



Agility Expert Articles

Training Beep - part 4 by Toni Dawkins

Why can't I just have a nice easy puppy?

While Beep was lying on the sofa just after my last article I noticed her belly looked a little flabby. Looking closer, she actually had boobs and milk! At last it all makes sense, my poor puppy who I have been trying to get to run faster for the last couple of months has been having a phantom pregnancy. I know I shouldn't be glad about this but actually I am as it explains a few things about her moods and, more recently strange guarding behaviour.

At the time I found this, she would have been about ready to have the puppies if there were any. It might seem silly but I took her to the vet as not having had this before I wanted to make sure she was okay. Their advice was to wait till it's over and get her spayed which I have done.

Even this did not go smoothly; I put a plastic collar on to be on the safe side so she scratched the wound with her back feet instead. (I wonder if this is my fault for teaching her such good awareness of her hind legs as she could reach really well) I tried a few t-shirts which did not work and in the end resorted to bandaging both back feet which did the trick.

Here she is in a wrap over cardigan, one of the other things I tried but this was off in a few minutes.

She doesn't look very impressed does she?

It's all over now though, the collar is off and stitches are out so I will wait till six weeks after the spay before I start any more training. What I have been doing though is taking Beep with me when I run Kite and Minx to get her excited and jealous that I am not training her. This is working and last week I had to put

her away as she started getting louder when watching all the dogs and not just mine.

For the last couple of weeks Beep has been a different dog and back to what she was like as an eight month old puppy. By this I mean generally quite annoying e.g. tipping the water bowl out, throwing toys at me all evening and chewing Kite until she gives in and plays. This however is what I love about collies and how I like mine to be, slightly out of control and naughty so I am very happy with this and am not going to tell her off for anything.

So you would imagine that I would not really have a lot to say but unfortunately for you I never run out of things to talk about. Plus in agility nothing is ever completely taught and when you think it is and get a bit lapse it is bound to go wrong. Lets talk about Kite and her seesaws.

This is actually a really good picture as you can see that Kite is right on the end of the seesaw and completely on the contact, but you can also see how far off the ground the contact is when she is on the very end of it, and this is the problem.

Kite only weighs 13kg so even though she runs to the end of the seesaw as quickly as possible she has to wait till it hits the floor before she can leave it. If you watch a heavier dog you will see that generally when they are on the end the seesaw is on the floor so they can leave straight away. This means that I can't run a seesaw like the other contacts as it is just off the ground and so could be faulted. I have to make sure it has hit the ground first and of course so does Kite.

Kite has been faulted on the seesaw five times in her life which as she is nine now is probably not bad. However if you look at her other contacts, she has never been faulted on an a-frame and only once on a dog walk. This means to me that the seesaw is a little dodgy. Especially as she was faulted just last weekend in a champ final and that is the last place you want a contact fault.

I know why Kite is leaving a bit early before I tell her to and of course it is my fault! As you are probably aware I train my contacts in 90% of my runs so that when I want to do well I can run a course without worrying about them. This plan has worked perfectly for me until recently and I find myself now running a

course and thinking about where to stand to make sure of the seesaw. This I hate! I don't want to be thinking about where to be to get the seesaw I should be thinking about the best place to be as Kite leaves the seesaw. The reason Kite is leaving early instead of waiting for my release is that in the past if I am running a class to win and she leaves the contact early I go with it as she never misses other contacts and then they are very quick, so all she is doing is trying to do the same thing with the seesaw but of course it doesn't work. Training and holding contacts in the ring is not going to fix this as Kite knows me so well now that she can tell whether I am about to do a training round or a 'go for it' round. We must give off something that they can pick up on and of course the better your partnership with your dog they easier it is for them to know.

So, the plan, its always good to have a plan and sometimes it takes me a while to think of one but everything is fixable and although Kite is getting older I am not spending the rest of her competing years worrying about whether the seesaw will be good or not. I am going to keep training most of my classes, what I mean by this is any class that is not a qualifier or that I don't need to win I will hold my contacts as if in training. When you get to grade 7 and you run a grade 7 classes does it matter if you win it? Of course not so I use them to hold contacts and if it's a jumping to test out something I might be working at home e.g. a different way of handling something or leaving my dog to do the weaves while running somewhere else. If you don't do this you never know if you can use new things when you really want to.

Sorry I have kind of gone of on a tangent, you do realise that you get the short versions of my articles as I could go on all day about something.

Back to seesaws (I dream of seesaws, before Beep was spayed I was dreaming of dog walks, what a sad life I lead)

Now the bad bit, to teach Kite she has to stop even if I am running to win I will have to run to win and if she comes off the seesaw early then throw the class and leave the ring. The important thing about this is that I am not telling her off, I just want her to think it out for herself. She has to wait for the release whether she can feel that I am nervous and really

wanting to win or not. I believe she can do this as she is very clever but of course I will have to throw classes that I would actually like to win!

I started this plan last weekend at Thames. My first agility class was a championship qualifier and the seesaw was number three. I did jump; tunnel, seesaw and Kite came off the seesaw and lay on the ground. She didn't fly the seesaw and she didn't get faulted, however the behaviour I want is for her to stop on the contact so I just said 'uh uh' to Kite and walked her out of the ring. I put her lead on and went straight back to the van and put her away. I am just going to stress again that at no point did I get cross or tell her off, I use 'uh uh' instead of no for all of my dogs to say 'that is wrong'. I am stressing this point because at the weekend when I explained to someone what I was going to do they said 'oh good so you can give her a good b***** in the ring' that is most definitely not what this is about and I can't even print the word let alone say it! I don't believe a dog ever does anything on purpose and if something like this goes wrong then there is a reason and it's something we have done. I also know my dog and Kite has always been the kind of dog to take a mile if you give her an inch so I should know better.

So, I threw my chance of a ticket but it gets worse as the next class was the Crufts qualifier and Kite has some points but not enough yet. This is hard because the week before at Hinckley I trained my Crufts qualifier to make sure of my seesaw for the ticket so I have already thrown one. This one was the same, again the seesaw was number three so two jumps, seesaw and Kite stopped on the ground. There was also nothing wrong with this seesaw and she didn't get faulted but if its one thing I know about Kite is that on the ground today will be a flown seesaw tomorrow so I did as above and left the ring throwing another Crufts class.

The last class was an Olympia qualifier, right at the end of the day and hooray the seesaw was one form home which meant I would get a bit more of a run. Kite has qualified for two days for this event but you want as many chances as you can get so I really wanted this too. I ran like a mad thing and carried on in this way down the home straight. Now if Kite is ever going to fly the seesaw this will be when and I did nothing to tell her to stop

but just looked back as I ran past to see what she did. She stopped!!! I then released her to the last jump and got a good clear round and another qualifying day. So, it took two wasted runs to get her to learn, I said she was clever didn't I.

Now I am not silly enough to think that all is fixed as I might have to repeat this a few times but I am prepared to do this for as long as it takes and if it means I don't qualify for any of the big finals this year then so be it. I would rather that than get to Crufts/Olympia and be worrying about how to handle my seesaw.

So, if you see me leaving the ring after a perfectly good seesaw but a stop on the ground, please do not think I am mad I prefer to think I am striving for perfection with my perfect dog.

Hopefully next time I will have more Beep news and if not I am sure I can find something else that needs fixing. It will probably be Minx next time.

Enjoy your shows

Love

Toni, Beep, Kite and Minx

xx



Kite on a seesaw

(posted 01/07/2008)