



## ASK THE PRO

### selection

By Dave Rorem

OF ALL THE SUBJECTS RELATED TO DOG TRAINING AND HANDLING, this one word causes more excitement, more passion, more heartburn and more anxiety for too many handlers. It has been the source and topic of many discussions at every seminar that I have done and seems to be a main topic at every trial that I run. What is it about *Selection* that causes so many training or handling issues? Let's look at what *Selection* is and how it started.

When I started training in the 1970's, it was widely assumed that the founder of *Selection* was Rex Carr. I also assumed that Rex had developed *Primary Selection*, so he could enhance control and to improve the success rate of getting the short retired bird at field trials. I also assumed that he then developed *Secondary Selection* to further improve his client's success at the short bird concept. When I first started training with Rex in the 1990's, I asked him about *Selection* and over the next 11 years, we had many in depth discussions about this topic.

Rex gives credit to Roy Gonias for being the first trainer and handler to use *Selection*. It happened at a National on a land triple where no one could get a short retired hen pheasant flanked by two rooster flyers. Roy pulled his dog off the go-bird rooster flyer and picked up the short dead bird first! Rex was so impressed by the feat that he immediately talked to Roy about it. Then on the plane ride home from that same National, Rex developed *Primary Selection*.

## Ask The Pro

True *Primary Selection* is the process of pulling a dog off of the last bird down and picking up the shortest bird in the configuration. When Rex started teaching *Primary Selection*, his main goal was to improve control with the dog and to improve the short bird success. Rex said that after spending many years trying to perfect it and to perfect his clients at using it, he abandoned it because it was too difficult to get the right handler/dog team to master it.

He then developed and progressed to *Secondary Selection*, which meant that after you retrieved the go-bird, you automatically selected out the next shortest bird to retrieve and you stayed with that formula until all birds of the multiple were retrieved. This formula proved to be much better than *Primary Selection* and his clients started having better success with it. To this day, this is the most popular method of using *Selection* by many trainers. I also used this method in the 70's, and 80's. When Rex asked me about my success rate with *Secondary Selection*, I told him it was about a 40% (at best) success rate. His response was that is simply not high enough if you want to win Nationals.

I asked how to improve it and he said, "We will start by changing your attitude about forcing your dog to get the short bird second and we will change you into getting the short bird last in training and that will improve your dog's memory and success rate."

The following day, Rex setup a land triple with a short retired bird and Bill Sargenti and I ran this test with all the dogs off of our trucks using *Secondary Selection*. Between the two trucks and approximately 30 dogs, we had about 8-10 FC's, 1 NAFC, and 1 CNFC. Our success rate on that test was very poor, either one or two dogs did the test. We were both beat up and humbled and I was ready for a change.

From that point on, I started following Rex's guidelines for improving the short bird and it lead to what we call *Ideal Selection*: getting any bird at anytime during the retrieving sequence. What started out as what I perceived as a tough change for me became a very easy transition and has become a solid foundation for greatly improving my short bird success.

Case-in-point: on this same trip and at the same time that I decided to change over to *Ideal Selection*, I had a young dog, Hiwood Apache Scout, owned by Brian and Debbie Van Dyke King. Scout came to me with some Derby points. He was a wild, fully talent-loaded young prospect. One problem: he

couldn't and wouldn't do a short bird! He was my test case as to whether or not I could get a stubborn, powerful, fearless young dog to do the short bird using *Ideal Selection* instead of *Secondary Selection*. I had been trying to do *Secondary Selection* with Scout but he had failed miserably at it.

We started the teaching process by making Scout get the short bird last and it was a very slow process. He failed at doing the short bird last for about the next 4-5 weeks. Then a significant change started to happen. We noticed that Scout started looking back at the short retired bird sometimes before we sent for the go-bird and then when he was coming back in from the go-bird. He was starting to think about that bird a lot but Rex still insisted that we leave it until last even if he wanted it second, because it was going to imprint him even more and he would become very good at that type of bird.

Fast forward a few years and FC- 1995 CNFC Scout became the best dog I ever had at getting the short bird at anytime and any sequence in the retrieving order, even when you had the short bird in front of multiple flyers. I could let him have the longer flyers that he wanted and still come back and get that short bird last. Many times, Scout would come back in from retrieving the go-bird at a trial and want the short bird second. When he did, I let him have it. If he wanted the flyer instead of the short bird, I let him have the flyer second and the short bird last.

In transitioning from *Secondary Selection* to *Ideal Selection*, I basically quit fighting him over control of which bird I demanded he get.

And this statement is the reason for this article.

After training dogs for almost 40 years it has become very apparent that too many people fight over control in the selection process to the point where it adversely affects the teaching phase of doing short marks.

Many trainers, both professional and amateur have had some success doing marks with the *Secondary Selection* process and therefore, they are unwilling to change and some are so set in their ways, they won't even talk about it. Back in the 1990's, I didn't think I should change because my success rate was about normal. I was completely wrong about that assumption and I am glad Rex convinced me to always be looking for change, because that is what will advance you in our sport.

So how do you teach *Ideal Selection*?

It is really quite simple. Set up your normal multiples with a short bird in the setup. Instead of demanding that your dog get the short bird, by means of *Secondary Selection*, leave it until

last and pick it up last. Initially, you might find the success rate poor, but my educated guess is it won't be any different than what your current success rate is, using *Secondary Selection*. You can really see the difference in how this process works by doing a land triple and shoot the flyer first or second, throw a short retired bird hip pocket to the flyer and throw a dead go-bird off to the side. Retrieve the go-bird and now you are faced with your selection decision. Do I force "Fido" into checking up short in front of the tempting flyer or do I give him the flyer and "hope" I can get him to check down on the short bird last? This is a very common all-age test seen at weekend field trials and every National. This test is what brings on heartburn and discussions while test dogs are running because so many handlers are "worried" their dog or dogs will blow through the short bird and want the flyer. I've even had judges tell me, "Nice marks," after successfully getting the short bird last, only to follow it up and say, "But, he didn't do it the right way." So why is it that so many people think that you should only do short birds via *Secondary Selection*? This is a common theme among many trainers. They resist change and are defensively hardcore about "their methods!"

One of the biggest contributing factors in aggravating the necessary relaxed attitude in the dog it takes to be consistently good at the short bird is handler frustration. Many trainers get upset and frustrated with repeated failure at any short selection concept and they apply pressure either collar, verbal or physical. Nothing will slow down the success rate faster than pressure corrections applied to short marks. Period!

Give a serious look at *Ideal Selection*. Spend some time in picking up the short bird last in training and see if your success improves. Practice good sound training principles in how you set up your tests and be careful in allowing frustration to dictate your corrections. You might be surprised at how this *Selection* change might be beneficial to you and your dog and improve your success rate at the short retired birds. ■

## Rorem Retrievers Dave and Paulette Rorem

Dave and Paulette Rorem along with their daughter, Ty operate Rorem Retrievers based in Minnesota and Texas since 1977. They train field trial dogs and have successfully produced over 80 Field Champions, 1 National Open Champion, 4 Canadian National Open Champions, 3 Canadian National Amateur Champions and over 60 National Finalists. [www.roremretrievers.com](http://www.roremretrievers.com)