



## **Agility Expert Articles**

### **Training Beep - part 2 by Toni Dawkins**

I knew I shouldn't have called my articles 'Beep Bother', it was asking for trouble and it seems I am getting it. Although the original idea was to talk about agility training, I think it's important to speak about all training as it all has an effect on the end result.

So, over the last month Beep has been a little strange at times, by strange I mean she is suddenly scared of odd things and for no reason. At puppy class recently someone shut the metal gate which made a clanging noise and Beep was so scared I couldn't train her anymore that night. Then a few days later a leaf fell from the tree in the garden and the same thing happened, she just kept looking up for another scary leaf to fall and again I had to abandon any training. When this is happening no amount of trying to play makes a difference she just switches off completely.

Obviously this is something I have to deal with ASAP as I don't want a dog that switches off if something spooks her and I need her to be motivated for a toy at all times. This is a problem I have never had with my dogs before as they are so toy orientated that they don't really notice anything else. Beep wasn't naturally into a toy so it is something I have had to work on anyway. To make this worse she came into season last week and so has also been mugging the other dogs and bashing them in the face with her bottom. I think poor Kite must have bruises all over her head. It is possible that her hormones are therefore playing a part in this strange behaviour but I had seen slight tendencies before and not really taken enough notice of them. Therefore I needed a plan of action! I started to think about what I could do and asked people I knew if they had any ideas, in particular my boyfriend Lee. Lee is very good at socialising his dogs to everything and will go out of his way to make sure they see and hear everything which I have to admit I don't do, so he is good person to speak to about curing silly fears.

Since Beep has been in season I completely stopped any agility training anywhere that she is not motivated enough as to try and train when your dog is not in the right mood is detrimental and you will teach that it's okay to do things at half speed which of course it isn't.

I have been playing a noise cd in the house very quietly and gradually turning it up. Lee had one which played fireworks and thunder and lightening and I also bought another one which had allsorts of other noises. I leave them on when I go to work in the morning and I have a friend who comes in to let the dogs out in the afternoon who turns it on again when she leaves.

Generally Beep is happier in the garden at home so I have been playing ball with her daily and taking the ball away when she is really trying to get it. I have been racing her for the ball when thrown so if she isn't quick enough she doesn't get it. If anything has scared her I have squeaked a toy to change her focus and then played and she is getting much better.

Her season finished this week and yesterday I took her to Thatcham DTC as I was teaching there. Last time she went to Thatcham she was very worried about the different noises and people. This time she was a different dog, she played very happily in front of other people and dogs without taking any notice in anything except the toy and me. In fact she was so much better that I did some jumps and tunnels with her too. Of course this could mean that her hormones are playing a part in her weird behaviour but she is in general quite sensitive so by doing these extra things with her I feel I am just making sure that she doesn't stay that way.

As you can see she is looking a little more grown up and sometimes I even think she is pretty.

## **Tricks**

So in the middle of all this I have managed to teach two more tricks, she is now lifting both left legs at the same time which has taken a while to perfect but it is hard. I will now work on the right side. The other trick is again for balance and I have been getting her to sit on the top of the exercise ball, she is doing this confidently so I will get her to lift her legs while on there. Most of my balance tricks I have found on Silvia Trkman's

web site, 'lolabu land'. Silvia has been a friend of mine since competing at the World Championships. She has some really good ideas on what to teach to develop balance and co-ordination, so when I run out of idea of my own I look to see if she has anything new.

## **General Obedience**

I have been continuing with general wait training mostly indoors and feeding Beep for staying still. I am not using this though in agility yet as I want it perfect this time. I have to say though that Beep is completely different type of dog to my other two and I don't think waits will be such a battle. The other thing I have been doing is calling her and feeding every time. Sounds like common sense but I want her to react instantly when I call her so on walks I call and feed every so often. At first only when I knew I would get her attention and now when she is chasing Kite so that whatever the distraction I still get her straight away. Of course I make sure the food is tasty and I use CSJ fish treats for this as she loves them and they are good for her. This is a good time for a moan about titbits, when I teach I see all sorts of treats used and one of the ones I hate the most is the canned sausage. Yes I am sure they are tasty and smell nice but they are full of salt! Please think about what you use for a reward, it needs to be tasty and healthy.

## **Agility**

This month with Beep being in season the only agility I have done is at home in the garden and just 5 minutes a day as I want her motivated. In the garden she is very happy to play, obviously as long as no leaves fall on her so a few minutes a day is perfect.

## **Weaves**

Channel weaves are great as I can incorporate this into my ball throwing so it's just a game. The channels are very wide so all I am teaching is the entry and speed through the middle. Beep loves these and is now doing all the entries I can think of and running very fast for her ball. I want very independent weaves

so most of the time I am just throwing the ball and letting her find the entry and run to the toy without me moving at all. Every so often I run too or recall but most of the time I either stand still or run away from the weaves so she learns to run to the end whatever strange things I am doing. Occasionally I throw the ball a little short of the weaves so Beep has to go to the end before coming back for it.

## **Seesaw**

I also have a seesaw in the garden and because I am teaching a running seesaw can just throw a toy for Beep so again it's just playing. I have what I call a Beep box on the floor after the seesaw and Beep does the seesaw, runs through the box and grabs her toy. So, as with the weaves I want this independent of where I am so I am varying how I do this. Sometimes sending, recalling, running with her and running away but always I throw the ball straight.

## **Jumping**

It's very difficult to do any jumping for speed in my garden as there is not really enough room and as I don't want Beep to learn not to stretch out over the jumps I have left this alone while she is in season. Speed is the most important thing and as Beep is not a naturally mad puppy I don't want to teach her anything at half speed. I can teach turns which are just as important but for the same reason I don't want to just teach turns so its best to wait until I can do both.

### **Contacts**

As I explained in the last article I am teaching Beep running contacts and so my training is a little complicated. I am teaching the Silvia Trkman way (her website address is above) so this basically means teaching the dog the difference between running and jumping. If your dog runs using the same stride pattern all the way across the dog walk or a frame it will hit the contact every time somewhere along it. The problem with this method for me is that I am a perfectionist and with method you can't be too precise as you will slow the dog down. The criteria when teaching is that the dog doesn't jump at all, not that it has to hit the same place on the contact every time. This is

extremely hard for me but I am determined to get it right. Obviously I can't do anything without putting my own spin on it and the one problem with Silvia's method is that she doesn't specifically teach turns from the running contact. I think the reason for this is that abroad most courses are much more flowing than ours so there may be subtle turns off the contacts but not like we would get. I think the turns are as important as the straight so I wanted teach Beep that she could turns or run straight early and had an idea on how to do this. Once again I spoke to Lee who agreed with me and made what I call the 'Beep Box'. You can see what this looks like in the clip below. Using the 'Beep Box' I gradually got Beep from running a plank to a low dog walk and then full height quite easily. As I was teaching each stage I taught her five ways of doing this.

1. Go. Meaning run as fast as possible in a straight line
2. Right. This is obvious (I hope) and is approx a 90 degree turn
3. Left. As above
4. Right, come. This 180 degree turn coming back to me
5. Left, come As above

I also varied my position and whether I moved or just stood still and directed. When I gave a turn command I gave it before the down plank so she knew early enough to change her stride and turn well. I also taught opposite ends of tunnels at this stage as they are important later. This was the easy part of this training and I have attached some videos, they are not great but you can get the idea. All the turning and tunnel training was done on a garden sized dog walk with the full height only being used a couple of times to test that she could easily change from one to the other.

Next month I will talk about the next stage in Beep's contact training and hopefully report that she is back to normal.

Bye for now

Love Toni and Beep xx

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