

## Alaska Retriever Club Swim-By Clinic

Welcome RCA, AWRC and MSGDA members to the first Joint Alaska Retriever Club Swim-By Clinic! The purpose of this clinic is to demonstrate a structured swim-by program and provide trainers who train their own dog with information to aid in training their dog. All participants need to be aware there are numerous methods used for teaching the “Swim-By”. Therefore, with that said, the procedure demonstrated is a very commonly used method. However, it is not the only method for developing a solid water foundation for your dog. One particular method may not work in entirety for your dog and there is a very good possibility that a trainer will need to make adjustments to suit their particular dog and situation.

As with all Retriever Training, there are certain pre-requisite skills that must be solid prior to introducing and teaching the Swim-By. To attempt to introduce a dog to Swim-By prior to having these skills to build on is not only foolish; it will most likely create problems that may haunt you dog the rest of his or her days.

### Pre-requisites prior to Introducing Swim-By

#### A. General

1. Rock Solid Obedience (will sit on the whistle immediately every time)
2. Force Fetched
3. Collar Conditioned

#### B. Land

1. Performs Multiple Marks (At the very least Doubles)
2. Structured Yard Program Complete
  - a. Force to Pile (Land)
  - b. Line to Pile
  - c. Wagon Wheel
  - d. ALL “T” and Casting Drills Complete
    - (i) Clean Sit Whistle without Refusal or Coasting
  - e. Disciplined Casting
3. Able to do Pattern Blinds on Land Reasonably Well.

#### C. Water

1. Very comfortable in the water with Non-Cheating Singles
2. Basic “T” type casting in the water.
3. Comfortable “in” and “around” the water!

The Swim-by is an important pre-cursor to teaching and conditioning your dog for water honesty. Skills developed through Swim-By provide the trainer with a tool to make corrections in the water. **YOUNG DOGS AT THIS POINT SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO THE OPPORTUNITY TO RUN THE BANK!**

## The Swim-By

by Dennis Voigt

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The Swim-by is a fundamental step in the Basics portion of the program currently used by many successful retriever trainers across the continent. It gets its name from the skill developed by the dog at the end of the lessons: swimming by the handler on command. The Swim-by generally follows the teaching of the Double-T on land. That step prepares the dog for several of the skills that the dog will develop in the water. The Swim-by is an important pre-cursor to teaching your dog about water channels and water cheating singles. Novices, seeing the Swim-by for the first time often question the process of Swim-by and why it is necessary. Experienced trainers have learned that the Swim-by produces a dog with a readiness to stay in the water and a dog with important skills that make teaching advanced water work much easier.

### **Purpose of the Swim-by**

It teaches handling skills in the water – view it as a single-T in water.

The process reinforces getting into the water since it exposes the dog to pressure (e-collar) to get in the water and to drive back while in the water.

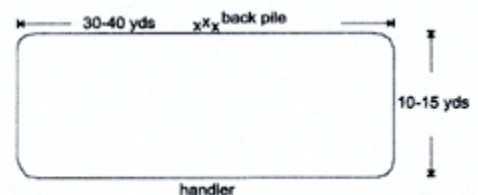
It teaches the dog to stop in the water, turn around and look for directions. It develops the skill of treading in water.

It teaches skills of staying in the water, casting into the water and being comfortable while swimming in the water near the shore (without getting out early).

It teaches the skills that are used to handle the dog into the water both on the way to the retrieve and just as importantly on the return from the retrieve.

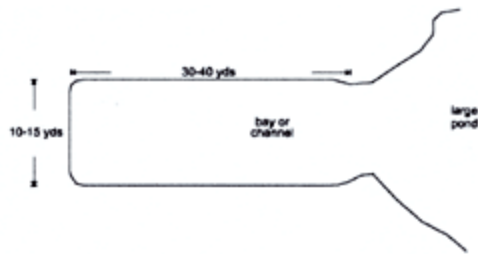
### **The Pond Requirements**

The correct size and shape of the pond is very important to teach the Swim-by effectively and efficiently. It is worth seeking the ideal pond. The ideal pond is rectangular and about 10-15 yards wide and 30-40 yards long (Fig. 1). It should be free of obstructions. It should have a clean shoreline of low cover and you should be able to walk around the edges. Avoid shallow edges.



**Figure 1**

A passable substitute is to use one end of a channel (perhaps a bay on a lake) that has the other required features (Fig. 2). This shape will require some special techniques to complete the Swim-by.



**Figure 2**

### Procedure

The following steps should be followed in sequence. Ideally, the Swim-by is taught in a series of daily lessons for maximum efficiency. Occasionally, I have done a second session in a day with a keen, willing young dog. Since there is repeated water work over a period of 15-30 minutes, do not teach the Swim-by until the water temperature is at least 60°F. I would also

avoid cold, raw, cloudy days even if the water is warm.

### Step 1. Lining to Pile

Identify a pile of about 10 **bumpers** 2-3' up on the shore across the pond by throwing one to it. I often allow the dog to watch me establish the pile either by walking around or tossing them across the pond. If you are not an accurate thrower do not toss them since you do not want a mess of **bumpers** all over the area, some in the water, some on land.

Send the dog on his name straight across the pond starting close to the edge. Repeat, lining across the pond using the command 'back'. Continue by mixing up sends from your side as well as remote sends with the dog facing you in front (front sit position). Your dog should be enthusiastically going and coming. Get a quick re-entry by blowing the **dog whistle** or commanding here, the instant the dog reaches the **bumper**. Shopping for bumpers should have been cleaned up on earlier land work. Remote sends should be varied from 10-20 feet from shore. Repeat this step a second day unless the first session went perfectly.

### Step 2. Forcing to the Pile

This step involves the use of the **electronic dog training collar** to reinforce the 'back' command both on land and in the water. Start the session by marking the pile and giving 2-3 freebies. Put your dog in a remote sit front finish position 10-20' from the water's edge. Command 'back' and just after the dog has turned, nick and then repeat the command 'back'. Use momentary mode or a very quick nick on the continuous mode. Use a level lower than you used on land force to the pile. (Example: if you forced on land with a level 5, high momentary, use level 5 medium or low.) The procedure now is to mix-up freebie sends with forced sends and nicks on land with nicks in the water. I do about 2 forces on land for each force on water, 2 freebies for each force, and 2 remotes for each side send. Read your dog and watch for bugging, no-goes, flaring problems. These should have been dealt with on land but they may reoccur here. React to hints of their reoccurrence by adding freebies, more remote sends or lowering intensity and duration. Your goal is not to avoid the force but to avoid bad habits, poor attitude and too much concern by the dog.

The response that you desire is a stable one with compulsion to go. This indicates your dog accepts the pressure, understands what it is for and what to do in response to the command. This is ideal. In my experience, you can achieve this better by teaching and balancing your sequence and application of pressure than you can by gritting your teeth and forcing your dog through every mistake or problem. The solid sit with a clear anticipation of going may come after only 3 forces, but usually it is not evident for 5-10 or more forces on 2 days.

Generally, I would only spend two days on the force to the pile step, unless problems escalate. If a mess does occur, consider going back to a land pile to iron out.

I am aware of Swim-by horror stories in which dogs have nearly drowned or quit retrieving during this and later stages of the Swim-by. That is not only totally unacceptable, it illustrates a crude and unsophisticated approach to training. Either such dogs should not be trained for this work or the trainer needs a giant wake-up call on their methods.

### Step 3. Stopping to Whistle and Treading Water

On day 3 or 4 and after step 2 is finished, start once again by identifying the pile and lining across a couple of times. On the next send, stop your dog with a **dog whistle** sit when half-way across en route. Be prepared for a quick second whistle and even a verbal "sit". Your goal now is to get your dog to turn around sharply and look at you while treading water in the same spot. You can help this by focusing on your dog and showing great interest. Small gestures or movements can be conveyed to get your dog to think that you are about to do something. I might even step the opposite way if a dog looks like it may turn one way. I might say "look" (or whatever you used in the yard to get them to watch you). Some dogs will tread naturally, some will want to turn, some will come-in and some will simply sink lower and lower in the water. Try to make progress here each time you stop by gradually increasing the tread and "stare at me" time. First, a few seconds before you cast and gradually increase 5-10 seconds. Such eye contact can be rewarded with a "good dog". Turns back require an immediate sit whistle. Swim-ins require a "back" followed by a later stop. Try to counter any tendency to not tread but reinforce any tread success. Since the emphasis here is teaching a new skill, I avoid the use of the collar. It's too easy for the dog to get the wrong idea, not relax or perhaps panic. Remember your use of the collar in this location, up until now, has been to drive back.

What about the dog who won't stop? First, try the whistle stop earlier, perhaps with a loud verbal command. If this fails and the dog has driven through twice, you may have to resort to a rope. If you have never used a rope near water, it's best to get someone who has to help you. Ropes can get tangled and confuse or panic some young dogs so some caution is warranted. A better alternative might be to go back to land for a refresher course in which you stop a dog en route to a pile 2X (and then immediately go to the swim-by pond). After this, I might introduce a sit, nick, sit if the dog stopped but then insisted on driving back.

### Step 4. Teaching the Over and the Exit

Finally, we get to the Swim-by part of the drill. This should only start after 1. good lining straight across, 2. good responses of compulsion to being forced en route, and 3. ability to turn on the whistle and tread water. After the usual freebie start, whistle stop your dog half-way and give a right-over cast. After your dog turns, toss a **bumper** to the right in the middle of the pond (location A, Fig. 3).

Try to avoid being seen but don't worry if that doesn't work. Your dog is likely to turn back with your over since that is what he has been doing until now. Simply repeat the sit and cast or toss the **bumper** and repeat the sit and cast over. As soon as your dog heads for the bumper, run down the opposite shore to exit L so that when your dog turns he sees you there. Your job now is to get him to swim down the middle of the pond and exit EXACTLY at L. Do whatever you have to with body language, casts, whistles and heres to accomplish this first exit. When he gets there, act like he just won the lottery with lots of 'okay, good dog' and excitement.

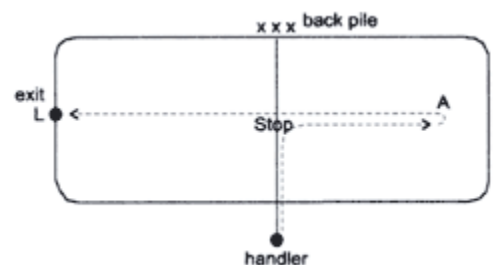


Figure 3

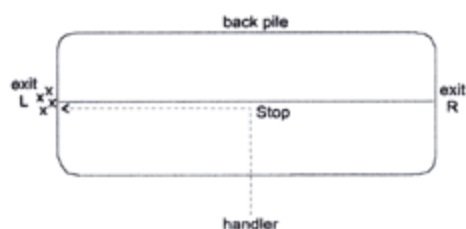
Return to the line and give a freebie across.

Again send across, stop in the middle, cast over, throw a bumper to A and repeat the swim to the L and that exit.

Repeat the entire sequence again, but this time start walking down the shore as the dog swims the exit line, using your left over cast and verbals to guide your dog. View this as if you are herding your dog down the exit line. Perhaps you'll need a little toot-toot if he cuts back to the far shore or a back cast or 45° over if he cuts in. Ideally, your dog has had disciplined casting in the Double-T (casting over and back with a bumper in the mouth) so this step should not be too problematic. I have enticed a dog into doing the Swim-by before his Double-T disciplined casting was done and although it was possible, it is a lot easier if you've done your earlier homework.

On the next day put a right over pile on shore. After lining across, cast to the right and then try to get the dog to swim the L exit line while you stay stationary. Keep your arm down only putting it up to give the left over. By the end of this session you can start to introduce the collar with a nick. For the dog that drives back, give a sit-whistle, nick, whistle and repeat the over. When a dog swims in and looks at you, often a quick over-nick will straighten that out. This is no time for heavy corrections, just a few gentle momentary nicks to get the dog to give you some attention and compulsion to try.

Once you have perfected the right cast and the left over ("Swim-by") exit, it is usually a simple matter to do the reverse Swim-by. Establish a left over pile and after stopping at the mid-point, cast left and then help your dog to get the right Swim-by by walking along and casting over. For the first time be sure to get the exit at the correct location (R).



**Figure 4**

You should be able to establish this Swim-by quite quickly.

If you were forced to use an open ended channel pond (Fig. 2), you will have to move across to the other side and cast to the left and then right swim-by. Unfortunately, the dog is really exiting at the same spot so he has not generalized the response very much.

With a left and right swim-by possible while you remain stationary, you have finished not only the Swim-by but the BASICS portion of the program. I like to do 2 final steps before declaring this significant milestone. First is to go to a place where there are 2 or more Swim-by ponds in a row and establish an extended Swim-by (Fig. 5).

If you can't find this, at least go to another Swim-by pond or water channel and do a Swim-by. You may find some confusion the first time but help and teach before you apply pressure . . . The application of the new skills by your dog should come soon.

### **Making the exit special**

An important part of achieving the Swim-by is how you treat the dog when he does exit at the correct location. After the accomplishment of the correct exit, it is very valuable to signal that success excitedly with an enthusiastic "Okay!" and much praise. Make this a big signal for a big event. The second tip is to start to extend the 'over' further on to land, perhaps as much as 40 yards. This is often quite easy since it relies on the same disciplined casting skills on land that were taught in Double-T. I have found that once a dog has done a Swim-by and Run-by well up

onto land, then the swim to the water exit becomes easier. Perhaps the focus on the destination well up on land helps the dog think further over.



**Figure 5**

### **Tips for teaching turning in water**

Many dogs have a tendency to turn only one way in the water after you whistle sit. This tendency may or may not also be pronounced on land. Sometimes that tendency can be dealt with in the early yard work when teaching 3-handed casting with the aid of a rope or lunge line. The stop to whistle in the Swim-by is the first time your dog may show his propensity in water to turn a certain direction. If you observe this early enough to counter one-way turning, it might be easier eventually to teach your dog to turn away from shore.

Observe which way your dog is prone to turn and move down the shore a few feet the opposite way before giving your cast. The sound of the whistle coming off to one side of your dog's shoulder often results in a turn in that direction. I have recently had some success with this and suggest its consideration for those who wish to pursue this refinement.

The stop to whistle and tread lesson may be accomplished in one session but it may take 2-4 days. Remember throughout this lesson to mix in lots of freebies of lining straight across.