

Total Control: HALT!

(adapted from C. Tabel: "Der Jagdgebrauchshund")

Leafing through an old American hunting book, published in 1904, I was surprised to find a training method for "Whoa" that is widely used in Germany, but apparently has been long forgotten in America. The article's author termed it "down charge!", and it is equivalent to the German "Halt!" (strangely enough, many Germans use the English command "Down!" instead of the German "Halt!").

In the following, I'd like to describe an old, proven way to control a hunting dog under any circumstance, teach it to point, improve his steadiness to wing and shot, and to stop any unwanted chase. Carl Tabel, one of Germany's most experienced and successful trainers of versatile hunting dogs considers "HALT!" the most important command, because the dog learns to obey its handler in any situation. Any rebellion against the handler is smothered immediately, and the dog will work with you, - not against you.

When commanded "HALT", the dog is in a crouching position, with its head between both outstretched front paws and his body tightly pressed to the ground. The dog remains motionless in this position until released. This position has many advantages over the standing position of a "whoa"ed (standing) dog: first, whatever caused your dog's attention to wander is out of view when he's flat on the ground; secondly, a dog that is flat on the ground can be safely shot over, and thirdly, the dog acknowledges the handlers dominance and control in a natural way (submissive posture!). This submissive feeling is probably the greatest advantage of the HALT training, and nothing can be more counterproductive in this discipline than lax, playful or inconsistent training. In order to exert total control over the dog, "HALT" has to be taught with greatest determination and persistence. Your dog must be convinced that nothing in its life is of greater importance than to tightly press its body to the ground when commanded "HALT". Tabel recommends six training steps, which facilitate the practical teaching of this useful command:

(1) HALT without painful force, but persistent guidance.

From a sitting position, the dogs front paws are pulled forward with one hand while the other hand pushes the dog down by the neck (and pinch collar) and the handler command "HALT". Raising of the dog's hind quarters is prevented by the left hand of the handler across the kidney area of the dog, which can exert a painful pressure and hence convince the dog to remain prone. After 30-40 sec in this position the dog is released ("Here") and praised. Repeat several times. Purpose of this step is to teach the dog that the proper "HALT" position is the only safe position, and all discomfort ceases immediately when this position is assumed.

(2) HALT and remaining prone.

Once our student stops to resist by trying to get up, we slowly reduce the pressure of our hands, but keep our hands in position to immediately push him down again. Repeat until the dog remains calm and prone when hands are taken off and, finally when the handler stands above the dog. When you can stand next to the dog for a minute without him trying to lift the head you are ready for the next step:

(3) "HALT", dog goes down immediately when commanded.

Start with the dog sitting at heel, leashed with pinch collar. Holding a short crop in your right hand and pull leash under your foot with left hand. While sharply commanding "HALT", raise right hand with crop above head (visual command) and jerk the dog down with the other. Any resistance or attempts to get up are to be reprimanded by quickly applying the crop. The dog must learn to lie down immediately, like a folding jackknife. Now we pay attention to the exact and proper position of the dog: straight, resting on both hind legs (not just one ham), front paws stretched out with brisket, throat and lower jaw tightly pressed to the ground between both front legs. All these "details" are of great importance and neglecting them will create greater problems later! We always use the visual command (one hand straight up above head) in connection with the audio-signal, the word "HALT" (or DOWN) and the single blast of the trilling whistle.

(4) "Halt", handler at distance.

After our dog goes reliably and immediately down when commanded, we can start moving away from him. Initially, we start walking around the dog, facing him and holding the crop over his body, ready to correct any disobedience. Every attempt to lift the head immediately causes a sharp slap with the crop and the command "HALT!". Slowly, we increase the radius of the circle around the dog, step over the dog or start introducing distractions (helper calls, throws dummy etc). At all these exercises the dog is leashed (check chord) and equipped with a spike or pinch collar. Should the dog get up while we are at a distance, let him feel the spike collar while bringing him back to the place he was supposed to lie down. When the dog is able to remain at least 5 min motionless in this position, we can move to the next step:

(5) HALT from a standing position of while moving.

If steps 1-4 have been properly followed, then the dog should go down immediately even when walking. If we detect any hesitation, stepping on the leash (and thus applying the spike collar) and the crop will make the point clear immediately.

(6) HALT from a distance and with distractions.

When the "jackknife- reflex" has become our dog's second nature and when he happily responds to the release, we can start teaching HALT from a distance. At this point, the dog should not consider "HALT" an uncomfortable burden, but rather a strong habit which is followed gladly and timely. To teach HALT from a distance, we let the dog sit, stand or walk 2-4 yards in front of us, of course on the check cord.

When the dog is not suspecting the command, we give visual and audio-signals and a short, sharp jerk on the check chord. After a few repetitions and the prompt and proper response of the dog, we then introduce distractions. Children chasing chickens, a tame rabbit, thrown dummies etc are suitable to reinforce the HALT reflex. Lastly, we take the dog into the field, where we polish his obedience in front of game, shooting, etc. Now you can use HALT when birds flush from a point, hence deterring the dog from breaking on wing or shot.

Consequently, he'll point more intensively and staunchly. Or, you may simply use it to slow down the overenthusiastic dog on a drag, blood track or while quartering. You have now the tool to master your dog in all situations, and his style and performance will greatly increase.

All contents Copyright (c)1996 [Stephan G. Kohlmann](#)