



ACTIVITY: WORKING TRIALS

THE AGILITY SECTION IN WT

The next stage in my series of articles on the trials exercises is the agility section.

Working Trials and the sport of Agility both have jumps with Agility focusing on speed and working trials with precision.

As such agility jumps are smaller and can be taken at speed without risk, while in working trials the dog needs to jump from a stationary position, and the larger obstacles need to be given due respect. This calls for a greater degree of control and a large amount of attitude, which can only be achieved by confident and positive handling.

PURSUANCE OF DUTIES

The trials jumps originally were meant to represent the three types of obstacles a working dog was likely to encounter in the pursuance of its duties. The 3 foot clear jump or hurdle, as it is sometimes known, represents a fence, which the dog must clear without contact.

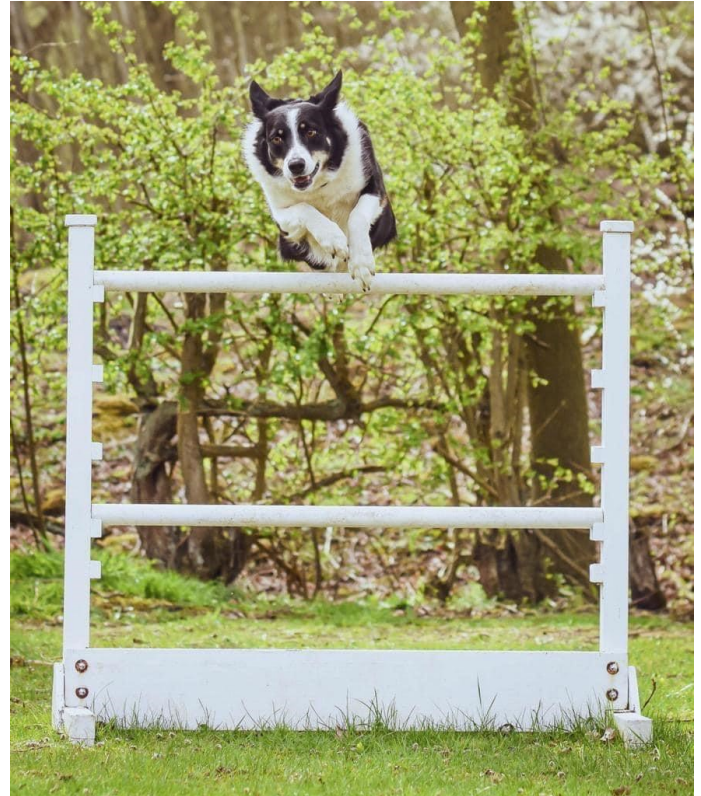
Although in trials it is only two bars on side posts, they knock down at the slightest touch, and so it would be obvious if a dog had made contact and would be penalised accordingly. The 8 ft long jump simulates a ditch or trench, and the dog is once again required to clear without contact whereas the 5ft 6" scale, which is climbed rather than jumped, represents a high wall or solid fence.

In the two lower stakes these obstacles can be lowered or reduced for smaller breeds of dog, but from WD onwards they remain at full size in all stakes for all breeds.

There are many ways of teaching the jumps and every trialist has their own tried and tested method. It is not wise to start jumping a young dog until it is over 12 months old, although I do teach the concept of jumping much earlier. It is perfectly possible to teach a very young pup to jump over a garden cane perched on two bricks laid flat on the ground on the command of 'hup' or 'over' and this lesson will be valuable once the pup is old enough to start real jumping.

Although the agility section consists of three obstacles, I believe only one should be taught at a time, and our method involves teaching one jump from start to full size before embarking on another and then practising the learned one just once a week.

We always start with the clear jump and begin with using any incentive to get the dog to hop over the lowest height.



This is when the earlier lesson of sticks and bricks can come in useful, and at this stage I am happy to position myself in front, behind or at the side of the dog without any regard to the 'rules.'

As soon as the dog understands the command I move the height up very quickly, but increase the incentive by asking the dog to wait. I always find that once a dog understands what to do, making them wait increases their desire to do it, and it's not being allowed to do it that makes them want to. This may seem a strange way of doing things, but it is our belief that the more a dog has to wait the keener he is to jump, and we use this method to build attitude which is such an important part of this exercise.

A reward for the clear jump can be anything which you dog likes from simple praise to food or toys, but in the clear jump it is essential that you dog cannot see the reward, or its attention will be directed away from the jump, either to the handler if they have the reward, or to the ground on the other side of the jump if that is where his incentive waits. In the latter case the dog will be looking at the ground rather than up at the jump, and so will inevitably knock it down.

As I have said, the height of this jump can increase quite quickly and as long as the reward is good enough, and the attitude remains positive, full height can be reached in a matter of days. It is important to start thinking about

distances for jumping and by watching how your dog jumps and where he takes off from naturally, you should be able to gauge the right distance from the jump when you start the formal set up.

With all jumps I believe that set up is very important and if time is taken to set the dog up and make him wait he will be more inclined to look at the jump and thus be more accurate.

The long jump, just like the clear, is taught in stages, but for this one there is always a favoured reward at the end of the jump, laid on the ground some distance from the last element, to encourage the dog to jump big to reach it. It is okay for the dog to be looking on the ground for this one, as we want him to jump long and low so a placed reward can be very beneficial.

Once again I move on very quickly as it is important with all the jumps not to let the dog become stuck on a height or length for too long, or it will be very hard to move them on.

I try with all jumps to start each session at the height or length achieved last time, and then add one increment and finish. By this method it is possible to teach a jump in a matter of days and as long as the confidence is maintained there should not be a problem.

With the scale I am looking for the dog to learn technique, but it is important to start at a height that the dog cannot clear. If the boards are lowered to a point that the dog could jump then it needs to be brought in very close so that it has to climb rather than jump.

I keep the scale at this height until the dog sorts out the technique and what I am looking for is the dog to gather all four feet on the top of the jump before coming down.

INCORPORATE THE WAIT

Once it has learned to do this you can add a board at a time until the 5ft6" is achieved. I only teach one way at a time, but other handlers prefer to teach both the over and back from the beginning but whichever way it is done it is good to incorporate the wait on the other side from the start.

As I said at the beginning, however you teach the agility it is the dog's attitude to the jumps that makes the difference, so once the dog has learned all three obstacles keep the practice going and keep it fun. If the dog makes a mistake on a jump, walk away from it and don't make it into an issue – they all get it wrong sometimes.

When you are training your dog it is important to either have your own set of jumps or regular access to someone else's and try to take your dog to different places and different jumps so that they experience all sorts of environments. If, once your dog has learned all the jumps and doing them consistently it starts to make mistakes or refuse to jump, have it checked out by a vet or chiropractor to ensure it does not have an injury, as I am sure you would not want to jump with a bad back.

Finally, make sure you keep the jumps fun, our dogs are more likely to anticipate than refuse, and that is a fault we can live with.

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**For Further Information on
Working Trials (WT) Visit:**

<https://www.workingtrials.info/>

<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/events-and-activities/working-trials/>