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The Use of Small Sleeves

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In this article, I will try to write of the advantages and disadvantages of using a small sleeve in training. These are just what my experiences are and how I see it. This doesn't mean that there are no other ways or ideas.



I like to use a small "soft" sleeve with young dogs when starting to introduce the sleeve. The biggest reason for this is that it is easier to give the dog a bite in the middle of the sleeve and the weight is a lot less than a normal sleeve. This makes it easier for the dog to hold (and carry) the sleeve when he is being rewarded and to hold a good grip. Another advantage is that the dog has to focus more on the sleeve when he is getting the chance to make a bite. This means that the dog has to be more in balance before he makes the grip. I think you can use the small sleeve in all exercises, but the most advantage you have is in the escape, in the attack in the back transport, and in the courage test. The biggest reason for this is that the helper can keep the sleeve closer beside the body, so a helper can teach the dog to focus on

the sleeve instead of on the body. This creates more speed and confidence for the dog.



I always explain that the dog should know there is a "highway" if he jumps beside the body of the helper.

For the escape, I think this is a nice way to teach the dog to jump forward instead of jumping in the back of the helper. With the small sleeve, the helper can hold the sleeve in front of him instead of wearing it normally. Once the dog has learned to go forward, the helper can start to wear the sleeve normally. To teach a dog to pull in the escape, it is an exercise the helper teaches the dog within another exercise. For example, when the dog is getting a bite, the helper teaches the dog to pull back or to try to stop the helper. When the dog knows both exercises, you bring them both together and you will get a nice escape!

The courage test is an exercise you teach first with a pillow and after that, move to a small sleeve. When you start to teach the courage test, I think it is better at the start to keep the pillow or sleeve beside the body of the helper and to keep it low. The reason for this is that it should be easy for the dog to make speed, and he should have a safe feeling to keep the speed. I always compare it as telling an inexperienced person to run fast to a hurdle, with the handler not knowing that the hurdle will move away, and not knowing for sure that he can jump that high. For sure, a person will run fast but in the end, he will slow down to make sure he doesn't get hurt. If you ask a trained athlete to run fast and jump over the hurdle, he will be able to keep his speed and get over it in a fast way.

By holding the sleeve or pillow beside you (and not in front of you), the dog will see and feel that there is a safe way or a highway beside the body of the helper which will give him a safe feeling. In the beginning, I think it is important that the helper hold the sleeve or pillow still, so the dog has ample time to have a chance to focus on the sleeve while he is running and jumping. Once you have the speed and the confidence of the dog, you start to hold the sleeve a bit higher. Once you have the speed and the height, it is time to bring the small sleeve little by little to the middle of the body when the dog is running, but always again



beside the body when the dog is making the jump. Finally, you will be able to hold the small sleeve in a normal position and the dog will be able to make fast and confident jumps while the sleeve is in a normal position (i.e., in front of the helper and not beside the helper). Once this is going well, it is time to teach the dog to deal with distraction. I think it is very important that you teach the dog to deal with distraction, such as the moving of the sleeve before he makes the jump, the use of the voice of the helper, the moving of the stick, and the moving of the body of the helper. All these factors can affect the way a dog is jumping to the sleeve. Too many times, helpers and handlers forget to teach the dog to deal with this. Many times, helpers are always standing completely still and don't give any distraction for the dog during training, but when a dog is going to competition, it will be a totally different picture for the dog and may cause the dog to jump too late or not jump, or slow down a lot. So, I think it is important to teach the dog this exercise in small steps and finally get to an exercise where the dog has learned to jump with confidence, no matter how the helper is acting.



If you start to teach the dog to get used to this, I think it is important that you bring the sleeve again always beside you. This is especially true with dogs who are body focused (dogs with more person aggression). It is important to teach them to jump beside the body with these distractions. Many times, you see these kinds of dogs doing it



nicely when the helper is not putting any pressure but once the helper is moving or threatening, these dogs will go surely back totally into the body. A dog who goes into the body is many times (though not always!) slowing down a bit because they are so focused on getting the body that they think more about getting the body instead of making speed and jumping with power. These dogs also get more easily "blocked up" by helpers, which will make them slow down again to protect themselves.

Once the dog is able to make very good long jumps with these distractions with a small sleeve beside the body, you bring the sleeve again little by little to the middle. An interesting way to make the step from the small sleeve to a normal sleeve is to use a small sleeve but put a normal sized cover on it. This makes it visually the same for the dog, but by using this kind of sleeve, the helper is still having the chance to move the sleeve a bit more outside.

In the back transport, I like to use it for the same reason as the courage test and I try to teach the dog to go always to the left side. In the beginning, I walk backwards in the back transport so the dog can see the sleeve (on my left side) so the dog will learn already there that the sleeve is always on the left side to make the attack. The next step is that the helper is moving sideways and making a 1/4 turn and again, the sleeve goes to the left side when the dog is making the attack. The final step is that the helper is moving normally and the sleeve will be on the left side when the dog is making the attack. After all these steps, it will be easier for the dog to be fast because he will know that there is a high way if he is jumping to the left side.



Again, all dogs are different, so surely you have to analyze every training session again with every dog and decide from there what will work best! Also, for some dogs it seems difficult when you make the change from a small sleeve to a visually normal sleeve. Sometimes it can be good for some dogs to try to use the visually normal sleeve fast enough.

I hope you've enjoyed this article and that some people can use some of the things I tried to explain. I wish all readers a lot of fun with their dogs and all the best!

Nick

