How To Train The Animal

We now approach the most exciting, challenging & rewarding part of the trainer's job -- the actual conditioning of the animal's responses. It is here that the trainer will see what most people would call a "dumb animal" turn into an educated performer, and it is here that the trainer will gain the feeling of accomplishment that comes with helping to produce an act that may well be seen and talked about all across the nation. Before a novice trainer attempts to work with a brand new animal, he should know something of the techniques which ABE has developed to train their animals. Also, the trainer should now recall the principles of animal psychology he learned in Part I for he will now have to apply them.

This third, and final, part of the training manual was designed to give a step by step description of the training of each act. The description is to include each response that is expected of the animal in a particular act, plus methods of getting the animal to emit these responses. In the case of some of the less common animals, general instructions for working with that particular type of animal will be all that will be given. In addition to reading this manual when first beginning work as a trainer, a person should read the section concerning a certain act right before he starts
training that act for the first time. The trainer may also wish to refer to the description of the act if he runs into trouble during the training process or if he has problems getting an experienced animal back to work after the animal has been out of training for a while.

**Feeder Conditioning:**

The first step in training any animal is to feeder condition it; that is, to train it to come to the feeder and eat when the bridging stimulus is sounded. This can be done in several ways. The first is to do it on an open table. A feeder is placed on the table along with the animal. The trainer fires the feeder every so often until the animal learns to come to it speedily. If the animal does not seem to be readily learning where the feeder is, it may be necessary for the trainer to tap the side of the feeder, lead the animal there with a cup of food, or to lay a trail of food from the animal to the feeder. Once the reluctant animal has reached the feeder, it should be fired again immediately to show the animal where the food is. This method takes more of the trainer’s time as he must stay with the animal at all times that the animal is on the table. However, the animal does become tamer when feeder conditioned by this method because he will come into more contact with the trainer. A second way of feeder conditioning is for the trainer to place the animal in the prop in which he will later be trained. Then *whichever* the trainer will either fire the feeder every once in a while or attach the loop to a timer that will automatically do this for him. Food can be dropped by hand into the cup, a cup of food to lure the animal, or tapping on the feed cup can be used to show
the animal where the feeder is. With this method it is also a good idea to have a small bit of food in the feeder cup before the animal is ever placed in the prop. This method is good in that the animal becomes accustomed to his prop but it does tie up other props that could be used for the more advanced stages of training.

A special mass feeder conditioning system that works with an automatic timer is a third method. With this system, the animals are placed in cages which have feeders hooked up to the automatic control box. The mechanism is then turned on so that the feeders will fire every so often. When feeder conditioning an animal by this method it is most important to make sure that food does not pile up in the cups. (Note: This way was used mainly on chickens.)

The preceding methods have all previously been used for feeder conditioning animals and each of them has proved successful.

However, the present, and preferred, method is to feeder condition the animal and teach it a response simultaneously. With chickens this is done in a special prop which includes a feeder and a loop, a piece of equipment common to many acts. The chicken is taught to respond to the bridging stimulus and pull the loop, or doughnut as it is sometimes called, at the same time. Before the bird is put into the prop a bit of food should be placed in the feeder cup. After the chicken has located this food and eaten it, the trainer should operate the prop a couple of times for the chicken. (The feeder will fire each time the loop is pulled hard enough.) Sometimes it may be necessary to tap on the cup, drop food into it, or lead the
chicken with a cup of food, in order to get the chicken to the feed
cup. Then the trainer should sprinkle some food around the loop
and either tape some food to the loop or attach a rubber band to it.
When the chicken picks at the loop the trainer should pull it for
her to fire the feeder. After the trainer has done this a couple of
times he can leave the bird alone to pull the loop for herself.
When the chicken has learned to pull the bare loop regularly and
to respond to the feeder, she is ready to begin the more advanced
stages of training.

Ducks and rabbits are feeder conditioned in the training props.
For this reason, we will discuss their feeder conditioning as we
discuss each individual act. The feeder conditioning of less
common animals will also be talked about as each of the animals
is discussed.

The Chicken
The chicken, either in the form of a banty or regular-size hen, is
one of the most common of ABE’s educated animals. Not only are
chickens easy to train, but they are also eager to work and appealing
to watch. However, a chicken, just as any other animal, is easier
to work with if she is tame. The best way to tame a chicken is to
separate it from the other chickens as a baby and to raise it with
frequent handling. But as this is not usually possible, the usual and most convenient taming method will merely be for the trainer to handle the bird gently and often during its training period.

Casey-At-The-Bat

Type of Act:

Type of Animal:

Act in Final Form:
The chicken pulls the loop on the bat to make the bat swing and hit the ball. The chicken gets reinforced when the ball hits the back fence with enough force to fire the feeder. This may take more than one try by the chicken.

Training Procedures:

Step 1 - The prop is put on continuous operation. The chicken is placed in the prop and a little food is put into the cup to show the chicken where the feeder is. It might even be a good idea to fire the feeder once to get the chicken used to going to the new location.

Step 2 - A small bit of food is placed around the doughnut to attract the bird to this new location. If necessary the trainer can lure the chicken down to the loop with a cup of feed. In some cases it may even be essential for the trainer to tape some grain to the loop to remind the chicken that she is supposed to pull it. (If the bird finds the doughnut and starts pulling it by herself, this step can be omitted.)

Step 3 - The chicken should be taught to swing the bat with the use of differentiation. That is, at first the trainer should reinforce the bird for barely swinging it, then for barely hitting the ball, then
Dancer

Type of Act:

Type of Animal:

Act In Final Form:

When the door is opened the chicken comes out of the house, or "Snack Bar" as it is often called, and walks across the prop to the juke box. She pulls the loop on the juke box which starts the music. Then she gets on the platform and "dances" until the feeder fires.

Training Procedures:

Step 1 - The chicken, already feeder conditioned and trained to pull the loop, is placed in the house of the prop. There is a little food in the feeder cup. The ratio is turned down to about 1/2 second. The trainer should fire the feeder once for the chicken.

Step 2 - The juke box is moved up right to the door of the house or, in some cases, laid on its side inside the house so that the loop will be very evident to the bird. The door of the house should be fastened or propped open so that it will not close and the platform should be weighted down. This will make it so that every time the chicken pulls the loop she will be reinforced. If the chicken does not begin to pull the loop by herself, the trainer can tape some food to it. After the chicken has started pulling the loop well, the juke box is gradually moved back until it is in its correct position. If
the chicken refuses to come out of the house to pull the loop, the
trainer can lay a trail of grain to the juke box. This will usually
lure the bird out.

After the juke box is out of the way of the door, the door can be
allowed to shut when the chicken goes into the house. From this
time on the chicken will have to wait for the door to reopen before
she can perform again. When the juke box has reached a position
where it weights down the platform, the other weight can be
removed. Even after the juke box is no longer on the platform the
weight need not be re-added for the chicken walking back to the
house will be enough to fire the feeder. However, if the chicken
just stands in front of the juke box or begins to wander around
the prop but never steps on the platform, it may be necessary
for the trainer to put a couple of pieces of grain on the platform
after the chicken has pulled the loop. After the trainer has done
this 3 or 4 times the chicken should be ready to step on the plat-
form by herself.

Step 3 - After the chicken has learned to pull the doughnut well
with the juke box in place and to walk back across the platform, it
is time to increase gradually the time ratio so that the bird must
stand on the platform for longer and longer periods of time. This ratio
is increased until it reaches ____________.
Step 4 - As the time is increased, some chickens will begin the scratching or "dancing" pattern on their own but it is usually necessary for the trainer to help the chicken bring out this response. To do this the prop is put on a push button basis. To use a push button in this fashion, the platform is unplugged and a push button with the proper type of plug is plugged into the control and the timer is turned down to zero. Then after the chicken has activated the juke box, the trainer can catch any random scratch pattern and reinforce it. As the chicken learns that she will be rewarded only for scratching, the amount of scratching can be gradually increased until she is dancing for the desired number of seconds. It used to be the practice to sprinkle grain mixed with sawdust on the platform to bring out the scratching pattern. But this operation was abandoned with the theory that those chickens who begin dancing on the bare platform will make the best, most dependable dancers, anyway.

Step 5 - When the chicken is dancing well with push button control, she can be put back onto automatic operation. She should be watched closely to see that she continues to dance.
DUCKS

The duck is one of the hardest animals to train as it is usually extremely scary. It has been the practice for several years at ABE to buy newly hatched ducks which are individually raised by children. Although this does help, the ducks are still spooky when put into training.

Drumming Duck

Type of Act:

Type of Animal:

Act in Final Form:
The duck will beat the drum by pressing down the pedal with his bill. After he beats it about 15 times he is rewarded.

Training Procedures:
Step 1 - The duck is put into the prop where a few pellets of feed have already been placed in the cup. As the duck will have not been feeder conditioned, the trainer should fire the feeder several times for the duck and, if the duck does not go to the feeder, attempt to lead the duck there with a cup of feed or by dropping feed into the cup by hand or by tapping on the feeder cup. This must be done carefully so as not to frighten the duck. The theory is that the duck is to learn the act and be feeder conditioned at the same time but normally the duck will be too frightened the
first day to do anything more than go to the feeder. However, the trainer should put some food on the pedal just in case the duck might try to feed himself. The ratio must be turned down to 1 and the prop put on continuous operation.

Step 2 - When the duck seems accustomed to his prop the trainer can begin the training. When the duck sticks his head out of the prop by the pedal (sometimes he must be induced by a cup of food to do this), the trainer should fire the feeder and be certain the duck goes to eat. The trainer should also fire the feeder if the duck begins to nibble at the food on the pedal.

Step 3 - After the duck is feeder conditioned well and has learned to peck at the pedal with the feed on it, the food is removed and the duck must learn to peck the bare pedal. The trainer should reinforce him when he pecks at it.

Step 4 - The next step is to let the duck reinforce himself. This should be done gradually by the trainer, reinforcing the stronger attempts until the duck presses it hard enough to feed himself.

Step 5 - When the duck has learned to reward himself regularly, the ratio is gradually increased so that the duck has to hit the drum more and more times to get fed.
Step 6 - At a ratio of about ____ , the prop is connected to an automatic timer so that the duck must learn to work only when the light is on. After this the ratio is further increased until it reaches 15.

Step 7 - The last step of training is to put the prop on a pushbutton or coin operation so that the trainer must activate the prop.

Piano Duck

Type of Act:

Type of Animal:

Act in Final Form:
The duck will turn on the lamp by pulling the chain and then play on the piano with his bill until the feeder fires.

Training Procedures:
Step 1 - A duck is trained on the drumming duck prop before he is put on the piano duck act. In fact, the best drummers are chosen to be piano players. When the duck is first transferred to the piano prop, the trainer should fire the feeder a couple of times so that the duck will know where it is before he starts to work.

Step 2 - The trainer should tape the chain on the light down so that the duck does not have to turn on the lamp in the early stages.
of training. The trainer should also turn the ratio down to 1
and work the piano once to see which section will be the next one
to fire the feeder. (Concerning the sections of the piano, the
piano is divided into three sections from left to right -- 1. bass,
2. middle, and 3. treble. The prop is so fixed that the bass
section will fire the feeder first, then the middle and the treble.
The cycle will always continue in that order, and any key in a
section will click the switch for that section.) After the trainer
determines which section will be the next to fire the feeder, he
should put a couple of pellets of food on the keys of that section.
When duck eats the food he will fire the feeder. Then the trainer
should place the pellets in the next section and so on. It is necessary
to place these pellets in all sections several times to show the
duck that he has to go all up and down the keyboard to get fed.

Step 3 - After a short while, the trainer can stop placing the feed
on the keys and just let the duck learn to hit the bare keys. The
ratio is left on 1 until the duck begins to play well on the bare
keys. Then the ratio is gradually increased.

Step 4 - At a ratio of 5 or 6, the pulling of the chain is introduced
to the duck. To get the duck to pull the chain the trainer should
a couple of food pellets to the end of the chain and then hold some
food in a cup or in his hand behind the chain to attract the duck's
attention. The first two or three times that the duck nibbles
on the chain the trainer should pull the chain for him. After that
the duck can be left alone to work the chain for himself. After
that, the duck can be left alone to work the chain for himself. By the time the duck has
managed to pull the food off the chain he will have learned to
pull the bare chain. Although the duck will almost always go to
the piano without help after turning on the lamp, it may be necessary
for the trainer to turn the ratio back down to 1 when first teaching
the chain pulling response. It can be increased again when the
duck is working well. The final ratio should be about 10.

Note: In the early stages of training, the trainer will have to be
with the duck almost continuously. This is true for two reasons:
1) He will have to put the food on the correct section of the piano,
and 2) in order to put the food on the piano, the front of the prop
will have to be open and the duck can easily jump off the prop.
RABBITS

Rabbits, although somewhat slow-moving, are relatively easy to train and make very cute performers. Domestic rabbits require little taming, just gentle handling.

Kissing Bunny

Type of Act:

Type of Animal:

Act in Final Form:
The rabbit comes out of the house and goes up to the white picket fence where he will stand up on his hind legs and kiss the plastic bunny head until it "blushes". Then he will run back to the house to be **rewarded**.

Training Procedures:
Step 1 - The rabbit is taught to respond to the feeder and operate the prop at the same time. To do this a movable feeder and a movable bunny face are used. The face is lowered so that it is level with the table and the feeder should be placed right next to it. The pathway is blocked so that the rabbit cannot get into the house. The ratio should be turned down to 1. The trainer should fire the feeder a couple of times and show the bunny where it is. Thenhe
should mix some powdered rabbit feed and water to make a paste which is to be smeared on the mouth of the face to attract the animal. The bunny will **ask** eat this paste off and in doing so will fire the feeder. The trainer may again have to show the rabbit where the feeder is. The trainer will also have to keep applying the paste to the face until the bunny learns to "kiss" the bare face.

Step 2 - The feeder is moved backwards and the face is raised concurrently so that when the movable feeder is next to the built-in feeder in the house, the plastic face is at the maximum height. Of course, the progress must be made gradually and must not be begun until the rabbit is working well on the behavior described in Step 1. For the first few inches the rabbits will have little difficulty in adapting to the additional height but at a reach of about 13 or 14 inches the shorter rabbits will begin having trouble, and the trainer must watch them closely. Some rabbits will actually be too small to perform this act successfully.

Step 3 - After the feeder has reached its position next to the built-in feeder, the movable feeder can be removed and the built-in feeder can be plugged in. The trainer may have to show the rabbit where this feeder is once or twice.
Step 4 - When the rabbit is working well with the built-in feeder and the face at the maximum height, the ratio can gradually be increased until it reaches __________.

Fire Chief Rabbit

Type of Act:

Type of Animal:

Act in Final Form:

Training Procedures:

Step 1 - To start a rabbit in the fire chief trainer, all the parts of the trainer which are movable are set on the minimum distance so that the bunny will have to do the minimum amount of work at the beginning to be reinforced. The water tank is dropped all the way to the bottom and the bell must be adjusted to follow the water tank down. There is a special plug of wood that goes in front of the lever to prop it almost closed so that the rabbit only need to pull it a fraction of an inch to fire the feeder. A movable feeder is set right at the rear of the trainer to help keep the rabbit in the prop and to make it as short a distance as possible for the rabbit to go from the lever to the feeder. Then the rabbit is