**Chapter 30: Traffic Exercises**

At this point in your training, you may have already experienced traffic checks during your daily workouts. However, we will be setting up a couple of exercises to help ensure that you can recognize your dog’s response. This chapter will explain the details of these exercises.

Class traffic training will actually take place in two parts over two separate days. Normally, the first phase will take place Thursday or Friday of Week 2. We will be doing a practicum on campus which will help you to understand what responses to expect from your dog and how to react to them.

Alumni Hall will be set up with a narrow chute with barriers along both sides in order to limit the dogs’ options. There will be 3 stages to this exercise:

During the first stage, each team will work through the chute, all the way to the double glass doors at the back of the room. Students should praise and reward their dog at the door. Teams will then heel back around to the beginning of the chute and reset for the next stage.

During the second stage, teams will work through the chute, and the supervisor will come from the opposite direction with a rolling cart. Your dog will stop as the cart approaches, at which point the supervisor will back the cart out of the way. Once the cart has disappeared, teams should proceed down the chute and target the double glass doors. Praise and reward at the door, then reset for the next stage.

During the third stage, teams will work through the chute, and again the supervisor will approach with the cart. This time, when the dog stops the supervisor will continue to move toward the team, creating a situation in which the dog will start to back up. Once the appropriate response is achieved, the supervisor will then move the cart back and out of the way. Once it has disappeared, the team should continue down the chute to the double glass doors, praise and reward.

On-Route Traffic Checks: This is normally done the second Saturday of class in White Plains. The supervisor will bring an additional vehicle to White Plains and position themselves accordingly to create traffic checks during routes. Now that you have had some prior practice in recognizing your dog’s response to traffic, you will likely encounter at least two traffic checks during your route. You will be prompted about when to expect the first check, but subsequent checks may come unexpectedly.

**Ideal Response to a Traffic Check**

An ideal response is one in which both you and your dog maintain or create a safe distance (or zone) from a vehicle. This can be accomplished by either moving forward away from a vehicle which is behind the team; by stopping or refusing forward movement at a safe distance from a vehicle; or by backing up and away from the vehicle, thus creating a safe zone. A forward refusal at a down curb in the face of traffic is another ideal response in which the dog is demonstrating intelligent disobedience. Be sure to provide verbal praise and support for your dog during traffic checks, however, you should NOT offer any food reward. The dog’s attention should remain focused on the task at hand, not on potential food. Once you are safely back on the sidewalk, or the danger has passed, you can offer additional physical and verbal praise. Traffic checks can be an intense experience for both handlers and dogs, and it is a good idea to take a few moments to regroup before continuing on your way.

During training, instructor staff may choose to create a “natural” check at a down curb. The purpose of this exercise is primarily to demonstrate the type of response your dog might have when a car cuts in front of you unexpectedly. It is NOT recommended that you ever attempt this type of set up without the direct supervision of an instructor. Always use you best judgment to determine when it is safe to cross a street.

If your instructor chooses to do this during your training, he or she will explain their intent and then will likely use a tap on your shoulder to prompt you to give the forward command. Your instructor will gauge the traffic and have you give the forward command at such a time as to create a situation in which your dog must respond to a moving vehicle. There are different responses that are appropriate depending upon how close the car is, how fast it is moving, the angle of the approach etc… Your dog may stand and hold position, confidently refusing the forward cue as the car passes in front of you or may back up a few steps if your dog feels the car is too close. Make sure to move backwards with your dog if this occurs and praise for either response once the car has passed. In some instances, the dog may enter the street slowly and then pick up its pace once the car passes. This too can be an acceptable response for checks that occur further away from the curb. If during this exercise your dog gets too close to the car before responding, your instructor may prompt you to “check” your dog, indicating that you should correct your dog with a harness check for getting too close to a vehicle.

NOTE: This chapter describes several specific exercises utilized during residential class training. If you are training at home, your instructor will work with you to set up exercised that allow you to experience your dog’s responses.

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