

**Wildrose Kennel**  
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**Delivery to Hand - Part II**  
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As the pre-training days of puppyhood draw to an end and the long anticipated beginning of formal retriever training approaches, be alert to a factor that can negatively effect the development of the natural hold-- the shedding of puppy teeth. When the adult teeth begin to arrive, the pup's gums become quite sensitive. This usually occurs between 4 and 5.5 months of age. All retriever training should be terminated for the duration of this period or the pup may develop the dysfunctional habit of dropping the bumper due to discomfort. They may even resort to chewing on the object.

**When to Start**

As progression begins to lead us into a formal training process, usually at about 6 to 7 months, worry little about repetitive, meaningless retrieves or stylish delivery. Focus on obedience conditioning providing only a few retrieves each week to keep up enthusiasm for both you and the pup. If the pup is unnecessarily dropping or mouthing the bumper, discontinue retrieving. Don't reward dysfunctional behavior with additional retrieves. You will only condition in problems that must be corrected later.

As the pup returns from a retrieve, coming in directly in front of you, accept the bumper by placing your hand under the pup's chin and lightly stroke and scratch the chin and back of the head simultaneously to encourage the hold. If the pup drops the bumper, don't become punitive or over-react. The pup's training progression and maturity determines when to begin hold conditioning, not age. Read your dog and don't begin too early. Here are some general guidelines as to when to start:

1. Pup is proficient on all obedience commands.
2. Pup is enthusiastic about retrieving.
3. Pup confidently enters and exits both shallow and deep water.
4. Pup readily responds to recall and stop whistles.
5. Pup enthusiastically crosses barriers; small jumps, logs, ditches, heavy cover, etc.
6. Pup locates bumpers or balls quickly in heavy cover.
7. Pup possesses a good attitude about training and has developed a trust in you, the handler.

It is very important that the dog responds immediately to the here/recall command, both verbal and to the whistle, from a distance of 50 yards prior to and during the delivery conditioning phase.

**The Beginning**

Eliminate all retrieving during the entire hold conditioning sequence. Continue to simultaneously work on items 1-7 with the exclusion of #2. Viable substitutes are non-retrieve exercises including sit to the flush, steadiness, honoring, recall past diversions, etc.

It is helpful to have a small, stable table to elevate the dog to waist height. A truck

tail gate or picnic table will suffice. Let your dog become familiar and comfortable elevated for a couple of days prior to beginning. Trust and confidence is important. Tie the pup securely as to eliminate evasive movement. Note this very important point, once the process is begun it must be continued each day in one to two, 5 to 10 minute sessions until the entire process is complete. Sessions should consist of about 5 repetitions.

#### Sequence 1

To avoid spoiling your pup's enthusiasm for training dummies, use a wooden dowel as the hold object. A wood hammer handle will suffice. Secure the pup on the table by the collar to prevent movement or lying down. Reach across the bridge of the dog's nose to open the mouth and insert the dowel just behind the canine teeth. Place one hand just behind the head on the neck, the other applies light pressure upward under the lower jaw to assure closure. Be sure to clear lips from between teeth and dowel to prevent pinching. Keep a calm soothing voice tone and stroke the pup gently. As the pup begins to understand what is being asked, begin repeating the command, "hold," and gradually release the pressure on the lower jaw. Short repetitions at first with lots of praise for small successes will produce results. Voice tone is very effective in communicating satisfaction or displeasure in this process. Positive reinforcement for results, no matter how small, is far more effective than the application of force for long-term compliance.

Now introduce the release command, "drop," "dead," "give," etc. just be consistent. Insure that the pup understands to maintain the grip until the release command is given. The objective in sequence 1 is to have the pup:

1. hold the dowel securely for at least 2 minutes continuously.
2. hold the dowel calmly while untied on the table.
3. continue to hold while you are absent from sight for brief periods.
4. totally understand the command, "hold," and the release command.
5. hold securely as you approach and touch or tap the dowel.

#### Sequence 2

Next we re-enforce the same skills while the dog is seated, untied on the ground. After a few sessions the dog should be relaxed while holding the object securely as you walk about, touch the dog, or create minor distractions. The outcome of this sequence is to be able to approach the dog, touch the dowel and command the release. We often conduct this drill with 3 to 4 dogs in group sessions with enhanced results.

#### Sequence 3

Now condition the pup to heel while holding the dowel. This may take a bit more effort as it involves the new dimension of movement. Here the outcome is to be able to heel the dog considerable distances with turns and the occasional sit for durations of 2 to 3 minutes. Involve crossing a few small obstacles as well.

#### Sequence 4

Put the dog in a sitting position, place the dowel in the mouth and command "hold." Walk a short distance away from the pup and call the pup to heel. Occasionally as the pup approaches, remind the pup to "hold." As the pup reaches you, have him finish to sit by your side or in front of you (your preference) and carefully take the dowel with the release command. Reward successful completion profusely with much excitement. Gradually extend the distance out to 50 yards and remember--- no retrieves as yet. If problems occur, simplify by shortening the distance or returning to hold/heel.

## Sequence 5

Now that the pup reliably delivers the dowel to hand from remote sit and makes a stylish recovery for delivery, we repeat the entire process using a small canvas or fire hose bumper--table, ground, heel, recall. This should progress quickly if preliminaries were properly instilled. Next, involve the carrying of a variety of objects from remote sit to hand delivery--weighted bumpers, dead fowl dummies, frozen birds of various sizes and finally freshly killed game.

Upon completion of #5, we should now have a pup who:

- Understands the "hold" and the release commands
- Delivers bumpers and birds to hand from remote sit
- Stylishly delivers to hand in a desirable finished position.

Ready for the test? Attempt a simple, straight, forward retrieve to demonstrate the result of your work. We want to discover if our conditioning has modified the behavior for the desired results of solidly picking up the bumper, holding the bumper while carrying it, delivering the bumper to hand and releasing the bumper properly. If so, we are ready for the final phase with no further retrieving at this point. If not, re-visit the appropriate sequence for further conditioning.

Our final phase of conditioning will take us to the field and water to transfer the newly-shaped behaviors of delivery to practical situations.