**PURPOSE:** The retrieve merit badge was developed to establish a foundation behavior that is necessary for many activities that Dog Scouts are involved in. A number of the specialty merit badges such as flyball, water rescue, scent hurdle racing, IMPROV, and many others require the dog to hold an object in his mouth. Many dogs do well at chasing and holding toys, but that behavior doesn’t necessarily carry over to retrieving objects on cue. This badge provides an opportunity for you to teach this skill.

**DOG REQUIREMENTS:** The dog must perform several exercises using a competition dumbbell made of plastic, wood or metal. The retrieve is a chain of behaviors resembling a routine competition obedience exercise. The dog must perform all of the required behaviors off leash.

**HANDLER REQUIREMENTS:** Each behavior in the chain must be shaped using operant conditioning. Each successive approximation of the behavior is rewarded. Free shaping and back chaining are both methods that can be used to teach the required behaviors. Additionally, the dog’s play retrieve behavior can be used to shape the formal retrieve.

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED:** A dumbbell appropriately sized for the dog and made of plastic, wood or metal.

**PROCESS:** The check off session is NOT intended to be a practice/training session. At the time of badge check off the dog is expected to reliably perform all of the required behaviors. If the dog is unsuccessful at the first attempt of a behavior a repeated attempt should be allowed. If the second attempt is unsuccessful the handler should be asked to repeat the ENTIRE check out at another time. The 3 exercises should be completed in succession. The dog may be rewarded between exercises only if it does not cause unnecessary delay. It must be clear that the dog is completing each exercise without being “tricked” into thinking the handler has a treat in his/her hand.

* **Retrieve from hand –** The dog must start in a sit or stand in front of the handler. The dog must take the dumbbell in his mouth when offered and hold it firmly with his muzzle steady and without mouthing, chewing, rolling or head flipping. The dog must hold the dumbbell in his mouth for at least 3 seconds while the handler’s hands remain away from the dumbbell.

The dog then releases the dumbbell into the handler’s hand when asked. The handler may hold the dumbbell by the end or hold his/her hand under the dog’s mouth so the dog can deposit it in the hand. It must be clear that the dog was waiting until the handler is ready for the dumbbell before the dog releases it.

* **Retrieve thrown dumbbell –** The dog must start in a sit or stand next to the handler. The handler should cue to dog to stay and must toss the dumbbell at least 6’ directly in front of the dog. It’s okay if the dumbbell bounces sideways but if it doesn’t go at least 6’ or bounces to an un-retrievable position the exercise needs to be restarted.

The handler should cue the dog to retrieve the dumbbell only after it has stopped moving. The dog should go directly to the dumbbell in a straight line. If the dog picks the dumbbell up by the end or if he drops, mouths or tosses it the exercise will need to be repeated. The dog should not need a separate cue to bring the dumbbell as the “bring it” is part of the “get it”.

The dog must return in a straight line to the handler. If the dog takes a detour, stops to sniff, etc. the exercise needs to be repeated. The exercise continues just as for the “retrieve from hand”. The dog should stop in front of the handler and sit close enough that the handler can reach the dumbbell without excessive reaching.

* **Retrieve placed dumbbell –** The dog must start in a sit or stand next to the handler. The handler should cue to dog to stay while an assistant places the dumbbell at least 6’ away, directly in front of the handler. Once the assistant steps away the handler cues the dog to retrieve the dumbbell. The exercise continues as in the “retrieve thrown dumbbell” exercise above.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ALLOWED: | NOT ALLOWED: |
| * Repeated cues
 | * Multiple cues for the behavior chain
 |
|  | * Dropping, tossing, mouthing or chewing
 |
|  | * Any delay in returning to handler
 |
|  | * Treats during the exercise
 |
|  | * Dumbbell type toys (okay for training)
 |