



Agility Expert Articles

Training Beep - part 6 by Toni Dawkins

September already, I can't believe how quickly this year is going. Maybe it's just because I am getting older but the years seem to go faster and faster.

Already its time to think about plans for the winter, the first thing I always do is give the girls a month off so from today Kite and Minx are officially resting. They probably hate me for it but it's really important both mentally and physically for all agility dogs to take a break. I often hear people say that their dog doesn't need it as he is 'mad', well maybe that is why. It's not about whether your dog seems tired, if I waited for Kite to say she was tired it would never happen but every year after some time out she comes back faster and keener so it makes a huge difference.

This week I will take both the girls to their physio/osteo for a check up to see if I need to do anything extra for them and other than that they will do nothing and that includes walks too. Next week I will lead walk them every other day, the following week they can go off lead but on their own so they are not racing, then back to normal exercise. This will take four weeks and then I will start some training again but on low jumps for a week or two before normal height again. This means by the time they are competing at Olympia they will be fully fit again and hopefully full of energy.

I know this sounds like a bit of a pain but it works for me, usually I rest one dog at a time so I don't get bored myself (how sad) but this year I have Beep so it will give me some time to put more work into her. Something I think people forget when resting a dog is that they still take them to agility and leave in the car/van. Mine would be in there whining and getting wound up and this month I want to avoid that so when I train Beep I will leave them at home whenever I can.

A quick update on Kite's seesaw for you, I have been keeping up with the ball at the end in training and this weekend at a show she had perfect seesaws. It was small local show so great to take the opportunity to train in the ring a little. I stopped her on every seesaw and counted to two before releasing. In one class the weaves were offset from the seesaw so I ran to end of the weaves leaving Kite waiting on the seesaw just to see if she would and she did. I will just keep doing this now and hope that with the mad atmosphere at Olympia she will still do it as she certainly won't be able to hear anything I say.

Not a lot to say about Minx, she is running really well at the moment and no real problems other than my timing occasionally. However, when they run that fast its hard to get it right all the time. I am looking forward to the next season with Minx more so than before as we now have some really good competition in the medium classes. I am sure you have all seen Tasha's little collie Dizzy, she is great and as fast as Minx. Its really making me want to put some effort in which before I didn't. At the show at the weekend Tash and I got first and second in both the medium classes. Minx won the jumping and Tash won the helter skelter, both times there was not a lot in it. It was great seeing who could beat the other though and I know it will be fun next year.

Well I guess I should talk about Beep and I will stick to mainly contacts this time as there have been a few developments and new ideas. I am getting quite excited about Beep now, as every time I go training she seems more confident and of course faster. I can see a difference every week and it's not just me looking for a difference as people keep asking me what I have done to her. She is also very easy to run; she does everything I ask her. She is even looking a little better now and has some hair!

A-Frame

This is all good news. I started this just after my last article and very quickly moved it to full height. I have put a stride regulator at the top just to make Beep get in the habit of jumping over the top. This encourages speed and as Beep is not naturally quick I thought this might be a good idea. It turns out that it is, Beep loves it and flies over hitting in virtually the same place

every time. I have practised different scenarios, so a long run up, a short one, coming from a turn and turning after it and they are all perfect. So far she has not missed one; there have been about two that were a little high so I just didn't reward those. This week for the first time I used it in a sequence with just jumps and a tunnel. What I found was that every time Beep saw the a-frame coming up she went very quickly over whatever was before and kept up that pace on whatever was after. Even coming from a turn she visibly picked up her pace to get to the a-frame and the momentum from it keeps her faster after too. I went home with a big smile on my face after that training session!

It does prove what I already know with Beep and that is she needs time to get confident, once she is, she goes much faster. I have just this week taken the stride regulator away as I don't want her to get dependant on it. I actually have some videos this month so the a-frame one is below, this is just under full height and no stride regulators.

Dog Walk

If you get bored with talking about running contacts you might want to skip this as I might go on a bit.

After the last article I decided to try Beep on the whole dw at full height, I watched how others did this and copied them. This was a bad idea, what others I have seen do to progress from just a down plank to the whole thing, is walk their dogs up the dw holding their collar, turn them round and then let them run down so that they realise it's the same as they have been doing. I should have thought about what kind of dog I have as Beep was not impressed with having to turn around on the dw and although ran down the plank was not at full speed. When I moved on to the whole thing she was very much slower than before, she would run (I use the term run loosely) up and across at half speed and then go quicker down the down plank. Although she never missed a contact I wasn't happy, the speed wasn't there and her contact was not as definite as on the plank.

Luckily Lee has finished my dog walk (I had to paint it myself though, tut) so I set this up in the garden, flat on the ground and started again. Patience does help with this method and lots

of it! I send Beep through a tunnel round a jump wing and then I can stay near the down end to check the contact. After just two runs that were a little steady she suddenly got the idea and was flying across it with the contact exactly as I like it.

Now some technical stuff. I have been talking to a couple of other people teaching running contacts. This is really helpful as luckily both of them are like me and happy to tell all. By this I mean they will share what works and what doesn't, what they think they have done wrong and well. This is great because I know a lot of people who think it's a big secret and would not want to help anyone else. I will always tell all as to be honest there are very few people who are prepared to put in the effort and time to get the right results anyway. And, if they do they deserve to get it right. I don't know anyone who is teaching exactly as I am but some things apply to all methods. What has come up recently is something you would never consider with a stop contact and that is how the dog gets on the up plank. With a stop this makes no difference whatsoever, as even if your dog gets on at a bad angle and scrabbles up the up plank it will still stop anyway. With a running contact it makes a huge difference as if their stride is affected on the way up it will change what they do on the way down. I have to say thank you to Tracy Flower for this one as it was not something I had considered before.

With this in mind I videoed Beep running the low dw with the jump wing she runs round in the usual place. Now she is running at full speed, she put in two long strides on the down plank and both her front feet ran through the contact. The next day I moved the jump wing further away so she had a longer run up. This time the second stride took her front feet above the contact and so her back feet ran through. Again, the next day I put the wing close to the contact so she didn't have that much room to get her speed up, this time on her second stride one front foot hit the top of the contact and one back foot hit the bottom. So you can see how much this affects the stride but what I am really happy about is that Beep is running and not jumping so wherever I put the jump wing at least two feet always go through the contact. I am just making sure that the jump wing is never in the same place for too long so Beep doesn't get used to the same stride pattern.

The dw is now on two paint pots for height and this weekend we tried a dw in a new venue about the same height as in the garden. Beep was perfect and fast so I believe I am doing the right thing. She won't do another dw on full height until it is perfect in the garden.

I know you won't believe me but yes I actually have another video, two in one month. (Thanks to my mum, who is still talking to me after finding out I wrote about her teeth last month). This is the low dw in a new venue, you can see that one front foot and both back feet run through so a very definite contact.

I hope I haven't bored you with contact talk but in my sad life at the moment that is all I think about.

Weaves etc.

Just a quick update on weaves and jumps. Weaves are upright now and Beep is doing them really well. I have bars on the exit at training so I can keep independent of them without worrying that Beep will come out early. If I am teaching entries I put the bars on the entry but already trust her to pick it up from all angles. I have a problem with the way people are teaching and training weaves but I will save that for next month or you have a book to read.

Beeps jumping gets better all the time, she is now bouncing where she can and turns really well. She is still on medium height but I will start putting the jumps up soon. There is no rush and I would rather she is confident at a lower height first. Her first show won't be until Ribble in January so I have plenty of time. There was a time when I thought I would never want to put her in the ring and now I am quite excited about it.

This Friday we are going on a Molly (Dave) Munnings training morning at the Waverunners show so I will tell you all about it next time. I always try and take my young dogs on as many training days as possible to get them used to working in all environments. I find then when you do a show it is just another place to them and so you can be confident they will be okay. So, it makes a change for me to have only good things to say about Beep and her agility. There is light at the end of the tunnel, I have found it!

Watch out Beep is coming! ... gulp, I hope
Speak to you next month

Love
Toni and Beep
xx



Beep
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