



Get the most out of your dogs Speed Retrieve run

Contributed by Tom Dropik at SportMutt

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I think we can all agree that in order to excel in DockDogs, a dog must have a strong, un-interruptible desire to get the toy, and an absolute love for the water.

To be able to excel in Speed Retrieve, a dog must possess a few natural abilities such as a powerful and fast runner, a big jumper, and a very fast swimmer. Then, it's important that the dog be able to utilize those abilities when it counts, during a Speed Retrieve run.

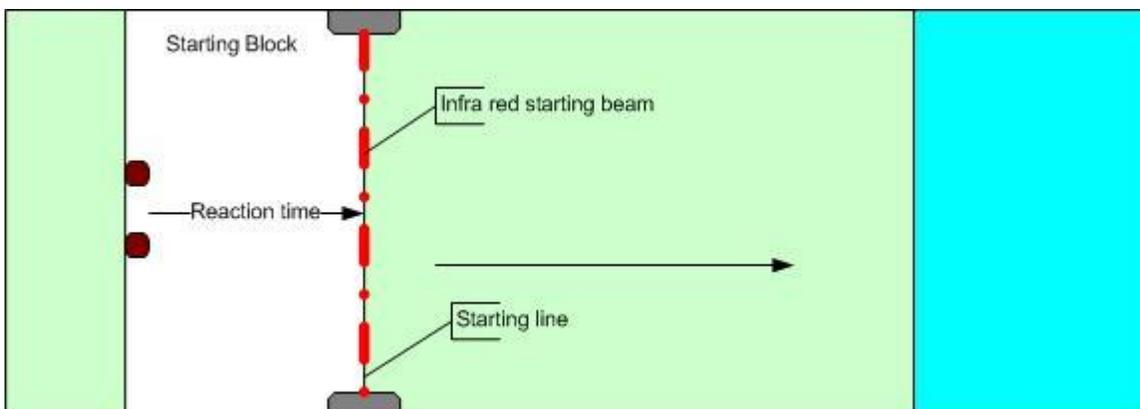
I love how in DockDogs a foot can seem like a mile in Big Air, inches can seem like stories in Extreme Vertical, and 10ths of a second can seem like forever in Speed Retrieve. So, when at a DockDogs event, and every dog participating in Speed Retrieve is demonstrating all those natural abilities, and all the times are with in 10ths of a second, a competitor has no choice but to ponder the thought "There's got to be something I can do to get the most out of my dogs Speed Retrieve run?"

Well thank goodness there is. There are really only 2 areas that we as Handlers/Trainers can help with, the rest is up to the dog.

First and foremost is the Start. I just love watching a Speed Retrieve competition and listening to the announcer call out reaction times and then the overall Speed Retrieve times, because it's that reaction time that gets tacked on to the dogs overall Speed Retrieve time. First let me help by explaining what reaction time is. Reaction time is the Time between when the starting Light turns green and when your dog crosses the start line. Dockdogs electronic timing system is sophisticated enough to be able to record that time. So when you hear an announcer call out a reaction time of .3, it means that dog took .3 seconds to cross the starting line. So when the announcer then calls out an overall Speed Retrieve time of 6.2 seconds, it could have been a 5.9 second run had the dog scored a perfect reaction time. So, you can see that reducing that reaction time will definitely improve the dogs overall Speed Retrieve time.

Now we can ask the question "What can we do to reduce reaction time?"

It's all in the starting block. The thing to remember is it takes effort and time for a dog to spring in to motion. It's that time in this case, that is the reaction time. So our goal is to take advantage of the 2 foot starting block. Set your dog up with the front paws as far back as you can get them while still being in the starting block. That gives your dog an extra 2 feet to spring in to motion before the light turns green.



Now, it's up to you, the Handler, to time the light and release your dog just prior to the light turning green because you have that extra 2 feet, so your dog will cross that starting line exactly when the light turns green and will already be in motion. Make sense?

The second is getting the dog to pull the bumper off the device with force because the time stops only when both strings have been detached from the device. I can't tell you how many Speed Retrieve runs I've seen where the dog get there very fast only to lose up to a half a second before both strings come off the device.

I mean, think about it, the dog is swimming toward an object that is only 2" above the water. To most dogs that is eye level. Then, the bumper is only a foot or so from the edge of the pool. So we are challenged with 2 things here. When a bumper is eye level, the dog doesn't have to reach up to pull it down. Then, with the edge of the pool being right there, the dog won't want to swim hard through the tug so the dog will simply grab the bumper and begin to turn while one string is still attached.

At SportMutt we train for this. First and foremost we tie knots on the end of each rope on the bumper. Then we suspend the bumper off a bar that has string hanging from it with spring loaded office clips on the end. We load the bumper with the knots completely secured in the spring loaded clips. This forces the dogs to pull harder on the bumpers.

Next we suspend the bumper at eye level and about 2 feet from a wall. We sit our dogs a short distance back from the bumper with the wall behind the bumper. We release the dog so he's moving toward the wall to tug off the bumper. With the knots and the wall, we're teaching him to pull hard without motioning through the tug.

There you have it. Remember, as in all dog training, progression is key with lots of positive reinforcement.