Using Heel Position in Agility, Part 2

Stationary and In-Motion Recalls Over Obstacles to Heel Position

By Linda Mecklenburg

Once your dog can perform reliable recalls to heel from all angles on the flat, both when stationary and when in motion, you should be able to recall your dog to heel from all angles over obstacles. When recalling your dog, always present him with your inside hand, shoulder, and hip. When you are stationary, point your outside foot in the direction you want your dog to face when he reaches you. This helps your dog know which direction he will be going, since your shoulders will be turned slightly toward him as you recall. The recalls in **Figures 1 through 8** show the progression of the difficulty of stationary recalls to heel position over obstacles. The progression does not necessarily reflect the order that the skills should be taught; rather the figures show that all recalls to heel over a jump are not equal in difficulty.

Note that the recall shown in **Figure 5** is the foundation of success for all handling maneuvers that are based on a recall to heel (lead-out push, shoulder push, shoulder drop, and so on). To perform these handling maneuvers, your dog must learn to control his jumping arc and momentum so that he can jump and land in heel position without crossing the plane behind or in front of you. He must learn to do the same when your position is offset from the jump and there is not a direct line over the jump between you and your dog. He must be able to do this when stationary and when in motion. If he cannot make the appropriate adjustments and come to heel position, he will not perform the handling maneuvers reliably or correctly.

Once you are able to recall your dog to heel from all angles, from variable distances, and over obstacles from a stationary position, you must do the same while you and your dog are in motion. When recalling your dog, always present him with your inside hand, shoulder, and hip. When you are moving, your movement will cue him to the desired direction. The recalls shown in **Figures 9 through 17** show the progression of difficulty in-motion recalls to heel over obstacles. The progression does not necessarily reflect the order that the skills should be taught; rather the figures show that all recalls to heel over a jump are not equal in difficulty. ✦

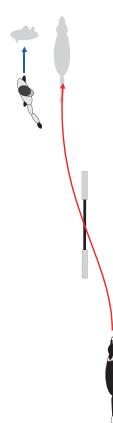## Stationary Recalls Over Obstacles
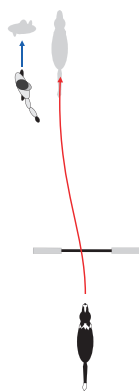
1

I must be able to recall my dog over an obstacle, have him come to heel position, and remain there. Here I recall my dog from behind me over a jump with a perpendicular approach. In this simple recall my dog can pick up and maintain a left lead and does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory. The first stage of practicing this skill without obstacles is covered in last month's article.
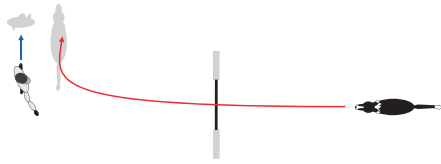
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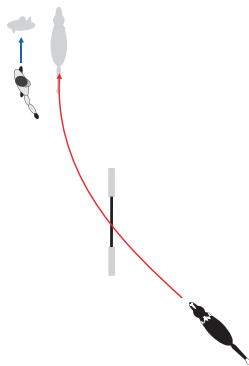
Here I recall my dog from behind me over a jump with a slightly angled approach. This recall requires my dog to jump off his right lead, and then change to his left lead, but he does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory.

3

Here I also recall my dog from behind me, this time over a jump with a significantly angled approach. This recall requires my dog to start on his left lead, change to his right over the bar and then change back to his left lead. My dog still does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory.

4

I must be able to recall my dog from a position lateral to me over an obstacle, have him come to heel position, and remain there. Here I am recalling my dog from a position lateral to me and over a jump with a perpendicular approach. This recall requires my dog to jump off his right lead, then change to his left lead, and he does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory (either his jumping arc or line of flight).
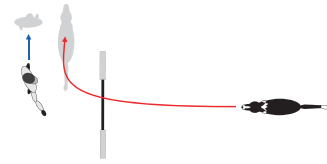

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As in Figure 4, I recall my dog from a position lateral to me, over a jump with a perpendicular approach. This recall requires my dog to jump off his right lead then change to his left lead. Now I am close to the jump and my position requires my dog to adjust his jumping trajectory. He must jump with a rounded jumping arc and swivel his hips in the air over the bar to land in heel position. My dog must land in the space provided, parallel to me and not cross the plane in front of or behind my body. This skill is the foundation for all handling maneuvers involving recalls over a jump. It is required for effective lead-out and shoulder pushes, shoulder drops, and variations.
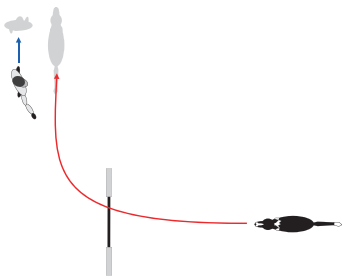

6

As in Figures 4 and 5, I recall my dog from a position lateral to me, over a jump with a perpendicular approach. This time my position is offset which means I am not in line with the jump, and there is not a direct line over the jump between my dog and me. I must drop my right shoulder back and give an inside (right) hand signal behind me to direct my dog over the jump. Again, my distance from the jump determines whether my dog is required to adjust his jumping trajectory. If I am far back, he does not have to adjust his trajectory, and this is a fairly simple recall with one lead change. If I am close, he must jump with a rounded jumping arc and swivel his hips in the air over the bar. My dog must land in the space provided and is still expected to not cross the plane in front of or behind my body.
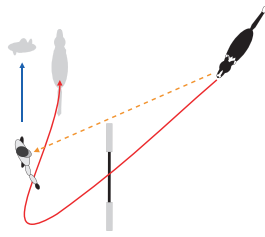

7

This time my dog's position is offset which means there is not a direct line over the jump between my dog and me, and his approach to the jump is angled. I must drop my right shoulder back and give an inside (right) hand signal behind me to direct my dog to heel position. As in Figures 4-6, my distance from the jump determines whether my dog is required to adjust his jumping trajectory. If I am far back, he does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory and this is a fairly simple recall with one lead change. If I am close, this is a very difficult skill for larger dogs. It will be challenging for my dog to land in the space provided without crossing the plane in front of or behind my body. He cannot simply jump with a rounded jumping arc and swivel his hips in the air over the bar. To land in heel position, my dog must either turn in the air or adjust his angle of approach on the takeoff side. Most dogs do not have the athleticism required to accomplish the task. I must recognize the effect this angle will have on his ability to appropriately come to heel position. Most large dogs simply do not have the physical capability to land in the space provided and will have to cross the plane of my body. If so, it is preferable that he cross the plane behind me since that will still allow him to come to heel position. As with all recalls to heel over jumps, the difficulty is much greater when my dog is approaching at speed.
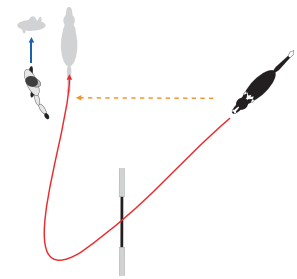

8

This time both my position and my dog's position are offset; there is not a direct line over the jump between us, and his approach is angled. I must drop my inside (right) shoulder back and give a hand signal behind me to direct my dog over the jump. As in Figures 4-7, my distance from the jump determines whether my dog is required to adjust his jumping trajectory. If I am far back, he does not have to adjust his trajectory and this is a fairly simple recall with one lead change. Again, if I am close this is a very, very difficult skill for larger dogs. I must recognize the effect the angle will have on his ability to appropriately come to heel position.

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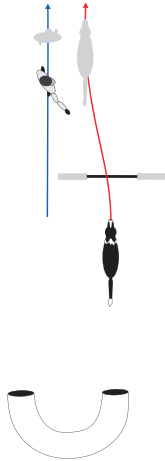
I must be able to recall my dog over an obstacle, have him come to heel position, and remain there. Here I recall my dog from behind me over a jump with a perpendicular approach. In this simple recall my dog can maintain a left lead. My dog does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory. Compare to the stationary recall shown in Figure 1.
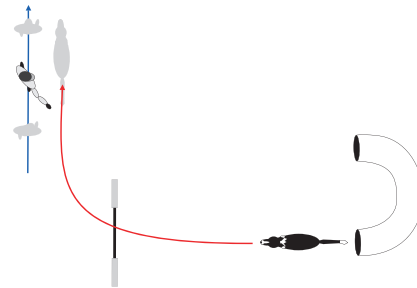
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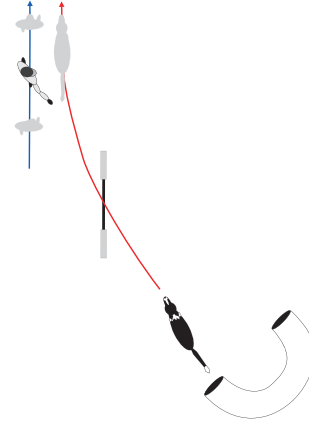
Here I recall my dog from behind me over a jump with a less than a 90° angled approach. This recall requires my dog to jump off his right lead then change to his left lead. My dog does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory. Compare to the stationary recall shown in Figure 2.

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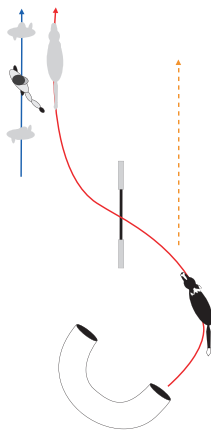
Here I recall my dog from behind me over a jump with about the same angle of approach as Figure 10, but this time two lead changes are required. This recall requires my dog to start on his left lead, change to his right over the bar, and then change back to his left lead. Because I am recalling to heel rather than facing him, my dog knows what direction he will be going when he lands and he can make the appropriate lead changes when he is ready for them. My dog does not have to adjust his jumping trajectory. Compare this recall to heel to Figure 3. When I am in motion, the timing on this recall to heel is much trickier because I must be sure to be ahead of my dog before he exits the tunnel. And, to show him that I want him to jump and not follow my forward motion (dotted line), I must time my signals perfectly. I must drop my right shoulder back and give an inside (right) hand signal behind me to direct my dog to the jump just as my dog's nose is between the uprights.

12

Here I recall my dog from a position lateral to me over a jump with a perpendicular approach. This recall requires my dog to jump off his right lead then change to his left lead. As in Figures 4 and 5, my distance from the jump determines whether my dog is required to adjust his jumping trajectory. If I am far back, he does not have to adjust his trajectory and this is a fairly simple recall with one lead change. If I am close, he must jump with a rounded jumping arc and swivel his hips in the air over the bar. My dog must land in the space provided and not cross the plane in front of or behind my body. Compare also to Figure 6.

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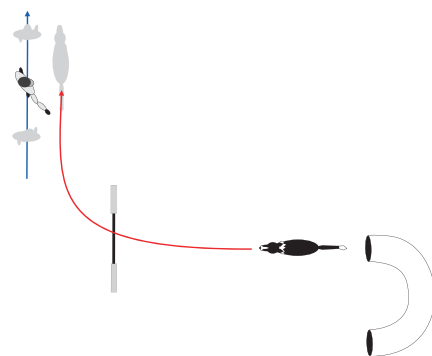
Compare this recall to heel to that shown in Figure 12. The only difference is that my dog is on the left lead when he exits the tunnel, which means he must change to his right lead to jump the jump and then change back to his left again when he reaches me. The more lead changes required, the more difficult the skill.

When an object in motion goes around a curve, centrifugal force compels it to go wider and wider as the object's speed increases. Imagine you are driving an ATV around a curve, riding a bicycle, or riding a horse. Now, imagine going around that curve and trying to accelerate, or asking for a turn but your horse just continues straight ahead, with his head turned but leaning to the outside. The ability to turn at speed in these situations will improve if you and your vehicle (whether four-wheeled, two-wheeled, or equine) lean to the inside of the curve, while shifting weight to the inside and to the rear. The same is true for your dog.
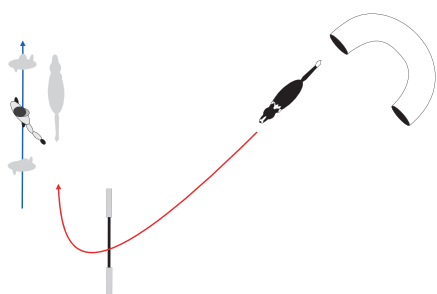
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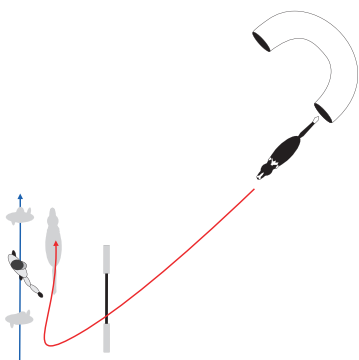
Compare this recall to heel to that shown in Figure 12. This time my dog's position is offset: there is not a direct line over the jump between my dog and me, and his approach to the jump is angled. If I am close to the jump, this is a very difficult skill for larger dogs. My dog exits the tunnel on his right lead so he can maintain the right lead until he jumps and then change to his left lead. There is only one lead change, but the jumping skill required is very advanced.
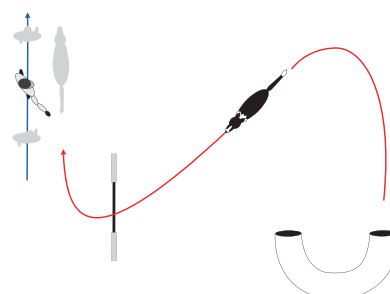
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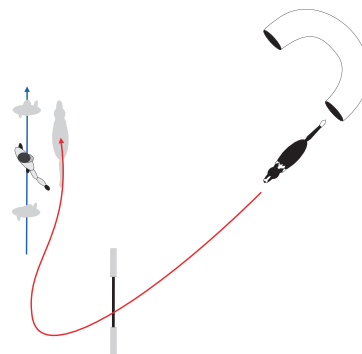
Compare this recall to heel to that shown in Figure 14. This time both my position and my dog's position are offset, there is not a direct line over the jump between us, and his approach is angled. I must drop my right shoulder back and give an inside hand signal behind me to direct my dog to the jump. My distance from the jump determines whether my dog is required to adjust his jumping trajectory. If I am far back, he does not have to adjust his trajectory, and this is a fairly simple recall with one lead change. If I am close, this is a very, very difficult skill for larger dogs.

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Compare this recall to heel to that shown in Figure 15. The only difference is that my dog is on the left lead when he exits the tunnel. He must change to his right lead to jump the jump and then back to his left again when he reaches me. The more lead changes required, the more difficult the skill.

17

Compare this recall to heel to that shown in Figure 16, a difficult challenge. The only difference between Figure 16 and 17 is my dog's trajectory upon exiting the tunnel. However, Figure 17 is an even harder challenge than Figure 16. Both my position and my dog's position are offset, there is not a direct line over the jump between us, and two changes of direction are required to direct him over the jump. I drop my right shoulder back and give an inside hand signal behind me to direct my dog to the jump. Because I am recalling to heel rather than facing him, my dog knows what direction he will be going when he lands and he can make the appropriate lead changes when he is ready for them.

Linda Mecklenburg is one of the leading handlers in the U.S. She has represented the U.S. in international competition on eight different occasions with three different dogs. In 2001, she and her BC Awesome were members of the USA team that became the FCI Standard Team World Champions. Awesome also placed 8th in the Standard Individual competition, thus having the best combined performance of all dogs at the FCI Agility World Championships that year. Linda teaches agility full-time at her Awesome Paws Agility Center in Ohio. She can be reached by email at awesomepaws@aol.com.