

Agility Expert Articles

Training Beep - part 7 by Toni Dawkins

April already wow, the time does fly or am I just getting old? The show season is finally coming and I am really looking forward to it. I have updates on all three girls for you.

Beep

Beep first of course and as usual I have good and not so good. It seems with Beep that every time I think I am taking a step forward with her something goes wrong and we end up going backwards.

Weaves

The weaves are causing me a lot of frustration at the moment as they are perfect, she knows her entry and never misses. At home, training club and friends venues she is fast enough for a young dog but as soon as I go to a show she is really slow. I have tried rushing her which works in training but not in competition. Some of this is down to what she has just done so if coming from a collapsible tunnel they are painfully slow as she still is not confident in the tunnel and her approach is therefore slow. I think she is trying too hard to get them right and so at the moment am just going with it, hoping that with confidence she will get quicker. At home I making sure I practise varying entries and my position to try and help with the confidence issue. I throw a toy as she goes into the weaves so she is focusing ahead and not on me so I will just have to wait and see.

Jumping

Her jumping technically is great, I handle Beep the same as I would Kite or Minx and she responds to everything. As you can guess though there is a but..... she is putting too many strides in between jumps which does not make sense as she has a long stride naturally. I have been doing some grid work to teach her to bounce and am trying to do just one grid a day so the bounce becomes more natural than an extra stride. I am doing this to a dead toy so that the only thing driving her is to get to the toy and not my body. Again this is great in training and getting better but in the ring she is still choosing to put an extra stride in rather than stretch out. It has to be confidence again and I wonder if the queuing stresses her or if she can sense anything through me. I am not going to do anything about this as I have to queue so this is another wait and see if she gets faster on her own.

Contacts

Her a-frame and seesaw are accurate and she seems confident. Sometimes the seesaw is slower depending on if it's a new place but most young dogs are like that. The a-frame is great, she never misses and I am changing my position and trying different things to proof it. Last night I recalled jump, a-frame, seesaw, jump, just a straight line but I stood past all the obstacles to see what would happen. I thought she would still have good contacts but might run past the seesaw. It was perfect though and I need to practise things like that more often to make sure she is not relying on my positioning to get the contact. The problem is that I have nowhere to do this other than on a training club night but its coming along and I am very pleased with these.

The dog walk is another story as this is another thing that relies on her confidence and in new places is still not perfect. She rarely misses to be fair but sometimes it is high and I don't want to give judges a decision, I want it definite. I have been trying at a few different places recently and most have been pretty good but then she had a bad night this week and I had to correct one. I have done an agility round in competition to see what would happen and all her contacts were perfect but I don't think it is a good idea to do more yet as I have no way of correcting in the ring. A strange thing with the DW is that it is markedly better outside; in the indoor school it is much worse. Knowing Beep this has to be an atmosphere thing and maybe the space helps too. I have decided to carry on with this method until the winter; if she is still confused or not confident then I will put a stop in. I think for a dog like Beep the repetition just makes her more worried about whether she is correct or not. You really need a dog like Kite that will keep trying no matter how many times you correct. Beep just switches off.

Shows

So far Beep's highest place is a third and this was her agility run. It shows how much time the running contacts make up as the course was just up and down which really does not suit her and her weaves were slow.

I am already fed up with G3 courses; I go to walk a course for Beep all excited and get to about jump 4 usually before I have worked the rest of the course out. Flat out speed is required for most of the courses and Beep does not have that. She has had a place at every show and I can see an improvement at every show. They are small things but good, her main problem right now is that is I turn her and she cant straightaway see the next obstacle she gets visibly worried and slows right down.

This week I have been working on this and we will see if it makes a difference. After every show I go home with things to work on, I mentally go

through each run and plan what I need to work on for that week. If she has a bad run I think it's important not to let her see if I am disappointed and use what went wrong in a positive way. I still have complete faith that she will be fine; it just might take a while.

New Trick (or maybe not)

I have taught her to run up stairs when I click a clicker!! Thought it might be good to try some tricks and introduce a clicker, only because it makes a funny noise and would be good for her. The first time I clicked it she ran up stairs and wouldn't come back down, now every time the clicker comes out she is gone and lies at the top of the stairs until I put it away. I am going to persevere with this though as I think I need to and Nic Jones recently sent me some tiny clickers that are not quite so loud. I don't need it for agility and actually don't like clickers for agility training but the new noise is good for Beep.

I know a lot of people with dogs like Beep and they tend to baby them a bit more and avoid what they don't like but I am taking the opposite approach and am going to keep introducing her to new and strange things and hopefully she will improve.

Treadmill

Another new thing for her is the water treadmill; I have recently started all three girls in a water treadmill near home. Its great and I prefer it to swimming as the dogs don't get so wet, I always worry Kite will get cold especially in the winter. Beep whines as soon as we arrive, all through the treadmill session and does not stop until she is back in the van but strangely seems to quite like it. Minx is really good and gets in herself now but walks along licking the glass constantly, I have to stop her as I am not sure a diet of window cleaner will do her any good but if anyone needs a treadmill cleaned she will do it, I will hire her out. Kite is not that impressed but just does it anyway, I wonder if she is thinking that by her age I should be letting her live a quiet life. No way ha ha. She just does a few minutes though and whereas the others will build up to longer sessions, Kite will stay the same, I just want to maintain her fitness not change her stride pattern or wear her out. The treadmill is run by Jo Hayes and is in the Alkham Valley near Dover in Kent. <http://www.chapelcaninetherapy.co.uk/>

Kite

Well I have fixed Kite's seesaw! I won't go on about Crufts as I have written a full report but I can't believe that in one month I retrained Kite to do a different behaviour on the seesaw when she has spent her whole life doing something else. Her seesaws at Crufts if anything were a little too solid and I

could have pushed them much more than I did. When I watched the runs back and saw that she stopped all four feet on the seesaw on every seesaw I couldn't believe it. I am still training with my gadget at home to keep this up but am more than happy with it and back to being confident about it. This year I am not entering her in any jumping classes, I will just do qualifying classes and agility as she will always need training in the ring but I don't want to wear her out. Realistically this will be her last good year competing but I keep thinking that and she just keeps going. I don't know if it's the food, the treadmill, the 'Back on Track' coat or just all three combined but she is flying at the moment and won a Chum qualifier at Nottingham!

Minx

Minx is now the new improved Minx, her contacts are fast and she can turn! She won all the classes I didn't train contacts in at the Easter show, so one dog got me some eggs. I am still working on turns as well as other things but she is responding to everything so well.

Both Kite and Minx now have 'Back on track' coats. These I think are great, Kite has had hers for a while now and they are supposed to help both as a preventative from injury and if they have an injury. The ceramic reflects body heat as an infrared wave, a form of energy that has a documented pain relieving effect. This reflected heat can reduce inflammation, ease muscle tension, increase blood circulation and hasten the healing process. I don't have a problem with either dog but I like to try my best to prevent problems rather than wait till they appear. Kite sleeps in hers but Minx is a fidget and it's all over the place in the morning so I put it on her when I am with her. They both have the mesh sheet which is really light, fits well and looks comfortable.

Thoughts this month

I had someone very recently tell me that some dogs will just never have that special something and you have to accept that, put them to one side and concentrate on the ones that do. I know I have mentioned this subject before and how I feel about it so I am not going to go into that but it got me thinking about what makes people love their dogs and why some love one more than another. (Phew long sentence). From people I know, some better than others I admit but it seems to be very much agility related. If their dog loves agility and is good at agility they love that one more than a dog like Beep. They often then find other reasons to not like that dog but usually those reasons would not matter if that particular dog was good at agility. I am not thinking of any one person here just summarising things I see and hear. This got me thinking about what I love the most about each of my dogs

and do you know that none of the reasons have anything to do with agility. They are all reasons that are specific to each dog and that no one else really sees.

With Kite it's her smiley face in the morning when I first wake up, she grins from ear to ear without showing any teeth and how I would miss that!

With Minx it's her tongue, it's too big for her mouth and when she is sleeping it hangs out so that when she first wakes up or if she is tired she looks a bit like the mad coyote from the 'Lion King'. If you look in her mouth it is wrinkled to fit in.

With Beep it's still changing a bit as she is still young and hard to pick a favourite but she tilts her head when I talk to her from left to right and although I know other people say their dogs do this I have never had this before and it's so cute. She has also just started smiling very much like Kite but she is more open with hers and does it for anyone. Kite saves hers just for me. She is also very vocal and whines and grunts when she is stroked.

I don't have a favourite dog I love each one exactly the same and if I try and think of putting one to the side I get the same awful feeling whichever one I try to imagine that with. 'Bond' is the word I hear most and people say they can't bond with a particular dog, I have to say that the minute mine come home I feel 'bonded' and it never changes. It certainly has nothing to do with their agility progression, but hey ask me again in another year if I still have no running DW!!!

That's all for now

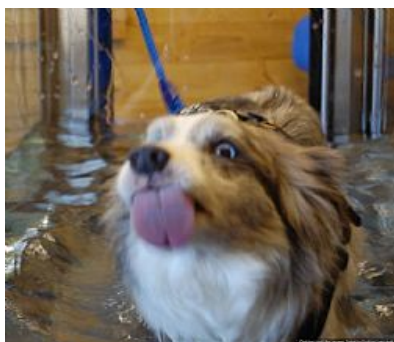
I will update you on my new addition next time.....

Toni and Beep

Xx

Water treadmill

Water treadmill 2



(posted
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