

# Clean Run In the Beginning

By Bud Houston

It's important to understand the world we lived in when the *Clean Run* started publishing. Dog Agility was a new sport. In the United States we had both the National Club for Dog Agility (NCDA) started by Bud Kramer, and the United States Dog Agility Association created by Kenneth Tatsch.

What we lacked, we fans of the sport, was any training guidance. There were no videos, no gurus of the sport, and pitifully few books. Bud Kramer published a small magazine called "Contact Line."

The only book out there when I first started was *Agility Dog International* by Peter Lewis and John Gilbert. Their advice for training a new dog was to allow the dog to skulk about the perimeter of the training field and pick things up as they went along. For training protocols that method has a lot less granularity than I like (as an American... you know us, the over-analytical blokes).

The *Clean Run* grew out of a weekly lesson plan I shared with other agility trainers, mostly in the Southwest. I led training classes for a couple agility clubs in southern Arizona: Contact Zonies and Good Dog Agility. By today's standards our training methods were primitive and slightly

desperate. But credit those pioneers in the 80's and 90's everything we know today.

My daytime jobs were technical writing and stand-up computer software training. I was naturally an advocate for the proposition that you always go to class with a lesson plan. As requests for my lesson plans grew, I started charging for it, and named it the *Clean Run*.

Initially the *Clean Run* was a weekly publication, consisting of six or eight pages that were photocopied, and featured dog agility drawings by various artists on the cover page; with a staple to hold it all together.

I teamed up with Monica Percival in 1995 and within a couple years sold my interests in the magazine to her. Monica is a publication pro who managed the *Clean Run* like a proper business and gave the magazine a professional and slick presentation.

It's a bit sad that the days of the printed magazine have probably come to an end. Most of us prefer to get our information and misinformation from the Internet. There is something substantial and reassuring about the solid printed page that cannot be adequately replaced by an electronic device.





## A Look Back at the History of *Clean Run*

By Brenna Fender

*What does it mean to you, the expression “clean run”?*

*A clean run is a course run with zero-faults, under standard course time. It is the essence of the sport according to the standard set by the United States Dog Agility Association. To get a leg, to earn a title, a dog and handler must be a team that is finely tuned and aware of one another. Increasingly a clean run is also required to best the dogs in competition. The days when you could take home the blue ribbon with 5 faults, or 1.2 faults, are long gone.*

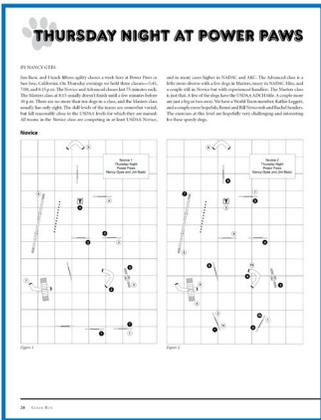
*There is more to a clean run than a dog being familiar with, and able to perform, each of the obstacles listed in the USDAA official rules and regulations. It’s not only dogs we are training. The handler on the field is at least as important as the dog. That may not ring true to you, but it is true.*

*When you walk the course, you must visualize how you are going to handle each flow, each sequence, each challenge. You must know exactly how you will communicate the flow and sequence to your dog. You must know exactly how your dog will respond to your signals, your voice, your posture, your body position, in the context of the flowing course.*

*The Clean Run is a reference for agility instructors. I do not always say Pay attention to the handler. But remember, as the instructor, you should be equally concerned for what the handler is learning as with what the dog is learning.*

—Bud Houston, January 1995, *Clean Run* Vol. 1, #7 (the real first issue of *Clean Run*, we’ll explain the #7 later!)



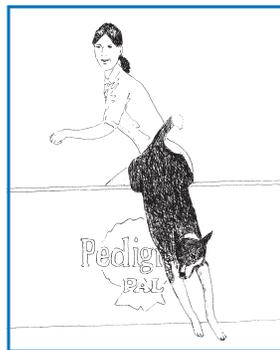


At some point, Monica asked me to start doing monthly drills/courses, and they were titled Thursday Nights at Power Paws. I think I resisted for a while, but she bought a laptop for me and a couple of other writers so we could get work done on the road, and it was all uphill from there! Those original "Thursday nights" morphed into the Power Paws drills, which I still do today for the magazine. Clean Run also published my first book, *Alphabet Drills*.

It's been quite a ride, and I thank Monica and the entire staff for my almost 25 years of association in publications, camps, and books and for supporting all my writing endeavors. I look forward to many more years of friendship with Clean Run Productions."

5. Linda Mecklenberg, who eventually became part owner of Clean Run for a time, shares her early memories:

"When agility began in the USA, few agility enthusiasts had much dog training experience, but none had agility training experience because the sport was brand new. There were no agility books, no DVDs, no seminars, and no online classes to refer to. There was no Internet to facilitate the transfer of information. Agility was taught primarily at clubs scattered hundreds of miles apart; communication between them was very limited. Different styles of handling and training techniques unique to that regional area often emerged.



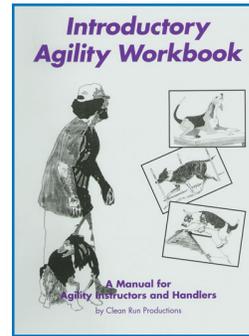
In 1995, *Clean Run* became an important resource through which aspiring agility instructors and trainers could share information. A scientist by nature, I loved agility back then because there were so many puzzles to solve. About halfway through *Clean Run's* first year, I started contributing and sharing some of my ideas. One of my first articles was about how I trained for distance control. Agility was growing and changing rapidly; I often wrote that year, as did others. Through *Clean Run*, we shared ideas with the rest of the USA, for the sheer love of the sport. I wrote about wait-for-release contacts, rudimentary versions of which way to turn, the dog's line, shaping, layering, and other topics that were novel back then. That year I happened to be a member of the USA World Cup team that competed in Belgium, so, along with Stuart Mah, we filled two issues analyzing the courses and designing drills based on them. Those were likely the first FCI courses most handlers in the USA had ever seen. *Clean Run* was not only a source of training and handling ideas; but now course designs of different judges and organizations, and even different countries, could be shared and learned from.

For me, it has been amazing to watch the sport of dog agility grow over the years. The difference between agility when I started, and what it is now, is mind-boggling. Thank you to *Clean Run* for the role you played in the evolution of the

sport, and for giving me a platform from which I could contribute to that evolution as well!"

Linda joined Bud and Monica as an editor of the magazine in 1997 and served in that position for many years.

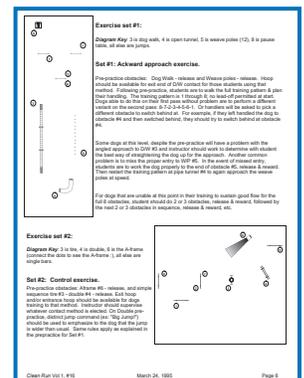
After attending the 1995 USA World Cup in Belgium, Linda along with Stuart Mah filled two issues analyzing the courses and designing drills based on them. Those were likely the first FCI courses most handlers in the USA had ever seen. You can find a complete copy of these issues here: [www.cleanrun.com/feature/clean\\_run\\_25th\\_anniversary\\_part\\_5/index.cfm](http://www.cleanrun.com/feature/clean_run_25th_anniversary_part_5/index.cfm)



6. It wasn't long before *Clean Run*, the magazine, became Clean Run, the store, at least on a very small scale. Monica says, "The first product we sold was the *Introductory Agility Workbook* in 1996. We created two more books in that series." Sales occurred at Monica's seminars and at agility trials, so in addition to the workbooks, "we started carrying a few other things: Zuke's PowerBones, food tubes that I made out of aquarium

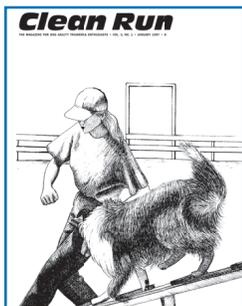
tubing, "peek a balls" that were these toys we found that you could hide treats in, [and] dog-friendly Frisbees which were hard to find back then." By 1998, Monica and partner Anna Jonsson had a 10x20 tent they set up full of products, which they hauled to trials in a small trailer. The business originally operated out of Anna's house. Monica says, "She had an old 1800s farmhouse. Eventually, CR took over the entire upstairs and the three-car garage. We turned our bedroom into the customer service office and made the living room downstairs into a bedroom!"

7. Long-time subscriber and contributor Janet Gauntt shares her memories of early *Clean Run* issues: "I was the sole contributor to Vol. 1, Issue #16 in which Bud printed my email response to a question about how I taught an agility class at my club. (This was in the early wild days when email was a pretty new technology and you either trained by yourself or with a club, so the mechanics of teaching a class were a bit different then.) I continued to contribute occasionally to the original newsletter with the odd little training tidbit or pattern. This continued over the years but with more fleshed out articles and reviews after Monica took over, and the newsletter transitioned into the professional educational publication we are all used to today that features a range of contributions beyond just training patterns. Mostly though, of course, I just read it. As long as I stay active in the sport, I will continue to subscribe. Not only does the magazine continue to report on current trends, it always remains useful to me if I need to come up with a quick idea for a class that week!"



You can find a complete copy of Vol. 1, #16 with Janet's contribution here: [www.cleanrun.com/feature/clean\\_run\\_25th\\_anniversary\\_part\\_7/index.cfm](http://www.cleanrun.com/feature/clean_run_25th_anniversary_part_7/index.cfm)

**8.** Monica and Linda were determined to go to a monthly magazine format. As subscriptions grew, the weekly format was too much work even with only doing a mailing every other week. Monica recalls, “By that time, subscriptions were almost up to 500. Folding together two issues, sealing them, so they stayed together, adding a stamp and a mailing label, and then transporting boxes to the post office every other week was getting very old, and people were tired of helping me out!” The first monthly magazine issue was published in January 1997 as Volume 3, #1. It went out to about 500 subscribers. The cover continued the newsletter’s tradition of being original agility artwork rather than a photo, showcasing a drawing by Rebecca Cheek called “Hit that Zone!” Monthly subscriptions were \$60 per year.



Meet the three editors of the all-new Clean Run magazine in this 1997 interview: [www.cleanrun.com/feature/clean\\_run\\_25th\\_anniversary\\_part\\_6/index.cfm](http://www.cleanrun.com/feature/clean_run_25th_anniversary_part_6/index.cfm)



**9.** The illustrated covers and other images within the magazine are well remembered by many. Nancy Culley illustrated quite a few of them, and she came upon that job in a roundabout way. She says, “I very fondly remember the early days and meeting Bud during a weekend of agility in Arizona when the weather was horrific—strong spring winds that launched so many of our little pop-up tents, destroying them completely and causing folks

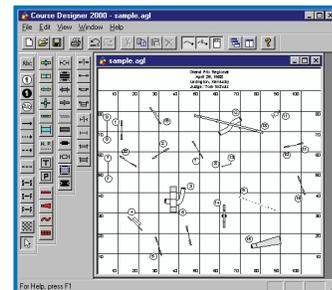
to hold on to the ones still standing for dear life. That evening I drew a few cartoons of the scenes, and they were circulated among the exhibitors the following day. Bud was among the crowd and brought over a copy of *Clean Run*, which he had just started as a club publication/newsletter and asked if he could use my drawings for an upcoming issue. I was delighted to be included and expressed interest in receiving future copies of *Clean Run*. Back then (I can’t believe it’s been 25 years!), the sport was still relatively new, and many of us were eager to learn how to handle our dogs and navigate through the various courses. *Clean Run* was an excellent resource, and soon many of my fellow Albuquerque agility enthusiasts also wanted to receive Bud’s new publication. I continued to do cover art as well as a few other art projects for quite some time, but as the sport grew, so did the number of artists who were soon followed by the great photographers we have today!”

**10.** The online store was launched in 1998. “The only things we really shipped out initially though were the books and magazines. We sold tons of back issues in the beginning, so we were always running to the photocopy store!” Soon



they added other products like toys, treats, slip leads, and the popular Dita shoes. The business eventually moved from Anna’s house to a rented space in Chicopee, Massachusetts alongside Exercise Finished, a dog training center for obedience and agility. The space was an old factory for bottling beer—with no central air conditioning or heat! Monica says, “So we wore gloves with cut off fingertips in the winter while working and had free popsicles and ice cream all summer long!” In April, 2007, *Clean Run* moved into the current building in South Hadley, Massachusetts.

**11.** The first *Clean Run* Course Designer program was released in 1998. It supported the AKC and US-DAA obstacle sets. CRCD4 can in fact still open .AGL files created in CRCD 1.0 and CRCD2000 (which was released in September 1999). These ran only on Windows PCs. CRCD did not run on Mac until CRCD3. The first copies of CRCD were available on disc only—no digital downloads!



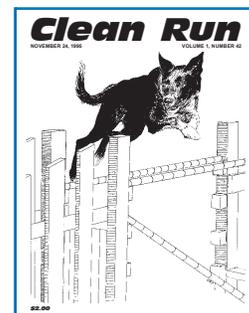
**12.** *Clean Run*’s current tradition of having stunning agility photography on the cover of each issue began in January, 1999 with a photo by Tien Tran of Pam Reid’s All-Canadian, Eejit. At that point the covers were black and white. The first color cover was in January, 2000. The rest of the magazine still sported black and white photos.

**13.** Linda and Monica bought out Bud’s ownership of the business in February of 1999.

**14.** With agility growing by leaps and bounds in 1999, *Clean Run* offered its first agility camp. There were 150 people and 10 instructors that met up at a Georgia campsite. By 2004, the camp had 350 competitors and auditors, 18 instructors, and 17 rings of equipment!

**15.** Long-time agility competitor and *Clean Run* contributor Mary Ellen Barry shares her memories:

“Wow, I can’t believe *Clean Run* magazine is 25 years old. I remember those early days when the ‘magazine’ was black and white with hand-illustrated covers. It was hardly a magazine, more like a newsletter stapled and folded in half and delivered by snail mail. These were the days I would check my mailbox for issues of *Clean Run*, premiums of upcoming agility trials, and confirmations from trials I had already entered. No email back then, how on Earth did we survive! I remember meeting Linda, Bud, and Monica, all in person, and seeing them compete after seeing their dogs on the cover pages! I remember vividly one of the covers which was Monica’s dog Lazer on the cover. I was in awe when I actually got to meet



him and watch him run. He was one of the coolest dogs ever with amazing distance and verbal commands!

I also remember the first Clean Run Camp held in 1999! I was the first participant to register for a spot when the camp was announced in the summer of 1998. I was SOOOO excited.

I eventually went on to write for the magazine from 2003-2017, as well as teach at the Camp in 2004 and 2005. I was honored to be a part of both.

Well done to *Clean Run* magazine and congratulations on your 25 years!"

**16.** In 2000, Jean Murray teamed up with Clean Run to offer a trial management software called Clean Run Trial Genie.

**17.** Also, in approximately 2000, Lisa Baird joined *Clean Run* magazine and has continued to work for the magazine since. She says, "I started working for CR about 20 years ago as a proofreader. I literally just got PDFs of the printed pages and read them through for errors. Things were a little raw back then. There were several of us who Linda recruited for this, in exchange for a magazine subscription. The idea of having access to agility exercises for our local classes and articles by the exercises was very exciting. We definitely made use of them in our local club classes.

I was very pleased to be along for the ride as the magazine grew into the glossy creation, with color and more and more info. Those hand-drawn courses became more detailed with the creation of Clean Run Course Designer. Eventually, I became a copy editor, primarily tasked with reviewing and editing those courses and exercises for the magazine, along with the articles that accompany them.

I've met and been able to learn from so many amazing people over the years I've spent with *Clean Run*.... I never thought all those years ago when Linda asked me to help out with this little magazine that it would become such a major part of my life for so many years. I cannot believe how it has expanded so far beyond just a dew training drills to health, nutrition, and so much more!

Recently *Clean Run* has undergone another change, but I am sure will remain the amazing informative, helpful guide for so many in the sport!"



**18.** In September of 2003, *Clean Run* published its first "special issue." The focus was "weave poles," and it had 112 pages! That's a lot of weaving! (You can buy a digital copy of this issue here: [https://www.cleanrun.com/product/clean\\_run\\_special\\_focus\\_issue\\_on\\_weaving\\_e\\_book/index.cfm?](https://www.cleanrun.com/product/clean_run_special_focus_issue_on_weaving_e_book/index.cfm?))

**19.** As subscriptions and advertising grew, the subscription price

decreased to \$48, where it remains today. In 2004, the magazine became full color, and in 2006 a digital version was added to the mix.

**20.** By 2004, Clean Run started publishing books, and then DVDs, the first of which was *Best of the 2004 FCI Agility World Championships*.

**21.** In November 2005, Monica bought Linda's share of *Clean Run* and became the sole owner of the business.

**22.** Clean Run offered its first instructor's conference in 2007. It took place in Connecticut. The second instructor's conference took place in Michigan in 2008.

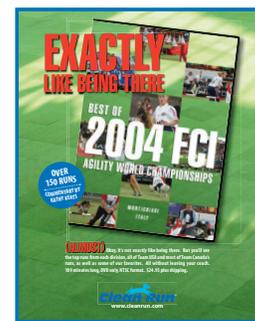
**23.** In 2011, Clean Run joined forces with Greg Derrett to create the World Agility Open, the first international agility event created and managed by agility competitors. The goal was to create an event without the encumbrance or politics of a large organization where agility is not the only concern. Monica says, "We wanted to be able to make decisions that were in the best interest of the competitors and also advance new ideas in trial management." Clean Run continued participating in the management and organization of the event through 2017. "We're still avid supporters of WAO, but wanted to free up time to focus on new projects like the Learning Center," Monica says.

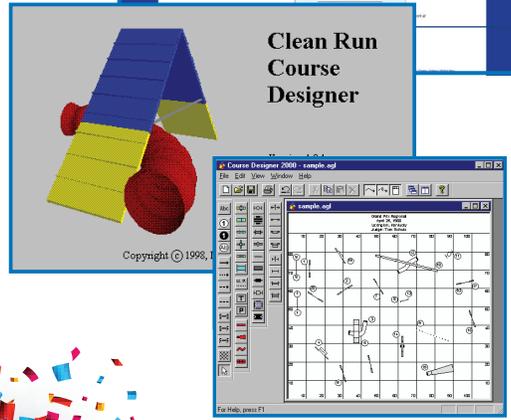


**24.** In 2019, Clean Run created an online school called the Clean Run Learning Center. This school offers online learning in the form of webinars, self-study courses, single lessons, and full service live courses. It can be accessed via Cleanrun.com or directly through this link: [https://www.cleanrun.com/category/learning\\_center/index.cfm](https://www.cleanrun.com/category/learning_center/index.cfm).

**25.** In 2020, *Clean Run* magazine became digital-only, no longer publishing a paper magazine. Although everyone involved was sad to say goodbye to the tradition of paper, the digital-only format has provided interesting options like video examples and expanded written content.

In a 1997 interview about *Clean Run* and agility, Monica said, "What a leap of faith they make—going along at top speed, reading every nuance of the handler's body language on the fly, listening for verbal cues at the same time. They have no idea when they leave the start line where that course will be going." And so it has been with Monica and *Clean Run*, growing, evolving, and changing in ways that could never have been predicted back at the start line.





25 years

