

# Review

## From the Ground Up

A Book by Kim Collins

By Martha Faulk

Over a decade ago when I became interested in agility, “foundation” training meant doing a bit of obedience work with your dog to enable you to basically heel him around the course. Not much more was necessary for beginner competition at the time because courses were much easier than they are today—no weave poles in Novice AKC, for example, and no 270° turns, threadles, or serpentine to test your beginner dog’s skill.

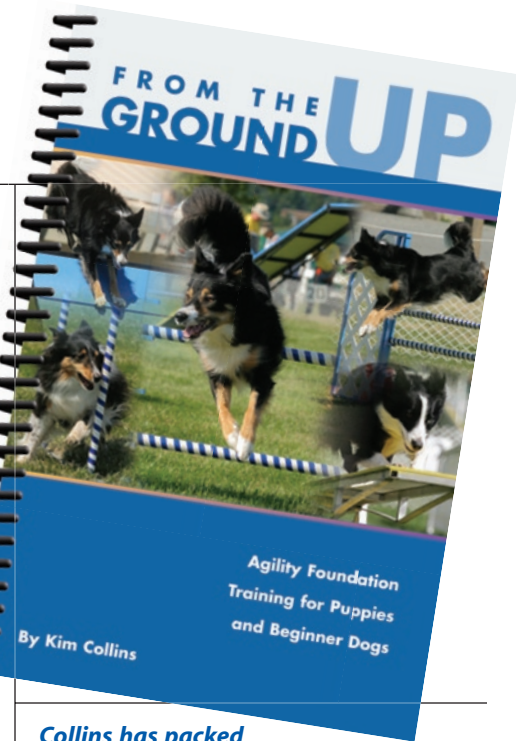
Today, though, we know much more about the benefits of training a dog for both speed and consistency of performance in agility *before* attempting any course work. That preliminary training is described in detail by Kim Collins in the recently published *From the Ground Up: Agility Foundation Training for Puppies and Beginner Dogs*. Collins, who has been training dogs professionally since 1992, owns Pawsitive Steps Canine Sports Centre, a training facility in British Columbia, Canada. Her Shetland Sheepdog Piper was the 2000 USDAA National Agility Grand Prix 16" Champion, and her Border Collies Bryn and Feyd were members of the 2004 Canadian IFCS World Team competing in Valencia, Spain.

Collins has packed a great deal of useful information into an easy-to-use 160-page book. After an introductory chapter that gives an overview of the sport of agility, she describes “Training Basics” in Chapter 2, providing clear explanations of luring, prompting, and shaping behaviors. She also describes basic steps in training a new behavior and lists the signs of stress that may occur during training. Throughout the book, there are sidebar “training tip” sections containing useful tidbits, such as “criteria for a good toy” and “begin and end with fun.” Also helpful are the many photographs and diagrams illustrating what the dog and trainer should try to accomplish in each important training step.

At the beginning of the chapter on “Reinforcement,” Collins says, “If you read only one chapter of this book, read this one.” Anyone who has ever taken or taught a beginning agility class will recognize that understanding motivation through reinforcement is key to a good relationship with your dog and essential for training agility. Collins describes both the use of food and the use of play in training. The section on “Teaching an Older Dog or Food Motivated Dog to Play with Toys” provides various suggestions for what many agility trainers consider to be the most important ingredient in your relationship with your dog—getting him to play with you, especially to tug.

Other chapters help the reader with obedience skills needed for agility, such as the sit, down, and recall. The “Foundation Work” chapter illustrates ladder-work and stool-work exercises to help the dog with rear-end awareness, as well as how to use targets for training in general. Much attention is devoted to how to prepare your dog for agility obstacles in “Pre-Obstacle Training,” by familiarizing him with wobble boards, tippy boards, planks, and jump bumps to help him pay attention to his takeoffs and landings.

Distance and directional commands, as well as footwork for many different kinds of crosses, are outlined in detail because, as Collins explains, many top handlers believe that “Agility is lost or won on the ground between the obstacles.” Collins provides a list of behaviors that your dog should be able to do proficiently *before* being placed on any equipment. These behaviors include: sit-stay, down-stay, wait in the crate, front, back-up, side/close, swing/around, hand target, drive in for tug toy, retrieve a toy back to you, and many others. After your dog knows these behaviors, you are now ready for the chapter on “Pre-obstacle Training,” where you’ll



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learn how to promote confidence on all the obstacles and set your dog up for success with early weave pole training.

The last two chapters are devoted to single obstacle training and sequencing. Collins defines sequencing as asking the dog to perform three or more obstacles in a row. She cautions that “Sequencing before the foundation and obstacle skills are fully trained, tested and proofed can lead to many of the problems we see in the ring.” Her instruction on sequencing can help handlers to avoid those problems.

*From the Ground Up* guides you through basic training principles, then progresses through the obedience, flatwork, verbal commands, and physical skills that your dog will need to be successful in agility. Whether you are starting your first dog in agility or refreshing your foundation training skills, this comprehensive guide will inspire you with confidence in your training abilities and help you to enjoy the positive results of your early work and play with your dog. 🐾

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