



## Agility Expert Articles

# Training Beep - part 10 by Toni Dawkins

## Good News

I will start this month with the good news as of course there will be some not so good news as well LOL

I spent a week at the Northern week show this year for the first time, I had been asked to teach for a day so my mum and I decided it would make a nice holiday and went for the whole week. We both have young dogs and a week of agility can help with confidence, of course you never know with Beep so I will try anything and see what happens. It was very windy and that is an understatement but apparently this is normal for that area. I strangely liked that it was windy as Beep is scared in the wind of anything that moves and makes a noise so I thought by the end of the week she will be cured or petrified. I also told my mum that however bad Beep's runs are I am not allowed to miss any and I stuck to my plan. It was a good job I said this as her first run of the week was awful, the wind scared her and it was hard to get her to play before her run and although she did run it was really slow. The next two runs however were really good and she got a fourth in a jumping and a third in her agility, both courses were just up and down so there was nothing I could handle to save time so I was very pleased.

I found as the week went on that every day she had one slow or not focused run and others were good, so good in fact that she won a grade three agility with a stop on the DW! That made my week as I thought she could win a class but was not prepared to ruin my DW training so I did a stop on every DW all week and she still won one. I actually thought we would still be in G3 next season so it is a surprise but a nice one. On the whole I was very pleased with the week and by the end of it we stood right next to a metal board that was blowing in the wind while queuing to run and it made no difference. Brave Beep. She didn't miss an a-frame or seesaw all week and stopped perfectly on every DW although some were slow and some fast depending on her mood. I have attached videos of two of her runs and although they are not great (my mum filmed them he he) you can see that she is looking much more confident. I

will add here that mum's little sheltie Puzzle won two jumping classes so almost won out of G3 too.

I loved Northern week and would love to go again, it was so nice to do a whole week at a show where nothing matters, no qualifiers at all so I didn't care whether I got round a course or not. It made the week very relaxing as did staying at Mandy Bainbridge's holiday cottage. Beautiful cottage in lovely surroundings and perfect for dogs, we loved it. The show atmosphere was extremely relaxed but I enjoyed that too except for the last day where we ended up arguing with a judge who told us in the briefing that if anyone put the dog back on a contact we would be reported for harsh handling! Very strange thing to say, I think it's harsher for people to run their dog knowing they will jump from the top of the a-frame or DW and just carry on as if that is normal. Some even find this funny? Anyway everyone is entitled to their opinion but if you judge you really should know the rules!

### **Bad News**

Okay you guessed it, there is bad news too. Its always one step forward and about ten back with Beep so I can never get too excited. I was however stupidly excited about our next show at Stour Valley. This did not last long as in our first run Beep started a little slowly and then as she was coming across the DW saw the judge in a big hat (it was sunny) and walked to her stop position staring at the judge with a shocked expression on her face. I could tell that if I released and tried to carry on it would affect the whole round so I apologised to the judge as I released her to me and got her focused back on what she was doing by touching her and using her ready steady cues. This worked and the rest of the run was lovely. A lot of people then said that I should get her used to hats and I have to say I don't agree. Her problem is her motivation for agility and if she, like my other dogs was 100% into it she wouldn't notice a hat or anything else. So, for me what I need to and am constantly working on is the motivation.

### **And yes more good news!**

Now unusually there is more good news (don't faint) and yes it is Beep news and not one of the others. As I left this article for a while to write more has happened, I have not had any more shows and do not intend to do anymore with Beep until next March. But Beep is changing all the time and right now is actually driving me mad, I guess I shouldn't complain but over the last few months I have noticed her behaviour in general changing from a shy dog to actually a very mad one. I mean at home, on walks, in the van and at her favourite place to train too. She does not stop at home, even

after a walk or the treadmill she is trying to play, running through the dog flap when I head in that direction, whining to go out of the garden to the van when I go out, the same when I am letting the others out for a walk before her and also on the way to training. This has carried on in to the training venue where she is now consistently running fast and confidently. If anything bothers her I just use my ready steady cue and it instantly changes her expression to what I am now calling her mad face. Something I never thought I would see in Beep. I think she is fitter than she has ever been which really helps, she is doing interval training on the treadmill and her back legs look really powerful. (Thanks Jo for the treadmill work)

I can see all the little things I have been trying now working and I also think having another young dog that is supremely confident is helping as they are best friends. The problem is that I now have a Beep that has no manners but the attitude I love so am going to have to live with that for now. I am after this weekend going to give Beep a break for nearly two months. I have Kite and Minx to get ready for Olympia so lots of work to do and I think it is a good time while Beep is on a high.

## **Seesaw**

I have been asked by a few people to explain firstly what I mean by a running seesaw and how I taught it. Well by a running seesaw I just mean the dog is not taught to stop at the end but to learn for itself when to leave it. It was actually really easy to teach although I may change a few things for my next dog as I am not 100% happy with it. I started with the heavy end of the seesaw on a table and hoop just off the end as the dog gets off it. So to start with the dog is just running down the seesaw from the table and through the hoop. The hoop needs to be the right height so the dog can't get off the seesaw until it is definitely on the floor so you have to experiment with this. I then altered my position and reward each time the dog completed this so sometimes threw a toy, sometimes put the toy out first and also asked for left and right turns. I went from this to the full height seesaw and kept the hoop for a while, I still put the hoop in every so often to remind the dog when to leave. This worked perfectly in that Beep has never left a seesaw too early; she turns off it or will run straight no matter where I am so it's completely independent of me as are my other dogs stop contact.

What I don't really like is the way Beep pushes off from it and it's hard to explain but I would like her to go further to the end of the seesaw before she pushes off as I think it would be quicker. You can see her seesaw in this video and it looks fine but I want to change it

slightly. I have just got a baby seesaw base and after Beep's break will go to this and see if I can change it a bit. Of course it's experimental; the only other person I know who has trained the seesaw as I did with Beep has the same problem with how the dog pushes off with back feet. As this dog does a faster seesaw it always looks like it could be faulted and has been, so although I will persevere with Beep I am not sure I would again. The seesaw in competition is still very much an opinion as to whether it was on the ground or not before the dog left and I like to teach things that are definite. I also like a choice, for example there are some judges we know like to fault a seesaw more than others so with my other two dogs I can release a bit later in some classes than others. If you have not trained a stop then you can do nothing about it and I would hate to lose something because of a missed seesaw.

## **Cute**

I know I have not mentioned Cute yet and I don't want to spend too much time on him but after falling in love with my merle boy I had to have him. I was initially very worried about timing and how it would affect Beep but he has done two amazing things. First he is Beep's best friend and as I mentioned above supremely confident so he has helped her cope with things that would normally worry her. She copies him and I think without him I might not be making the progress that I am now. Also he has restored my faith in myself as a dog trainer. When you have a dog like Beep I think you always wonder what you have done and whether it is your fault. From the day Cute walked in he owned everything but in a really nice way, he knows he is gorgeous and acts like it and for me he is perfect in every way. I know now that I did nothing to make Beep shy and a little fearful of strange things and have more confidence to help her get over it. He is seven months now, here is a picture so you can see why I fell in love. He is not in any way related to my others and I did this on purpose to stop me from comparing which is a really bad habit. There is only one Kite, or so I thought.....  
Anyway enough of him, I won't be writing very much on his training as this is Beep's report but I will give brief updates on him each time.

## **When I first brought him home**

### **Kite and Minx Update**

I class this as end of the season for these two and so always now look at what I have achieved. Both the girls have been stars this year and qualified for everything I think, Olympia is first and both are going. Minx on Thurs and Kite Sat. Charlie Wyatt is judging so

the courses will be very open, straightforward and fast, perfect for Minx but not for Kite, although she always surprises me at Olympia as she seems to find another gear. This year though she will be closer to eleven than ten so it's a lot to ask against the young fast dogs when very little handling is involved. She has however beaten every one of them at some point this year so I will be putting everything into it. Lots and lots of very spread out course training over the next month for both girls, making sure that if I am behind they are still driving as fast as they can. It also means lots of the same for me; I started this week running two/three times a week in the mornings to make sure I am not far behind them. I hate early mornings but if I leave it till the evening I always find an excuse not to go LOL

Crufts will be next and again both girls are in the Championship class and the Singles and Minx has a team event as well. Both have just been asked to attend the European Open qualifiers for 2010 although I have turned that down. It is in the Czech Republic and I don't want my dogs to have to travel that far and also leave my others behind.

So I feel I have had a good year with all dogs and am looking forward to the next one. My aims for next year are to get Beep to Novice Olympia and to G6, Minx to all the usual, Olympia, Crufts Champ and Singles. I have no aims for Kite as she will be 11yrs by Crufts so if we qualify for anything again I will see it as a bonus but am not planning on putting any pressure on her.

Oh and Cute (I will be busy!) training and those damn running contacts again!!!

My next article will be after Xmas so although it sounds much too soon, Have a lovely Xmas, give your dogs a rest and we will be back soon.

Love  
Toni and Beep  
xx

(posted 26/08/2010)