

Hassen, Koehler and E-Collars

By Captain Haggerty

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That title is a real grabber! Don't go away---it matters not if you are opposed or in favor of any of the three subjects. Read on and come away with an educated understanding of these three subjects---positive or negative. This is not a sales pitch. It is a statement of facts----some of which you've never heard before.

Now that is an interesting combination: Hassen, Koehler and Electric collars. How did they come together? There was an exciting seminar that brought all three together, even if they do not belong together. It was good, informative and turned a number of heads. It was conducted by Cactus Canine Center in Tucson, AZ. The presenter, Fred Hassen is an interesting personality unto himself. He is a dog trainer in Las Vegas, NV, a town that conjures up all sorts of images and none of them are dogs to my mind. Degenerate gamblers, yes. Dogs, no. How do you teach a slot machine to heel? I had an advantage that many of the participants did not have. I had spent three days in Vegas with Fred as he made his training rounds. I got to see him training dogs and selling his training jobs. Both of these activities fascinated me---the selling and the training.

Fred brought himself, Koehler and e-collars together in an electric collar seminar he gave at Cactus Canine Center...

- Cactus Canine Center is a Koehler-based dog training organization. One thing that you may not realize about "true" Koehler trainers is that they can and do quote from their guru's writing and follow his dictums to the letter. It would appear that there is no such thing as a "partial" Koehler-based trainer.
 - When people hear about e-collars their minds incorrectly jump to Koehler.
- Fred is often asked about Koehler and does seem to be a fan but not a true Koehler trainer.
 - Fred uses e-collars on everything, including shyness.
- The only name that should be lumped together with Fred Hassen is "Maddy" his pride and joy Pit Bull bitch.

Why shouldn't these names be lumped together?

- The time frame is all wrong. E-collars were at a very primitive state when Koehler's books first started to appear. More on that later.
- Bill Koehler's only reference to electric training (as far as my memory serves me) is hot wiring meat for poison proofing---a long way from today's current (pun intended) e-collars.
- Koehler's approach was NOT to correct a dog until it had complete understanding of the command. This is an important point missed by many anti-Koehler zealots. Yes, they are out there.
 - Fred uses electric "stimulation" as soon as he starts working the dog.
- The improvements in electric collars since Bill Koehler's death is about as great as the difference between the Guttenberg press and your desk top HP printer.
- Fred Hassen's approach to training is not a Koehler approach because he uses the collar from the first lesson. In effect correcting the dog before the dog understands what is expected of him. A completely wrong approach to Koehler.

FRED HASSEN

Fred has an interesting and persuasive background. He is a staff writer for Dog Sports Magazine. Along with his buddy Maddy he has set some world records in competition with top scores in obedience and protection on a consistent basis. Maddy also is the all-time record holder in the highest obedience score in NAPD history. Fred is out there with a weekly radio show in Las Vegas is always ready to speak about dogs. With five busy trainers he sells an off-leash obedience course to Las Vegas residents. Yes, people live in Las Vegas.

The attendees at Cactus Canine Center were fascinated with Fred's presentation. The real attention getter was Fred using the collar on a spooky Great Pyrenees. Instant success was produced with this white giant and everyone sat up and took notice. Fred uses the e-collar from jump-street and follows through with the entire program. When I visited Fred in Las Vegas I saw a man confined to a wheelchair. He was in pitiful shape with very little control over his own movements. The man was one step above Stephan W. Hawking. In this, his first lesson, he had a young Doberman coming alongside his wheel chair when called. The dog showed more control responding to the man than the man had over himself. The dog was working off-leash, which is the only training that Fred will sell.

CACTUS CANINE CENTER

Cactus Canine Center was started in 1975 as a not-for-profit Koehler based training club. The spark plug then and now is Pam Green. Back then there was a "difference of opinion" on how dogs should be trained with another group. They didn't agree with the Koehler method so Cactus Canine Center became an off shoot of that group. The original group is no longer in existence. There is an old saying, "Nothing succeeds like success." This organization is separate and apart from Pam's full-time business of Kennel Comfort in Tucson, AZ a full-service boarding, grooming and training operation. Pam is one of the coterie of Koehler-based trainers that follows his well laid out ten lesson obedience course.

WILLIAM KOEHLER

The seminal "The Koehler Method of Dog Training" first published in the early sixties came up with a doable step-by-step process for training group classes. Forty years ago 99% of the dogs were trained in group classes. The courses then were longer than they are now. They often ran 10 to 14 weeks. This is no longer true unless you are a Koehler acolyte. Koehler's purpose was turning out competitive off-leash dog that could leave his last class and march into the obedience ring and get a CD degree in three shows. This single-minded dogmatic approach produced results---again, again and again. Now to Koehler and e-collars. He tested these collars for Tri-Tronics in the mid to late seventies. Understand that this firm was first starting out at that time. The collar was still quite primitive, as compared with today. Bill Koehler certainly was familiar with e-collars but the rapid improvements occurred in the last decade and he passed away in 1993.

What is a Koehler trainer? You can't just read his book and call yourself a Koehler trainer. There is a strong and strict criterion in order to be a Koehler trainer. It is administered by Tony Ancheta at www.koehlerdogtraining.com. You must:

Conduct a 10-week novice obedience course based on Koehler's original book.

- The graduating class requires the student to pass a novice AKC obedience work out with far more distractions than would ever be found at a dog show.
 - You must have been in business five years or longer.
 - Your class(es) will be visited unannounced.
 - Past students that have attained titles will be interviewed.
 - Then and only then can you call yourself a Koehler trainer.

The name Koehler is pronounced "Koaler" on the east coast and "Keeler" on the west coast. "Keeler" was Bill Koehler's preferred pronunciation of his name so that in turn makes it the preferred pronunciation. The correct German pronunciation as in Wolfgang Koehler the great German ape expert would sound more like "Kuhler" (slur, do not roll the "r"). "Cool-er" is another very rough approximation. The problem is in the umlauted "o" with two little strikes or dots over the "o". An impossible sound that is transcribed by adding the letter "e" after the umlauted vowel.

E-COLLARS

Now I know that there are those out there that are adamantly opposed to e-collars. I do feel that anyone claiming to be a trainer should have a working knowledge of the subject. How can you be opposed to something if you know nothing about it? How can you discuss something intelligently if you aren't knowledgeable in the subject matter. These collars will not go away. They are here to stay. Don't take the ostrich's approach. Should you prefer the citronella collar remember it is an electric collar, too. It is electrically keyed with the dog's barking. A quick story about a citronella collar and an Australian Shepherd that outsmarted it. When the dog wanted to bark he would immediately do a spin and back flip to avoid the citronella spray.

The most important advance in e-collars is the range of stimulation that can be adjusted from the transmitter. Not all collars have this capability. This is all-important to my way of thinking. An area that is open to improvement is developing a true philosophical approach to using the collar. This is a very individual thing. I can see different approaches emerging currently.

There are a number of different brands of e-collars with different capabilities and limitations. Basically the more you pay the better the product, generally speaking. Which one is right for you? Everyone is different and has different needs. If you asked Fred Hassen he'd say Tri-tronics. That is his favorite and he is a Tri-tronics dealer. Do a bit of study before plunking down your hard-earned dollars. To give you an idea as to cost and sophistication it is possible to get a collar with SIXTY different levels of stimulation in the \$325 price range. Now I think that is overkill but better 60 than one. This gives you an idea as to the versatility of these collars.

No matter what you feel about e-collars you are not going to stop their onslaught. I recently had a customer that picked one up in a pet shop in the \$125 price range. The current R.C. Steele catalog has four pages dealing with electric training devices. What are you prepared to say when asked about the subject? You don't have to like them or use them.but you SHOULD know about them. The Chinese classic The Art of War spoke about the advantages of knowing your "enemy". Is the e-collar your friend or enemy?

About the author: **Captain Haggerty** started using remote collars nearly 40 years ago. At that time he didn't particularly care for them. The improvements in the ensuing years has caused him to fall in love with them---but he still doesn't use them on all dogs.