

## **Transition (Blinds & Trail)**

### **Hunter/Intermediate/AKC Senior Yardwork**

#### **Blinds (land and water)**

##### **Walk out blinds**

- Walk out blinds are just that – you walk your dog out with you while you place a white blind pole in the ground and drop a bumper at the pole.
- Walk your dog a short distance away from the pole and the bumper.
- Set your dog up in heel position.
- Tell your dog 'dead bird'.
- When your dog is looking straight ahead and locked on, indicate he is correct.
- Then send your dog by telling your dog 'Back'.
- The distance you walk away will depend on your dog. If after you walk away and set your dog up to run the blind your dog is not intently focused on the pole and the bumper you have walked too far. Move up until you see your dog focus. This is your dog's first introduction to a blind retrieve and if you can only get six inches away from the pole and bumper, that's fine. A good 'blind dog' is a confident dog and a dog that trusts you. Build your dog's confidence and trust one step at a time.

##### **Sight blinds**

After you've built focus, confidence and trust with walk out blinds, you should progress to sight blinds.

Sight blinds are blinds that the dog sees you (or someone else) place but doesn't walk out with you to place.

If you are training alone, leave your dog in a sit.

- Walk out and place a blind pole in the ground and drop several bumpers at the pole.
- Walk back to your dog and stand at heel position.
- Tell your dog 'dead bird'. Your dog should focus on the blind pole and bumpers.
- When he is looking straight ahead and locked on, indicate he is correct.
- Tell your dog 'Back' and send your dog.

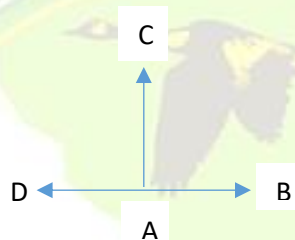
If you're training with someone:

- Have someone walk out to the pole.
- Tell your dog 'dead bird' and have your partner show (not toss) the bumper and place it on the ground by the pole.
- Have your helper walk away.
- After the blind is placed heel your dog in a tight circle to your left and set your dog back up facing the blind.
- When your helper is out of sight, tell your dog 'Back' and send your dog
- Tell your dog 'dead bird'. He should look straight out.
- Tell your dog 'Back' and send him.

**About blinds:** Keep in mind that dogs are visual learners. They learn best when shown. They take a mental picture of what they see. White blind poles teach your dog where to look and how to look out straight. White or black and white bumpers for blind work are critical during the early stages of teaching blinds. You will never see a white blind pole at a test but at this level you will very often see blinds placed at a point of natural visual reference, such as a tree, bush, etc. When you are teaching walk out and sight blinds, place your blind poles in front of a natural visual reference.

### Pattern Blinds

Dogs are easily trained to patterns and the purpose of pattern blinds is to train (pattern) your dog to run a straight line, which is not something they are naturally inclined to do. The classic pattern blind is called the Three Legged Blind. Please refer to the end of the Training Sessions section for a complete diagram and instructions.



Dogs are visual learners and take mental pictures of a set up when working, creating a mental album of different scenarios. After your dog has mastered pattern blinds and has been patterned to run a straight line you need to develop your dog's mental album.

Some examples of the pictures in your dog's mental album could be:

- Running a blind to a tree off to the side of a gun station.
- Running a blind to a short or tall bush at the edge of some brush.
- Running a blind past a gun station.
- Running a blind across a pond to the far bank.
- Running a blind to a finger of land in a pond.
- Running a blind between two trees or gun stations.
- Running a channel blind.
- If you are going to teach pattern blinds it is critical that you do these things:
  - Use a white pole or bucket
  - Use white bumpers.
  - Refer to Carol Cassity's book 'Building a Retriever Drills and More' third edition for all the teaching drills needed.
  - If possible, obtain D.L. Walter's book "Training a Retriever to Handle".

### Pattern Blinds with Diversions

A diversion is a bird that is either thrown before the blind is run and retrieved, before the blind is run but not retrieved until after the blind is run or thrown while the dog is returning from picking up the blind. In all instances it is critical that your dog is running pattern blinds with great confidence and enthusiasm. This is a concept you will see in Master so don't rush it.

### **Simple Cold Blinds**

A cold blind also builds on the visual library your dog has acquired because there is no white pole or bucket to help him. This is truly where your dog's confidence and trust in you is of paramount importance.

- Keep it simple.
- Keep distances short.
- Recreate the visual pictures you taught your dog with sight and pattern blinds but do not use a blind pole.
- Drop a few bumpers at the base of a tree (your dog will not see you do this).
- Get your dog out and set him up at heel position.
- Tell your dog 'dead bird'.
- Your dog should look out and focus on the tree.
- When your dog is focused, indicate he is correct and then tell your dog 'Back' and send him.
- Drop a few bumpers on the far shore of a small pond (your dog will not see you do this).
- Get your dog out and set him up at heel position.
- Tell your dog 'dead bird'.
- Your dog should look out across the pond.
- When your dog is focused, tell your dog 'Back' and send him.

You get the idea.

- Resist the temptation to get fancy and stop your dog if he is going directly to the blind. Stopping your dog tells him he is taking the wrong line. If he's taking the correct line, stopping him will erode his confidence.
- If your dog is taking the wrong line and you are absolutely certain he will stop on a whistle, then stop him and correct his line with a cast. If you're not absolutely certain he will stop on a whistle, don't try – all you will be teaching him is to ignore your whistle.
- If your dog is taking a questionable line but it looks like he's going to get there, do not stop him. Again, you will be eroding his confidence. Instead, go back to Carol Cassity's book and work on more lining drills.

### **Lining Drills**

Lining drills teach your dog to confidently run a straight line. You cannot ever overwork lining drills and you should run lining drills for your dog's entire career. Refer to Carol Cassity's book for lining drills. Once you run and understand the drills in her book, you can easily create your own.

### **Channel Blind**

A channel blind is a water blind run in a narrow body of water surrounded on both sides by land.

- Start by making it a sight blind.
- Set your dog up on the shore so that he's lined up to the middle of the channel.
- If you're training alone:
- Walk out and gently toss the bumper into the water in the middle of the channel (no duck call, no hey hey).
- Walk back and send your dog.
- Gradually add distance to the place where you gently toss the bumper into the water.
- If you're training with a partner or group:
- Have your dog sit at heel while someone else gently tosses the bumper into the water.

### **Carol Cassity's "Building a Retriever, Drills & More" third edition**

By now you should realize that this book is a must-have for the work you are doing with your dog. It should be your bible.

#### **Introduction to Trail**

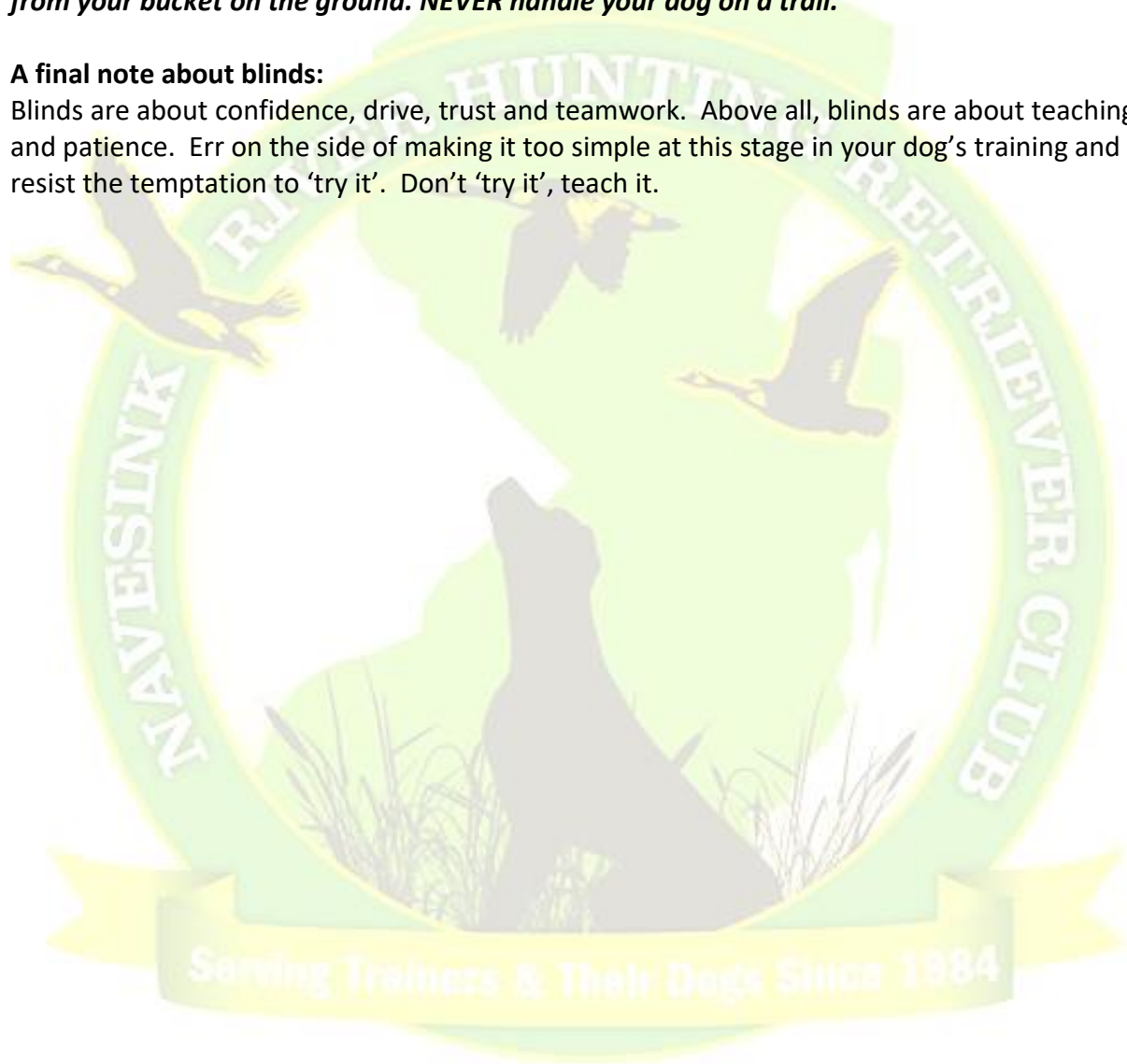
A trail requires your dog to pick up the scent of a bird and follow that scent until he finds the bird. When he does, he must pick up the bird and bring it back to you.

- You will need several dead ducks to teach your dog to run a trail.
- Soak one dead bird in a small amount of water in a bucket.
- Pluck feathers from another dead bird and place them on the ground at the start of your trail and at several spots on the line of the trail.
- Keep your trail short and straight.
- Take your wet bird from the bucket, tie a string or leash around its neck and hold it off to your side at the beginning of the trail.
- Drag the wet bird a short distance. (take the bucket with you)
- Be careful not to walk on the trail you are dragging – stay off to the side.
- At the end of your trail put your wet bird back in the bucket and place a dry bird at the end of the trail.
- Get your dog out and take him to the start of your trail.
- Put him in a sit and hold your dog by the collar and pick up a few feathers.
- Let him smell them.
- Place the feathers back on the ground.
- Point to the ground.
- Your dog should be intently sniffing the ground.
- Let go of your dog's collar and tell him "Find the bird" or whatever phrase you are going to use.
- Your dog should follow the trail to the dead bird at the end.
- As he gets there, run off to the side of the trail.
- When your dog gets to the dead bird, tell him to fetch it up and call him to you.
- Don't let him "drag back" his scent on the original trail. He must follow your "call/whistle".

**NOTE:** *Your dog may or may not run with his nose to the ground. Running a trail with nose to the ground is not required and not all dogs will do that. Some will but some dogs are air-scenters and will run with their heads up, following the scent cone in the air. It's perfectly normal for a dog to go 'off course' while running a trail as the air moves the scent around. They will pick up scent, follow it to the edge of the scent cone and then double back when the scent disappears to look for the source of the scent. Resist the temptation to tell your dog what to do. If your dog becomes completely lost or returns to you then start over, making your trail shorter, re-dragging it, putting more feathers on the ground, pouring some water from your bucket on the ground. NEVER handle your dog on a trail.*

**A final note about blinds:**

Blinds are about confidence, drive, trust and teamwork. Above all, blinds are about teaching and patience. Err on the side of making it too simple at this stage in your dog's training and resist the temptation to 'try it'. Don't 'try it', teach it.



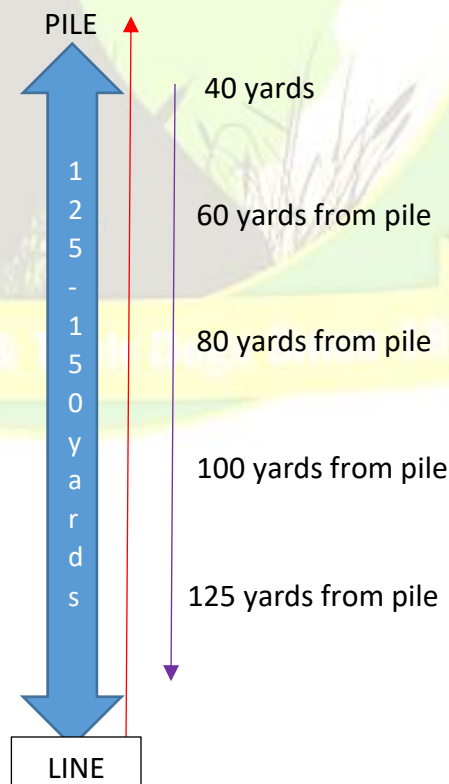
## Transition (Blinds & Trail) Training Session Hunter/Intermediate/AKC Senior

### WALK OUT BLINDS

Walk out blinds are a way to help develop confidence in transitioning to cold blinds. This is the process you will use to build your pattern blinds and can be used when introducing factors and suction into blinds as your dog become advanced in his handling ability.

The basics of a walk out blind is that you, and your dog will walk out into the field together when planting the pile. When you get about 40-50 yards from where the pile is to be planted you will sit your dog and let him watch you walk to where you expect him to go. Once you are at the area the pile is to be planted, make sure you have your dog's attention, let him see you drop the bumpers into a pile. Walk back to your dog and prepare to send him from heel position to the pile he saw you drop. He should be focused and willing to go since he saw you plant the pile. Go through your cues, DEAD BIRD, GOOD, BACK. When your dog has committed to going to the pile you will back up a few yards, increasing the distance between the line and the pile. When your dog returns, take the bumper, line him for the send, go through your cues and send him to the pile.

At some point, as you progress further from the pile, you may notice your dog's focus on the pile start to lessen. If this happens do not send him but simply move closer, to the last distance he had success from and go through your cues and send him from that location. Some dogs will understand this process very well and you may get back to 125-150 yards in one session, others will need to be lengthened out at a slower pace.



As with all drills that introduce new concepts to your dog remember to be patient and teach. Read your dog as you move further from the pile, instill confidence, don't cause confusion.

We can use this same process to introduce factors into the equation. Example: We want to teach the dog to carry a line up a slight angled incline that would cause the dog to fade to the left. Walk out with your dog to a distance where your initial send will have you standing on the incline, this may be closer than 40 yards. Sit your dog, walk out and let him see you plant the pile. When you return, line your dog up, go through your cues and send him to the pile. While he is going take several steps backwards but pay close attention to the line he ran. If he held the correct line on the slope you can send him from a little further back. Remember the further from the line the factor is the more likely the dog is to be affected by it. Keep his lines honest and move back slowly. When you move back from the pile pay attention to your dog; if he is showing any confusion, do not send him. Instead move closer, back to the line he had success from earlier.

You can use this progressive introduction method for many factors that your dog will encounter.

#### SIGHT BLINDS

Like walk out blinds sight blinds are blinds where you will help you dog understand where you expect him to go. In addition to your bumpers for the pile you will need some type of marker to identify the pile for the dog. This can be a white blind pole with a white one gallon plastic bottle on the top; whatever you choose to use be sure it is high enough to be seen by your dog from the line and is white, so it is clear to your dog where he is going.

For this set up you can place your marker 4-5 feet behind the pile in the field before you bring your dog to the line. Make sure your marker is visible from the line. When you bring your dog to the line, 40 -50 yards from the marker, he should focus on the white marker in the field. Once your dog is focused go through your cue and send your dog and back up as your dog is making the retrieve. Your dog should be able to progress further back fairly quickly in this drill due to the aid of the white marker.

A word of caution about using a white marker. The use of a marker is fine while teaching but do not use a marker for every blind your dog runs. You do not want to develop a dog that relies on seeing the marker as his cue to where he is going. Keep in mind that every dog is different and some may need the assistance of a white marker longer than others. Transitioning off the use of a white marker may take time. It all depends on how confident your dog is and that depends on how well you have taught him. One way to transition off the use of a white marker is to line your dog up and have a helper drop a bumper. After your helper walks away and you are sure

your dog is focused, send your dog. Planting the blind at a natural visual point of reference such as a tree or bush is also very helpful. While he needs to understand that he is to go in the direction you line and send him, don't forget that this is the Transition stage of his training. You are not testing, you are teaching. He needs to learn to trust you.





## Transition (Blinds & Trail) Training Session Hunter/Intermediate/AKC Senior

### SIMPLE COLD BLINDS

Whether you are training alone or with a group, when setting up a cold blind use a field that has no factors that could influence the dog's line. If you are doing a water blind the best way to start with cold blinds is to set it up so that your dog cannot possibly cheat; a swim across the middle of a pond and not down the shoreline.

This is a big step and again, remember you are building confidence. There are many ways to help your dog be successful in this transition: try to use any natural visual points of reference, it's ok to use a white pole, place the white bumper so it's visible to the dog from the line.

If you've done your Pattern Blind yardwork your dog will be patterned to take a straight line and this is an opportunity to have him add another picture to his mental album.

If your dog's line isn't perfectly straight, resist the temptation to stop him with the whistle. Read your dog; if it looks like he's going to get where you want him to, let him go. But if it looks like he's truly confused and way off line, stop him with the whistle. Walk out and move him so that he is back on line and send again. He's just made a mistake and when dogs make mistakes they are looking for more information. Help him out – build confidence!



## Transition (Blinds & Trail) Training Session Hunter/Intermediate/AKC Senior

### PROBLEM SOLVE

The list of problems that can arise during a training session is endless – and perfectly normal. If you're lucky enough to be training with folks who are more experienced than you and have been successful, don't be afraid to ask for advice. But keep in mind that each dog is different and only you know your dog and how your yardwork has been progressing; also keep in mind that if you put five trainers in a room and ask them how to solve a particular problem you will get five different answers!

Learning how to identify a problem and solving it requires some critical thinking on your part and the necessary 'tools' in your 'tool box' to solve the problem.

#### Problem Solving Blinds

- Are there factors your dog has not been exposed to before like change in cover or a cross wind?
- Is the distance greater than you've previously trained?
- Is the water cold?
- Is there a type of suction you've not trained?
- Have you allowed your dog to slip a whistle before?
- Was your cast deliberate and clearly visible to your dog?
- Did you cast too quickly after stopping your dog?
- Was your dog really focused on you when you gave the cast?

The list really is endless. If you've been using Carol Cassity's book you know that for each drill she has a "Potential Problem" and "Solution" section. Your actual field work is based on drills so take the time to familiarize yourself and learn how to identify a problem and come up with a solution.

#### Problem Solving Trails

- Is the wind a factor?
- Is the trail too old?
- Did you drag the trail on sandy soil? (sandy soil doesn't hold scent well at all)
- Is the trail too long for your dog?
- Did you send your dog off or did your dog take off on his own? (when your dog 'drives the bus' it never ends well)

All easily solved if you take the time to identify the problem and think about the solution.

## Transition (Blinds & Trail) Training Session Hunter/Intermediate/AKC Senior

### TRAILING

To get started set up a simple, short trail for your dog. When setting up trails in the field be aware of the wind direction. To start a young dog trailing you will send him directly into the wind so that the scent from the bird will pull him along.



This trail will be only 20-25 feet long and it will be a straight trail, no turns or twists. Place a pile of feathers at the line, drag the bird from the line to the final location in a straight line into the wind. Place the bird belly down and inside some light cover. We do not want the dog to see you drag the trail, or see the bird on the ground. Bring your dog to the line and sit him in front of the pile of feathers, do not let him run up to the line, smell the feathers and just run off out of control. You are in control until you send him. Pick up some feathers and let your dog get a good smell. Now give the dog a new cue to let him know there is a bird down and he needs to use his nose to find it, "HUNT DEAD", "FIND THE BIRD", whatever you choose to use as his new cue. Once your dog has had a good whiff of the feathers and you have given him his new cue let him go and try to work it out. This is one portion of training and field work where you have to really trust your dog. Pay attention to how your dog deals with the scent and how he manages to figure out where the bird is. Did he air scent or was his nose to the ground?

Between the scent you dragged on the ground and the dog being sent from a downwind location he should have been able to locate the planted bird with little to no issue. Repeat this into the wind scenario a few times, increasing the distance of the trail each time. Remember to sit him at the start and use your new cue for when he is trailing.

Once your dog is running short trails into the wind you can increase the difficulty by introducing bends in the trail you drag, cross winds that do not carry scent straight at your dog, following

winds that will carry no scent toward your dog. All of these factors should be introduced to your dog while training.

Some handlers prefer to limit the amount they train on trailing, they feel it causes problems with the control needed during other areas of training. They do not want their dogs to be self-employed.

Based on the self-employed reasoning, run your trail at the end of your training. Do not run the trail to start training.



## Transition (Blinds & Trail) Yardwork Hunter/Intermediate/AKC Senior

### BABY BLINDS

Baby blinds are 3 short 40-50-yard blinds in a field that has no factors that could influence the dog's line. The piles should each have 3 bumpers with one standing up against the other 2 so that it is very visible from the line. You want to make sure the dog sees this and knows where we want him to go.



A good order to run this drill is outside pile, outside pile, inside pile. Have the piles set out before you bring out your dog. Bring your dog to the line and send from the heel position; all sends in this drill will be from heel unless handling for a poor line is needed.

Once your dog picks up a bumper from a pile move on to the next pile until you clear all 3 piles. Be patient, if your dog takes a bad line, stop him, walk up closer and give him the cast that will put him back online. This is where you introduce literal casting. Literal casting is a cast that will provide the direct line to the pile. It may not be a direct back cast; it could be a cast at any angle that shows the direct line to the pile. If he takes it and makes progress to the pile great. If he does not then let him go about 5 yards, stop him, gently tell him no, and call him back to where you originally stopped him. **DO NOT BRING HIM BACK TO THE LINE.** Identify the pile and give him the same cast he failed on earlier.

During each session have your dog pick up the bumpers in the same order each time, do not vary the order of the piles at this point. Run these BABY blinds every day until your dog can line the pile for all 3 bumpers at each pile.

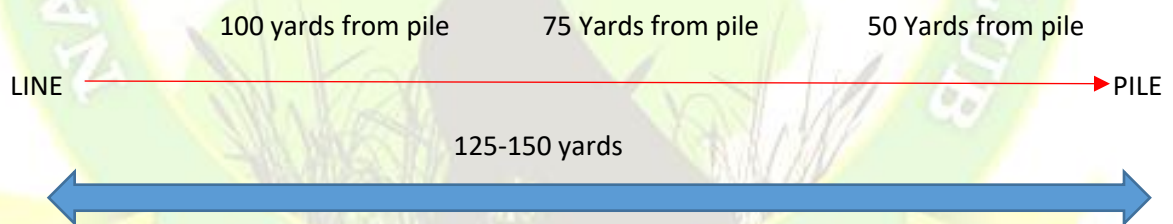
Once he has lined 3 BABY blinds move to another location and set up 3 more and run them until he can line the pile all three times sent.

After doing this in 2-3 locations you will start to build much longer pattern blinds, 125-150 yards each.

### PATTERN BLINDS

To get started with pattern blinds you will need a field that can handle 3 blinds, at 90-degree angles to each other in the same setup you used for baby blinds, up to 150 yards each. Once you have a good location you will need 6 large white bumpers and a lining pole to mark your line.

You will be building these blinds starting with one of the outside blinds then moving to the other outside blind and finally the inside blind.



To get started have your dog at heel at the LINE. This line should be the farthest away from the pile that you want to build up to. Place a marking pole in the ground so you know exactly where your line is. Once your line is established start to walk the line to the pile with your dog at heel and bring 6 large white bumpers with you. When you are about 50 yards, the length of your baby blinds, sit your dog as you continue to walk the line to the pile. When you reach the location of your pile stand facing your dog and make sure you have his attention. When he is focused on you, drop the bumpers one at a time up and have them land at your feet. This is not

a mark just an attention getting action so your dog is focused on the pile. Once the bumpers are dropped and before you walk back to where your dog is sitting, reach down and stand 3 of the bumpers up on end so they are visible from where your dog is.

Walk back to your dog's side, go through your DEAD BIRD, GOOD, BACK sequence and send him to the pile. Your dog should line this. While your dog is heading to the pile you will move back, away from the pile about 25 yards; now you will be 75 yards from the pile when your dog returns. Go through your line sequence and send your dog from this point, once again moving back while he is making the retrieve. Continue this walk back process until you have reached your line 125-150 yards from the pile.

There may be a distance where your dog gets confused due to the increased distance. If this happens move back up to the last length he had success at. Just keep working at it until your dog is successful. When your dog can successfully run the first outside pattern blind you will start to build the other outside blind in the same fashion. When building the additional legs of these long pattern blinds always finish your session by running the previous leg that he has completed already. Pay close attention to your dog in this drill. There is a lot of physical exertion from your dog with the amount of running he will be doing.

If you can only get 4 passes to the pile and only worked back to 75 yards in a session be happy and go home. You will get more out of a short positive session than exhausting your dog and having him shut down on you.

When you have built all three legs and your dog can line all three legs, outside , outside, inside with 3 bumpers at each pile you can start to build another set of pattern blinds in a different location.

When starting a new set of pattern blinds you can now look for small factors to place, nothing too severe, to incorporate into the blind. Do not rush into blinds that have severe suction or factors at this point.

Each new set of pattern blinds you build should be easier for your dog to learn.

With the longer distances you will, at some point, have to handle to the pile. When this happens, stop the dog, wait a few seconds, make good eye contact, give the literal cast. If he takes the wrong cast let him go a few yards, stop him, gently say no, call him back to the spot he made the mistake, walk closer and give him the same cast he failed before. If he makes the same mistake again repeat the entire process. This process of bringing the dog back to the same location and giving him the same cast he is failing on, until he gets it correct is called attrition. When he finally changes his mind and goes the direction of your cast , it does not have to be perfect as long as he was willing to change his mind and do the right thing, let him go even if it takes him off the true line in the other direction. After he has gone 15-20 yards stop him and repeat your casting sequence. Do not worry about a perfect line to the blind at his

point, let him go 10-15 yards and work on your literal casting and get him to the pile, he will get better with each pass.

A word of caution about when to stop him when he takes a wrong cast. You will let him carry an incorrect cast for a short distance in the beginning for this one major reason: You do not want to stop him the second he takes the wrong cast. You want him to GO when you cast him, remember he has to GO SOMEWHERE. If you stop him too soon when he takes the wrong cast, he will think he is being stopped for going and that is not what you want. He needs to understand he is being stopped and brought back not because he went but because he went in the wrong direction.

Do not correct him with the collar at this point; that will come later when you are sure he is being disobedient and not just making a mistake. When we get to that point, you will use indirect pressure for taking the wrong cast.

After 3-4 sets of long pattern blinds your dog should be able to run simple cold blinds and handle to the bird. These may be ugly at first but just stick with your mechanics and casting sequence and do not correct your dog yet, just keep using attrition at this point.

This entire transition section will occupy a large amount of your training time so once again be patient and look for positive advancement, however small that may be.

When you are teaching pattern blinds it is helpful to use white lining poles to indicate the piles. You can also use natural visual references such as trees, bushes, etc.

