defense reactions, and the dog must be neutral to it all. Heel means heel, and down

means down, no matter what is happening in the environment.

In order to succeed in this kind of environment, the dog cannot merely be capped (see Part 1 for information), as the incitement of the drives is steady and unrelenting throughout the routine. The dog must actually learn that the decoys are irrelevant to him unless told otherwise. No matter how enticing, they are not to be considered options for biting. Trainers reward instead with toys throughout the routines, bleeding off drive, and the dog must become satisfied with these rewards. The trainer is basically deconditioning the dog to the arousal a decoy would normally elicit.

The process of drive neutrality with respect to the decoys is a process of systematic desensitization. The dog's drive is channeled into the toys for correct obedience responses and the dog is never allowed to fixate nor have the decoys. As training progresses, the dog may be given a bite on the decoy and then have to come back under control for more obedience. This is referred to in IPO (Schutzhund) as "secondary" obedience. In PSA there is no "secondary" obedience per se. In training well, we create neutrality unless otherwise commanded. The knife edge one must balance for success at the PSA 3 level is a sharp one, and part of the reason there are only 14 dogs that have passed both legs of their PSA 3 in the 15 years of the sport's existence.

This process of creating drive neutrality takes time. Exposure to decoys, varying the level of attraction, with both subdued decoy behavior at first and spatial management of the proximity of the decoys and thus finding thresholds of arousal we can manage. We reward neutral behavior often and systematically. In any process of systematic desensitization, there are two key variables. First, we must know the dog's triggers

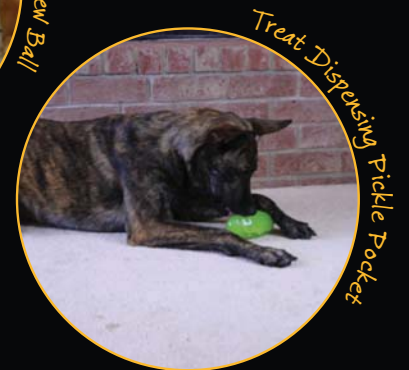
(the stimulus that triggers his prey behavior into a high state of arousal) and second, understand where his thresholds are for these triggers. A dog actively engaged in attention heeling for which the movement of the dog and handler team allows some natural bleed off of prey intensity may allow for closer proximity of decoys, all else being equal. In sit stays, all else equal, the dog may not be able to tolerate the same level of decoy behavior and remain stable, so the trainer may need to manage both spatial proximity to the decoys creating a larger buffer between the dog and decoys, as well as considering where she places herself. The social drive aspect of the trainer's influence via rewards and corrections matters here too, and is an additional variable to consider. Double handling (requiring social dogs who can be handled by a 3rd party) as well as lots of back-tie training where we do not allow the dog to make bad decisions that satisfy their drives is in order in this training. Systematically, we desensitize the dog not to prey drive, but to

the triggers, objects and behaviors on the part of the decoys that cause the prey arousal to a high state of intensity. The part that keeps the dog on the knife's edge is that in the protection phase, the dog will have to also demonstrate obedience but is allowed to bite these decoys in protection (and bites are allowed in PSA 3 obedience routines as well) and so the attraction to them enhances with every bite session. This requires the dog to constantly practice neutrality, not make its own decisions, and understand that the trainer controls all access to the decoys.

In pet training, when we have dogs that arouse in prey on cars, bicycles and joggers, the elements of teaching drive neutrality are the same as for the performance dog, though we have slightly less control of the stimuli. If they arouse to defense at the proximity of strangers or other dogs showing aggression, the process of drive neutrality trained by systematic desensitization is also the proper way to modify the behavior. We must know what is actually causing the dog to enter the state of

THINK, PLAY, LEARN

Starmark's treat dispensing toys give dogs challenging and tough outlets to combat boredom and spark mental stimulation.



STARMARK[®]
TRAINING & BEHAVIOR SOLUTIONS

See our full product range and free behavior solutions, guides, and videos online at starmarkacademy.com.

drive intensity (stimulus), prey or defense or both, and then systematically desensitize the dog to those things by varying approach to the threshold and rewarding alternate behavior in a calmer, non aggressive or intense state (usually we choose an obedience behavior we can reward that is incompatible with prey or defensive aggression).

Systematic desensitization can be somewhat time consuming, and requires the trainer to both reward good behavior and hold a standard of performance firmly, correcting departures from good behavior, if they occur, as long as the corrections do not further cause conflict or aggression as can be the case when systematically desensitizing defensive behaviors. Thankfully, with pet dogs the drive intensities are often somewhat lower (though not always). Teaching the dog what it is to be in a non-aroused state is often necessary, as much of what a frightened dog faces just in daily life can elicit a defensive reaction. Getting a baseline of good obedience behaviors is critical. The dog will learn he is safe and sound while performing these behaviors (no threat will molest you in your

stays or during heeling). These trained behaviors can often provide the fearful dog a state of being that is comfortable and relaxed. While engaged in these obedience behaviors, the dog can extend these safe feelings to other triggers and move the threshold of defensive arousal (proximity to perceived threats), making the dog more neutral to common encounters so that he need not perceive threats in normal human behaviors and normal proximities. In effect, the dog is not tasked with making the decisions about what to do with this person coming closer to him. He just needs to hold a stay, or heel position, and all is safe. The same must be done with prey driven pet dogs: systematic desensitization to those attractions as we would exactly do with the PSA performance dog. We start with drive capping in some situations at first, extending to drive neutrality through systematic desensitization over time.

Modifying Behavior

We are fortunate if we can create the habits we want through conditioning dogs that are young.



K9 Lifeline, LLC - SLC, UTAH
801-272-1159
K9lifelineinfo@gmail.com
www.k9lifeline.net

K9 Lifeline's Dog Days of Summer Workshops! We have a jam packed schedule of dog training workshops throughtout the summer, come join us!

Skin and Coat Care Workshop
Featuring Michelle Knowles
July 29-31, 2016

3D Workshop Daycare Edition
August 2-3, 2016

3D Workshop
Featuring Jason Vasconi
August 25-28, 2016

Shadow Programs are also available!



DogWatch® 
TRAINING PRODUCTS
Smart products for today's pets.™

the Bark Collar™ NO-BARK TRAINER
the BigLeash™ REMOTE TRAINER
the SideWalker™ LEASH TRAINER

www.DogwatchTrainingProducts.com

Drives are instinctual, and a prey driven dog that reacts to movement (be it cars or chasing a ball) is not created by us, it just is. However, it is the continual repetition of those stimulus-response-reinforcement opportunities that burn in the neural pathways and wrap them in myelin that create strong habits, faster responses, and quicker firing of these neural pathways without hesitation, whether good or bad. Knowing this, we have power to create good habits and redirect possible trouble in young dogs with early training intervention, where systematic desensitization and counter conditioning can be made more easily, before the neural trail is burned in strongly. When behavioral responses are clear and strong to certain stimuli, it will take more time and effort to change them.

The performance dog that is taught to bite equipment like sleeves and suits has a neural pathway burned in when he sees a sleeve or bite suit, and thus systematic desensitization is harder the longer this process has gone on and the more fluent the response. Managed drive capping may produce beautiful results in some situations, but in

others, for different sports or pet training situations, drive neutrality may need to be created. These techniques, once mastered, are used in all areas of training, and training a competition dog will help you master these techniques for your pet clients.

*Jerry Bradshaw is the Owner of Tarheel Canine Training in Sanford, NC. His experience and progressive training methods have made Tarheel Canine an industry leader in training and service. Jerry is co-founder of the civilian protection sport PSA (www.psak9.org) and the Police K9 Certification organization known as the National Tactical Police Dog Association NTPDA (www.tacticalcanine.com). Jerry is the author of *Controlled Aggression*, and the forthcoming book, *Commonsense Pet Training*. Jerry and his trainers have appeared on CNN, Good Morning America, and in many regional and National print publications.*

Additional Reading

Bradshaw, Jerry. Environmental Challenges: Basic Systematic Desensitization for Police Dogs. K9 Cop Magazine. November/December 2013.

Bradshaw, Jerry. The Talented K9 Trainer: Becoming an Expert Handler or Trainer. The Journal. Winter, 2015.

The Protection Sports Association. www.psak9.org

iaccp



"Our Customer Service will jump to serve you and your clients. Join our team and be a part of the fastest growing e-collar company in the World."



No Minimums - No Shipping Fees - Same Day Shipments - All IACP Members Qualify as Dealers