

## Agility Expert Articles

### Training Beep - part 5 by Toni Dawkins

First I must apologise if this article seems to have taken longer than normal but the idea is to update you on Beep and so I wanted to make sure I had an update for you.

There is also an update on Kite and the seesaw.

So, Beep first and you will be pleased to hear (I hope) that her attitude seems to improve every week. I guess her hormones are sorting themselves out now and she is a little monster, more active, happier, very naughty and her drive for the toy is now as good as Kite's. She will play anywhere and is nowhere near as scared of silly things as she was. When something does scare her I can just get the ball out and she forgets and plays. She has to have something in her mouth all the time whether that is a toy, a sock or as last weekend my mum's teeth! (Don't tell her I said that). She is no longer fussy about food and wolfs down anything I give her. I guess you can tell I am a little pleased with her, I never realised hormones made such a difference.

Beep is now 16 months and is probably quite behind compared to what I would normally be doing with my dogs. I guess she has lost a good 3 months or more but I am finding that confidence is everything to her; the more confident she is the faster she goes so I am not rushing anything.

#### **Jumps:**

This is the area she is most behind with as I don't have anywhere to practise so she is only jumping once a week. I also changed the club I take her to, not because there was anything wrong but because that is where she started her silly fears and I wanted her to start in a completely different place until she is okay. I put her in the lowest class with other pups so everything is straight lines or just flows from one thing to another. She is doing everything perfectly, still not with the drive I am used to but now when I throw the ball she goes like a rocket to get it so

I know it will come. Her waits are perfect which makes things easier and she loves the weaves so when she sees them from the jump before again she goes up a gear to get to them. I plan on taking her back to the old club within the next few weeks to see how she goes there now. In general I am very pleased with her jumping, she is on medium height and I will leave that for at least another month.

### **Weaves:**

This are going very well but I do have them in the garden. I have pushed the channels together now and she can do any angle I give her, and does them really fast. Generally I send her in and throw the toy but some times I run past and she gets the toy from me. I never run alongside as I don't want her to learn to rely on me being with her.

I have put jumps and tunnels close to the weaves so she doesn't look at anything until she has finished them all. There are also channels where I am training her so she does them as well and if I do a training day myself and they have channels I put her through them so she gets used to different places.

One problem I have with all my dogs is that they love the weaves so much it's sometimes hard to pull them off them on a course where you don't want to do them. I think this is probably because I love teaching them and my dogs pick up on this. Also with Beep I have used them as a reward for a really good dog walk so she thinks they are her reward all the time. I don't think it is a bad thing and would rather have them this way than having to try and get them to look for the weaves.

### **Seesaw**

As with the weaves I have a seesaw in the garden so this is going well. I throw the ball as I send and Beep does a running seesaw to the ball. This week I started turns after it so that I can send and say left/right as she gets on, that way she knows to turn early. So far so good. The only problem is confidence in strange places but again every time I do a training day I will put her over a seesaw so I think the problem will be cured before

she does them in the ring. She does a seesaw anywhere but is just slower in a new place.

### **Dog Walk (dw)**

Well I am now on my 7th month of teaching the running dw and I have to say am quite excited. I can't get too excited as I still don't know how it will end up but Beep really seems to understand what I want from her. She is still on the down plank only but it is raised on a bank in my garden, Beep goes up the bank, round a pole and down the plank, she does this really fast and runs right through the contact every time. I can turn her left and right and do a reverse turn at the end and send her straight back up the bank. I can now throw the ball as she is coming down the plank and she just speeds up. I can't remember the last time she missed a contact, the worst she does is put in a jump when I think of something new to do at the end. When she does this I just don't reward and she never jumps twice. My latest test is to throw the ball off to one side as she is running down the plank; of course she is going to jump off the side at first but is already learning to run to the bottom and then turn. Lee is finishing my full dw this week and I will then start over again, with a low dw and raise it a little at a time. I won't start the A-frame until the dw is finished.

I have been watching other people who are training running contacts and so far, I am convinced 'mine' is the best method. I haven't seen anyone with any consistency, when they are good great but when they are not...

Most people I have seen are using a prop of some kind and I think this is the problem. If you are trying to keep your dogs stride the same then sometimes it will miss as it depends how and where they get on the dw and with what speed. I really want running contacts but I want consistent running contacts and I am prepared to take another year if it means I can get that.

I think the fact that I throw the ball a lot as Beep is running down the plank is good as the ball is never going to land in the same place (anyone who has seen my throwing will know that)

therefore I have introduced variability from day one. This week one of my throws went upwards instead of straight and I could see Beep watching the ball but still ran through the contact.

So I am quite excited about some of things Beep is doing and not so about others but I will work at them until I am happy. I was asked recently if I would get another pup if Beep wasn't what I wanted. I was asked this because someone else has recently brought a young dog out and says they are not getting on with them so has booked another pup instead. The answer is definitely NO, I believe you work with what you have and a good trainer will get the best out of every dog. I would never push a dog to one side and go get another one. What happens to the one you left out, as you won't have enough time to give that one if you have another?

Minx is the hardest dog I have ever trained and I honestly believe a lot of people would have given up. I can remember crying over her as I couldn't work her out at all. She is now an Agility Champion, what a waste that would have been.

### **Let's move on to Kite's seesaws**

I had to have yet another rethink on these as I was throwing too many qualifying classes that I actually needed. What was happening was that even if Kite got the seesaw I was so prepared for the fact that she might not that I then messed up the next bit as I wasn't ready for it. So the new plan was a quick fix to get my qualifiers and then sort it out properly.

My quick fix was to put her ball on the floor just where the seesaw lands, as it comes down Kite have to grab the ball and obviously stay on the contact until released. When I thought of this I had one week until Rugby show, which had a Championship class and a Crufts singles class. I already had some points for the singles but not enough yet and as I had thrown the last three I really needed to get some more.

I am lucky in that I have a seesaw in the garden so every day that week morning and evening Kite was doing the seesaw to her ball and I put a command in as well just so I had something to remind her. I didn't do one without the ball and when I went training I did the same thing. On Friday I drove to my mum's, who lives a good hour and 15mins away to do the same there. At Rugby they had a practise ring which we don't really see very

often anymore. Of course I made good use of this and put the ball after the seesaw for Kite, what I actually did was get someone else to put it there so Kite didn't see making it a bit more like it would be I the ring.

In the champ qualifier Kite did a really good seesaw and got through to the final winning the ticket! I don't think anyone would know I had a seesaw problem as I acted like I trusted her to do it on her own.

She also got third in the Crufts singles - meaning in one weekend I had finished with all my qualifiers!

This is the link to the champ final, it's not a great video and although you can't see the seesaw that well you can see that I am not doing anything to make her get it. In fact in order to get the next bit perfect you had to keep running - which I did.

Now, I did say this is a quick fix so am not expecting it to last, I think for the rest of Kite's career I will be 'managing' her seesaw. What I mean by 'managing' is that I will always be doing something just to keep on top of it, but if you watch most people I believe they do that for every contact so it's not too bad. Luckily I do learn from each dog so Minx's seesaw is fine and Beeps will be better.

In my next article I will have news on Beep running the whole dogwalk. I can't wait and am very excited about it. What a sad life I lead!

See you soon  
Toni and Beep  
Xx



Kite

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