

An excerpt from

## ***Try Tracking! The Puppy Tracking Primer***

by Carolyn A. Krause, Dogwise Publishing. Reprinted with permission.

### **Chapter 5, The Glove Game**

The Glove Game is a very important part of the training program—unless, of course, you have that seldom encountered “Wonder Pup.” A Wonder Pup is a natural retriever and always snatches that glove up in his teeth and turns to bring it to you. This is rare. Non-Wonder Pups, although they may love tracking, often will go right past the glove, even while still on the track. That’s a big “oops.”

The Glove Game is something you can start even before you begin tracking training. Whenever your puppy picks up something with his mouth, praise him lavishly. Yes, this means your underwear, too. If you leave your underwear on the floor, then shame on you, not him! Try leaving a glove lying on the floor or in the yard. If he picks it up, praise and let treats rain down upon him. Have your own celebration, too. You have a Wonder Pup. The dog that is an article fanatic is a wonderful candidate for advanced tracking.

AKC tracking test regulations state that the dog must indicate (preferably pick up or touch) the article and the dog or the handler must retrieve it. Don’t skimp on this article work. It’s a real heartbreak for the handler, judges, and tracklayers when a dog does a great job tracking, but fails to indicate the article. Article work is doubly important for dogs who may continue to more advanced tracking.

I train handlers to use positive reinforcement to get the dog to pick up the glove. We shape this behavior by rewarding small steps toward the behavior we desire from the puppy, called approximations. Thus, an approximation is when the dog gives an indication of interest in the glove, or any other behavior that indicates he is moving toward the retrieve of the glove, the goal of the Glove Game. This article work is critically important, but not based on any rigid time schedule. Bring your puppy along at his own pace. You can’t enter a test until he is six months old so there is no need to rush.

#### **Using a clicker to train the Glove Game**

The Glove Game is an ideal way for clicker trainers to utilize their skills in shaping behavior. The clicker is used to mark the behavior you will reward. That is, the behavior you want your dog to repeat. The “click” is followed by a reward. The “click” is an effective tool to help the puppy learn what he has to do to earn a reward. It is referred to as a reward marker because it “tells” the dog exactly what he did correctly. Your final goal in the Glove Game is for your puppy to avidly pick up that article, turn, and take at least one or two steps toward

you. As soon as he is grabbing that glove, back up a few steps as you praise and you will get him to move toward you. Reduce using the “click” and begin to rely more on just praise once the dog is showing a willingness to grab the glove on his own, because a clicker or other motivational item is not allowed in a tracking test. Your voice is always with you and praising during a test is allowed. Advanced tracking handlers often have a little “praise-fest” at each article.

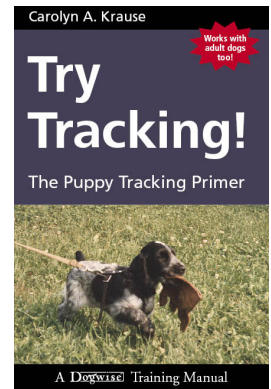
During the first week of training a quarter-sized food reward should be left on top of the glove. As the dog eats this reward, stand on the line and praise. When he has finished eating, remain standing on the line. Wait quietly with a treat in your hand. If the pup moves his nose toward the glove again, say “Good!” “Yes!” or click, then give him a treat. Wait quietly and hope for a repeat. If he doesn’t return to the glove again within a minute or two, just take the harness off and go to the start of the next track. Perhaps he’ll get the connection between glove and more goodies on the next glove.

We don’t cue or signal the pup to pick up the glove. He must decide to pick it up himself. In any tracking situation the dog’s job is to find things or people. In a test, part of the judge’s job is to place the article so it is not visible from twenty feet away. It should be your goal to have the dog indicate the article himself while training so he will do it successfully with no assistance from the handler. You should *always* praise after he picks up the article, especially in a test. This Glove Game takes a lot of patience on the part of the handler. Personally, I think that simply doing nothing and waiting for the dog to figure it out is the hardest thing for most of us to learn. As one of my students said, “You mean I just shut up and wait?” “Yes, that’s what I mean,” I replied!

Play the Glove Game as part of the day’s session whatever the dog’s current level of tracking proficiency. If your puppy shows no interest in the glove then hold him at the glove until he does something as simple as just look at the glove. Click and reward for looking at the glove. When the desired behavior is offered at shorter and shorter intervals, you can escalate the game to the next level.

#### **Taking the Glove Game to the next level**

If your reward timing is good you should eventually see your puppy actually touch the glove with his nose. Nose touches (the target behavior) then can become the reinforced action. When the nose-to-glove touches become consistent and rapid, begin to shape the



next stage of the behavior you desire. Now you should want something more than what he is now giving you. Possibly that he takes hold of the glove with his teeth. Then, raise the reward criteria again, i.e., the dog has to perform a more difficult task before being rewarded. The target behavior for reinforcement is now something more than just a glove touch. We hope he will grab at the glove or (Yippee!) pick it up. Whatever the targeted action is, watch for that action to be rapidly repeated as the dog figures out what you want him to do. Then raise the reward criteria again.

Use repeated small food reinforcements, instead of one large food treat. You want the target behavior repeated several times. Timing of the reward is critical. Have your food treats ready because a delayed reward while you fish around in your pocket does nothing to teach the dog the Glove Game; in fact it might confuse him and can really delay learning. Suppose he finally snatches that glove up and you are so surprised that you are slow in praising and rewarding that action. He will probably think you are looking for some other behavior, and it will be harder to get him to pick up the glove again. He'll probably offer several other less desired behaviors.

Integrate the Glove Game into your tracking training routine by sneaking several food rewards into your hand as your puppy approaches a glove on the track. The only thought you want in your puppy's mind at this moment in time is "glove + targeted behavior = reward." After several repetitions of the targeted response, remove the harness and go on to the next track. Learning comes through repetition of reward and praise. Larger food rewards but fewer repetitions of the sequence does not help the Glove Game progress as much as more frequent and smaller rewards. You want more repetitions of the sequence.

During the second week of training, the larger quarter-sized food reward should be stuffed just inside the cuff of the glove. The pup can still get the food reward. As your puppy locates and eats the food treat in the glove, praise him. With extra goodies into your hand, stand on the tracking line to prevent him moving on past the glove and when he reaches the glove give him a "jackpot" with several treats. You want to build in your puppy the habit that stopping at the glove is an important part of tracking.

Your dog may go through a stage where he paws the glove instead of picking it up. This is a stage you may reward, but the next level should involve mouth-to-glove contact.

### More Glove Game Tips

- Push food into the glove, but the dog should still be able to get the food out with a little effort. Reward all glove touches.
- Reward if your puppy grabs the glove with his teeth after eating the food inside. Reward additional grabs.
- Push food deeper into the glove to get your dog to pick up the glove even if just for a second. Reward additional glove pick-ups.

- Place food so deep into the glove that your puppy cannot get it out. Reward all glove pick ups.
- From this point on, work toward having the dog pick up the glove and turn toward you, then take a step or two toward you with the article in his mouth.
- If the dog seems well focused on the glove, discontinue leaving food *in* the glove.

You and your dog will not necessarily follow these steps exactly as described above. The levels of the Glove Game are simply approximations of the desired behavior and these may take many forms depending on your puppy's creativity. Some of the things the pups do at this point are hysterically funny and it is intensely interesting to see their little minds at work.

At home, praise the dog anytime he picks up anything. Without the dog watching you, try leaving several random gloves in the yard or house. Be prepared with a pocket full of treats. Let your puppy into the area and just watch. *Do not give any retrieve command.* When he indicates or, hallelujah, picks up a glove, click or praise and reward. If you run out of treats, end the game. Put your puppy away and pick up any remaining gloves.

The Glove Game is goal oriented and goes on throughout tracking training. Usually pups are picking up and bringing the glove by the fifth or sixth week of training. Some catch on a little more slowly. If you have done a good job of reinforcing the glove pick up, the lack of food on or in the glove will make no difference to the pup. If it takes a little longer to reach your goals or you have to keep placing food in the glove a little longer, don't worry; he'll get it eventually.

If your dog just will not retrieve the glove, then teach him to lie down at an article. Make sure you have taught him a good, solid, positively reinforced response to a down command while at home. Don't try to teach the down as part of a tracking session. Next, when he reaches the article, stand on the line to stop him at the article. Give his down cue. Praise and reward lavishly. When you reach the point that you are no longer leaving food in the glove, buy some new, non-food scented gloves. The gloves in a test will not be impregnated with the scent of food. As the puppy advances in his article work, occasionally leave a non-glove article at the end of the track as you may encounter something other than a glove at a tracking test.

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