

Working Trials Article

Jumping for Joy

When people find out I do working trials the one thing they all ask me about is the jumps or, more particularly the scale. Their reaction to this section of trials varies between an arrogant



assumption that their dog could easily do the jumps as they are very good at agility, to abject horror that a dog should be asked to tackle such dangerous objects.

Neither of these reactions is justified, as the jumps are neither easy nor dangerous, but a properly trained dog of an appropriate breed that treats the jumps with

respect will find them well within their reach.

Without, I hope, causing too much controversy, I would like to point out that I am a firm believer in the right animal (or person for that matter) for the right job. Just as I would not choose a terrier for a lap dog or a dachshund for the gun, I do not think that working trials are suited to all breeds.



That said, the jumps are a good indication of this, and if the dog is physically incapable of doing the agility section of trials then I think it is fair to say it is perhaps not suited to the sport.

Each of the three jumps are designed to see a different type of agility from the dog, and with the 3ft Clear Jump, or Hurdle as it is sometimes known, the dog is required to perform a high arc to clear the top. To do this it will need to take off much further away than for the 6ft Scale where an almost vertical take-off is required.

There is no doubt that to the onlooker the scale always looks the most challenging of the three jumps, and the one that causes the most fear in the handlers, although not usually in the dogs. However, this is very much down to the shape and size of the dog, and we have found that collies seem to find the scale relatively easy, but find the 9ft long jump more of a stretch.

GSD's however can sail over the long jump in a single unbroken stride, but sometimes find heaving their big frames over the scale a bit more difficult. Getting the distances right can be of a great help to any breed, and we have found that by a process of trial and error and watching where our dogs take off from to get their best results can enable us to place them at the right distance every time, and thus give them their best chance.

After helping several people with jump problems we have become convinced that most of the problems stem from the handlers anxiety, and if we ask the handler which jump they dislike the most it will inevitably be the one the dog is finding difficult. Therefore, we must ask the question, which came first, the handler's dislike or the dog's?

The two most common mistakes in teaching a dog to jump increase the size too quickly or too slowly. If you rush the dog through each jump without giving it time to get confident at each height/length then it will lose confidence and begin to use avoidance. However, spending too long at each stage can give the dog a false sense of security and then any attempt to increase the size can result in refusal.

We have found that by teaching one jump at a time and increasing the size on a daily basis seems to work well. We believe in starting low/small, and once the concept is fully understood, we increase the size each day. We try to stick to the rule of jumping the dog at the previous day's height then increasing it and jumping again, and that is one session. This ensures steady progress without over facing and it does not

matter if the jump is increased by one inch or one foot just as long as it keeps on being increased until the full size is achieved.

Once we have reached full size on one jump we put it away and only revisit it once a week while we start work on a daily basis on the next jump. By this method, we usually teach all three jumps in a couple of weeks, and from then on, for the rest of the dog's working life, we jump them on all three jumps once a week either in training or at a trial.



Obviously, we don't start until the dog is over 12 months and we usually have hip x-rays done first but as long as the dog is fit and well and is not over faced it usually goes very smoothly.

Making the long jump look easy



All our dogs have continued enjoying their jumps throughout their working trial career and even the retired dogs still howl with frustration when the other dogs are jumping and they are not.

So there is nothing scary about the working trial jumps but they should be treated with respect as they are not hurdles and dogs must be given the time and taught the

Scale is no problem for a fit collie

technique needed to achieve success.

We have found that once the dog

learns how to jump each jump they never forget it, and our biggest problem on a trials field is stopping them from jumping as soon as they see the obstacles, which is something I'm very happy to work on.