

# The Force Fetch

## Part 2

Last month we discussed the step-by-step process of the forced fetch. We accomplished getting the dog comfortable running up and down the bench while tied to the overhead cable. Next we tethered him to the bench post and taught him the fetch, hold, and leave commands. Finally we began applying ear pinch pressure to enforce the fetch command, reinforced an authoritative firm but gentle hold, and finished with the leave command as the dog cooperatively surrendered the bumper. By now our dog should have had enough consistency and repetition with these three commands so that he is eager to comply with the commands and avoid ear pressure altogether. If in a moment of defiance he gives you a “c’mon make me!” attitude when you command fetch, don’t lose your cool or give up, instead smile and use your new tool...**the reliable ear pressure**, and you should quickly get the response that you were looking for.

Next we want to unhook the dog from the post so that he has a bit more freedom to run up and down the bench. This is where we teach him to move his legs and reach for the bumper that we are holding out in front of his nose. If he does not respond to your fetch command, use steady ear pressure and drive him towards the bumper. Sometimes a dog will have a difficult time and not move his feet under pressure, usually out of defiance or confusion, so help him out by pulling slightly on his collar driving him towards the outstretched bumper. Help him succeed so he understands exactly what you want. Remember to instantly release ear pressure as he grasps the bumper. Pull your hands away quickly so he does not try to balance the bumper on you. Again, while he is holding the bumper, praise him, pet him all over, and tap the bumper to make sure his hold is secure. Upon the leave command, he should release his jaws and there should never be a tug of war match to get him to release. Remember to roll the bumper down towards his throat if he should try to clamp down and not surrender it. As he successfully begins to reach for the bumper, you can hold it at different elevations so he learns to reach up, down, and side to side. Again with consistency, he should be enthusiastically lunging the span of the bench for the bumper as you hold it for him to fetch from your hand. If at any time he spits out the bumper prematurely, instantly resume pressure and re-offer the bumper to him. He soon learns that was a bad idea because with your precise timing, a self-spewed bumper only leads to undesirable pressure. At this point I like to offer the dog a change of scenery by bringing him outside

on a check cord to repeat our fetch, hold, leave drill. I don't enforce him to walk at heel; I only have one rule...DON'T DROP THE BUMPER!

Dropped bumper = immediate ear pressure. At this point we haven't yet fetched the bumper from the ground, so if he does drop it, you need to pick it up and hold it out in front of his nose with ear pressure until he grasps it.

Once he is trotting around while holding the bumper nicely, try incorporating drills like sitting on the whistle, coming to the whistle, and walking at heel while holding. As a distraction, try waving a second bumper around while he is holding the first one. Oops, you say he wants to drop it to pursue the other one, well now you should know what to do! You should eventually be able to toss a second bumper while your dog stays at sit still holding the first bumper.

Next we need to have the dog actually pick up the bumper from the bench without our assistance. For some reason this is always a difficult step for the dog, therefore you can assist by holding the bumper slightly elevated off the bench with one end tilted down touching the bench. Don't forget to slacken the dog's lead to the overhead cable so that he can reach down. Again, help drive the dog towards the bumper as you apply ear pressure, and even help roll the bumper into his mouth. Practice this drill until he lunges to pick up the bumper off of the bench without any pressure. This drill can be repeated outside and on the ground. Remember the dog is now back in his comfort zone, therefore he probably will require more ear pressure to persuade him to comply. Always have him on a lead so that he cannot run off and completely defy your command.

Our final drill is fetching to a pile. This can only be accomplished once your dog obediently fetches a bumper up from the ground, holds it, and delivers it to you. I suggest you also start the dog off with a check cord when beginning fetch to a pile. Begin with the dog at heel placement and toss 6 bumpers out in front about 15 feet away in a pile. By tossing them out, he sees them and is usually eager to go fetch. Then command him to fetch, meaning drive out to pick up one bumper and bring it back to the heel position. If he refuses, ear pinch him all the way to the pile driving him to one bumper, help him grasp it if you need to, then enforce hold as you walk back to where you initially cast him to fetch. Practice this drill until he charges out with authority and can successfully retrieve 6 bumpers one by one from the pile. As he progresses you can extend the distance of the pile and begin replacing the word 'back' for the fetch command. This transition leads us to our next series of drills in which you can teach your dog to handle blind retrieves.

**Frequently asked question:** How much time should I spend teaching him all these drills so that he complies at least 75% of the time?

**Answer:** As long as it takes! While it usually takes me two weeks to teach the average dog this entire process, it takes weeks of practice to reinforce these skills. I have had dogs so biddable that they seem to understand and accept the forced fetch and even fetch to a pile within one week, but I've also had dogs that spent over two weeks on the bench completely refusing to comply with the pressure to fetch and hold. Don't give up; stay determined and consistent and your break through will come. At the same time, spend the time it takes to finish the forced fetch in its entirety. I promise that you will be overjoyed with the results.