

Clean Run

I love teaching beginning classes. At no other time is the magnitude of improvement so pronounced. To see the difference in the dogs (and the handlers!) from the first class to the last -- it is incredible!

The beginning class can offer many things for the dog: a first exposure to other dogs, people and new places; experience with new surfaces and heights. Sometimes it is the beginning of a new relationship between the handler and the dog; for others, it strengthens an already existing one.

In the beginning class, we teach the fundamentals of each obstacle. We also work toward the ultimate goal of developing a smooth, forward movement away from the handler. To do this, we use targeting. We have used targeting in our last 2 or 3 beginning classes and have made a couple important discoveries: it takes longer (which means a small instructor:student ratio) and the results are quite spectacular.

After the introductions and new class briefing, we divide the group between instructors (4 students per instructor is good) and spend a few minutes with each dog, a white plate and Roll Over (or microwaved hot dogs). Toss a treat on the plate and say "Get it" several times. It doesn't take a dog long to "get it". The objective is to get the dog focusing away from the handler and on to the plate. We encourage the handlers to work this at home.

-- Marsha McIntosh

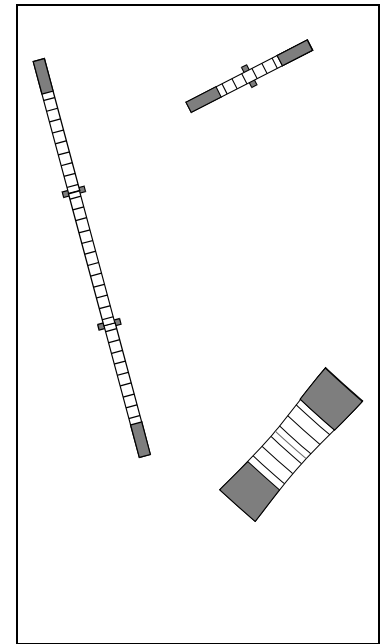
The Go-Ups

For the first week the Go-Ups are:

- a ladder flat on the ground
- a plank on two blocks
- the A-Frame at 3 feet (we support it on a saw horse)

The goal for this session: the dogs learn where their back feet are (dogs are not conscious of where they place their back legs), and to walk on different surfaces and heights.

1. The handler walks the dog through the ladder, on leash, several times.
2. The handler walks the dog on the plank, on leash, several times.
3. Trainer places the target on the ground at the base of the A-Frame. The handler walks the dog over the A-Frame, says “Get it” and allows the dog to eat the treat. Repeat several times.



Watching the Handler

Your job is to teach the handler to teach the dog. What you are teaching at this point is *go slowly*, and *make it fun*.

Watch these handlers... especially the competitive ones who are ready to feel the wind in their hair and race their dogs over the obstacles. There will be plenty of time to work on speed later on. It is necessary for the dog to trust his handler before any confidence in obstacle performance can be achieved.

Many of your students will not know how to make the experience fun for their dogs. Though the mechanics of this are pretty simple. Encourage them (over and over) to use very enthusiastic praises. Insist that they bring treats with them to reward the dog. On the first day of class it might be necessary for you to provide treats.

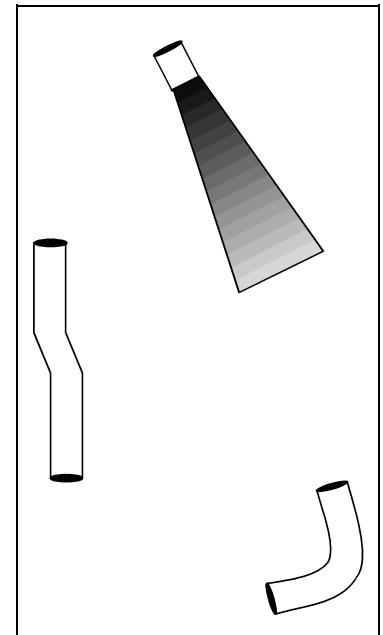
The Go-Throughs

The Go-Throughs are:

- a collapsed tunnel without the chute
- a pipe tunnel (pushed together to make it as short, yet stable, as possible)
- cardboard barrels, or other tunnel-like obstacles if we have any

Goal: Forward motion through the obstacles. Angled approaches for those that are ready.

Instructor places treat on target plate. Handler sends dog through with the command “get it”. (We don’t name the obstacle until the dog loves it.) This is repeated for each type of “go-through” that you have. The instructor removes the treat from the plate if the dog goes around the tunnel. So the dog only gets the treat for completing successfully. The instructor may need to move the treat into the tunnel to entice the dog through.



The Weaves and Jumps

Weaves: short set of leaning poles or a short chute (these can be purchased or created).

Leaning poles

The poles are flat or nearly flat on the ground, bent alternately left and right outward from a straight line. The dog trots down the center on leash with the handler at side. The instructor places a treat on the plate at the end of the poles. The handler commands “get it” and lets the dog eat the treat. This only needs to be done once or twice and then the dog can be sent by the handler to the target. The instructor removes the treat from the plate if the dog doesn’t go down the middle. So the dog only gets the treat for completing successfully.

Jumps

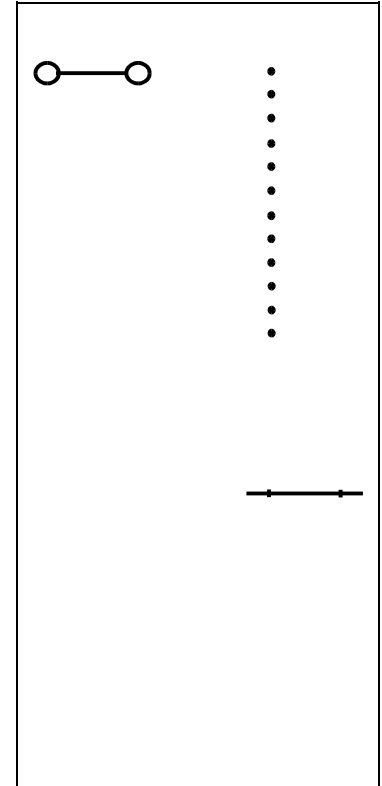
Introduce jumps by laying a track of trotting poles on the ground. Use about 8 bars or broad jump pieces laid about four to six feet apart, and not in a straight line.

Goal: fast, forward motion through the center of the poles

The instructor may need to put the plate into the weaves if the dog is having difficulty focusing on the treat.

Chute method

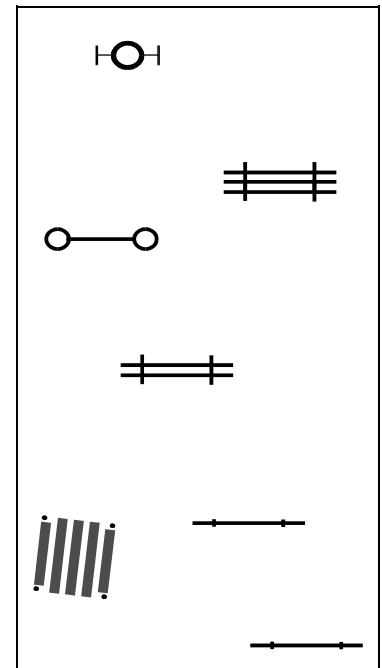
Set 6 poles about 21” apart in a straight line. Then move every other pole 18” to the right to form a channel. The drill is the same as for the leaning poles: handler helps dog through channel, on leash, with a “get it” to the target. After a few repetitions, the handler sends the dog through the chute to the target.



Goal: teach the dogs to judge when to pick up their feet

The handler trots the dog (on leash) down the poles to the target. The handler says “get it” as the dog gets to the target. Repeat this a couple of times, and then send the dog to the target.

Note: Not all dogs will be able to be allowed off leash (but most of them will). Work with those handlers to make sure the dog has enough slack on the leash and the leash is used as a correction only when necessary.



Bud's Road Notes

I'm on the road for the next several weeks judging dog agility, my *second* favorite activity in this sport. We are using this opportunity (getting rid of me) to publish our vision of what we do in the beginning agility classes in a six issue format. Marsha McIntosh, the training director at Good Dog, will do the honors. Of course, you already know that if you've made it this far back in the publication.

That doesn't mean I'm totally off the hook. I will put my road notes at the back of each of the six issues coming your way. Also, I still need to do cover drawings.

Notice, by the way, that this issue is numbered #1. A number of people have expressed an interest in the missing six issues. For all practical purposes, Clean Run began with #7. Actually, when I first started publishing, Clean Run was a monthly. It also had a distribution of less than 10 readers. But all of that has changed. With #7 I changed the format, started adding cover art, and made it a weekly training program. Most of the material from the preceding monthly issues has been cannibalized and put into the weekly format.

But this will be a good opportunity to fill in those missing six weeks. I hope you have fun with it.

-- Bud Houston

Change of Direction or Correction

I've observed a number of dogs that do not change direction well during a course run. They will lose speed, motivation, and energy. It is possible that early in the dog's training the handler used stern, or even harsh, correction for choosing wrong. Picture this:

The dog runs through the tunnel and bounds happily towards a jump set in its path. The handler screams "Fluffy NO!" The dog, startled, pulls off the jump. The dog's ears are lowered, tail tucked, as it slinks back to its handler.

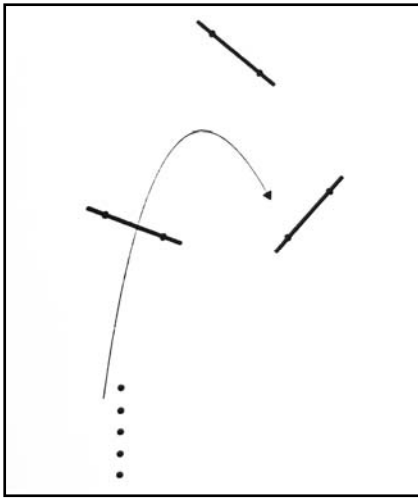
This same dog will take a change of direction command badly in competition. This dog will surely shut down in competition if a harsh or negative call-off is used.

A positive training method from the onset will keep the problem from ever occurring. If the dog does well, responds to the handlers change of direction, "Come! Jump!", the handler should praise the dog enthusiastically and pop a treat in the dog's mouth. If the dog does wrong, use a word or signal that the choice or performance was wrong, like "Wrong Fluffy." The signal should be delivered in a neutral voice. The signal should not mean "BAD" to the dog; it should mean, "wrong, let's try again."

A dog who has already conditioned to a correction meaning "BAD DOG!" really must be retrained in this. The training should emphasize success and enthusiasm.

Before introducing change of direction, return to a three jump set. Use a baited plate or other favorite motivator for the dog's reward at the end of the series. Run with the dog on the right; run with the dog on the left; call the dog over the three jumps.

When you observe that the dog is working with a lot of enthusiasm and speed, you can introduce the basic change of direction set.



The Basic Change of Direction Set

Again, it is very important to be neutral if the dog chooses wrong; be very upbeat and use treats or a favorite motivator when the dog does well.

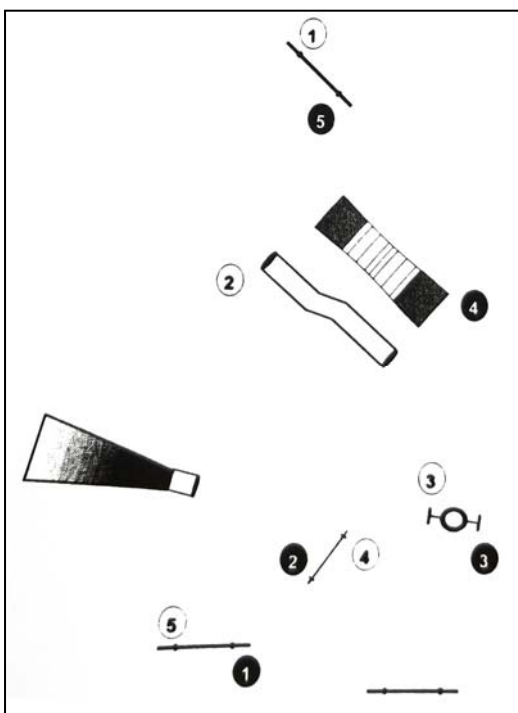
When the dog begins anticipating the turn to the second jump, and moving with speed and enthusiasm, begin alternating the second jump choice: One time turn right (Come, Jump); the next time go straight (Go, Jump). After awhile it will be a game between you and your dog. Your dog will become sensitive to your signal for choice in order to win the praise and treats.

Some things to keep in mind about the Basic Change of Direction Set

- Think of this exercise as a long-term, perhaps never-ending process. Do only 5 or 10 minutes of work each day on the set. Always end on a successful note.
- Timing is crucial in any change of direction exercise. The command (in our example) should be given after the dog has committed to the first jump, but before the dog has committed to any other obstacle. That begs the question, at what point does a dog become committed to the next obstacle?

That depends on the dog. To use my dog Winston as an example, he commits *after apogee!* That is, he commits while in the air, before his feet ever touch the ground. That means to me, that my timing must be as he leaves his feet to commit to the jump.

- There are plenty of other clues you provide to your dog in a change of direction exercise. If you are turning, for instance, your stride will shorten, your frame will twist in the direction of the change. When you recognize what these signals are you should learn to be very consistent with elements of posture and stride so you can use this non-verbal communication with your dog.



Masters Change of Direction

Two separate sequences are defined for this set (white 1 through 5, and black 1 through 5). Each flow similarly challenges the master handler to negotiate a short sequence that features a discrimination problem, trapping obstacles, multiple changes of direction, and at least one change of sides.

That's a lot going on in a 5 obstacle sequence!

Use this as an opportunity to discover something worthwhile about your dog and handler relationship.

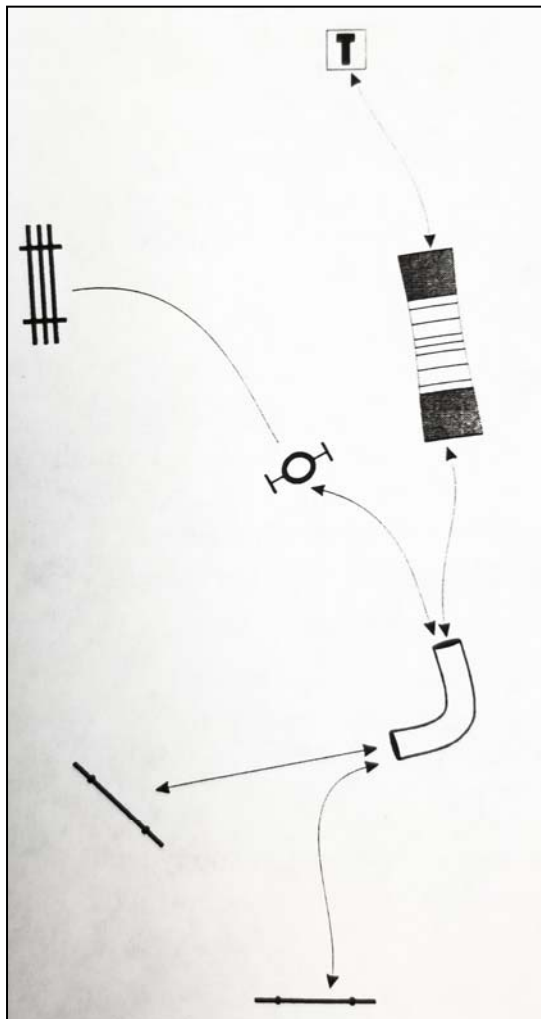
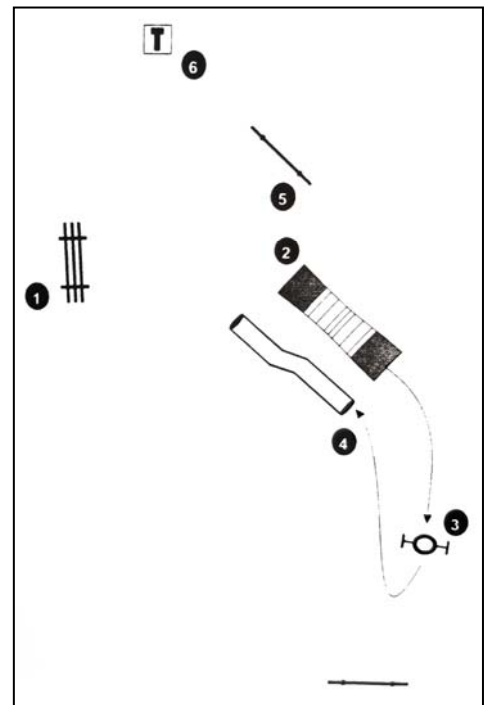
[Editor's trick question: Do judges really design choppy and ungainly courses? Or, do handlers run them in a sloppy and ungainly manner?]

Advanced Change of Direction

The tunnel – A-frame discrimination problem will occupy the advanced handler's attention in this set. The changes of direction are key. Squaring the dog up fairly and unambiguously for the A-frame requires deft timing in the change of direction.

The right-turn out of the tunnel presents an awkward moment to the handler, who must get the dog in the tunnel, then run around both tunnel and A-frame to rejoin the dog.

In light of Stuart Mah's discover (See "The Houdini Sequence"), is the path noted in the transition from #3 to #4 the only possibility? How would handling the transition differently affect the handler's predicament?



Starters Change of Direction

This set is rich with possibilities for changes of direction. In each case the tunnel is the crux of the change.

Work this set in either direction. Make it as fun as possible for the novice dogs.

Remind these beginning handlers that the magic word is *Come!*, which should already be conditioned by obedience training. The handler might use *Here!* instead. The command can be used multiple times in agility.

Using the dog's name when running a set is highly over-rated. If every command a handler uses is preceded by the dog's name, then the handler is putting up quite a chatter on the course. Ask the handler who is truly obsessive about using his dog's name: "Do you think your dog will believe you are talking to someone else?"

This is also a good opportunity to get the handler thinking about which direction his body is pointing... orientation of the frame. Advise these beginner handlers to turn their frame in the direction of the flow.



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Fax Transmission -

To: Bud Houston

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Remarks:

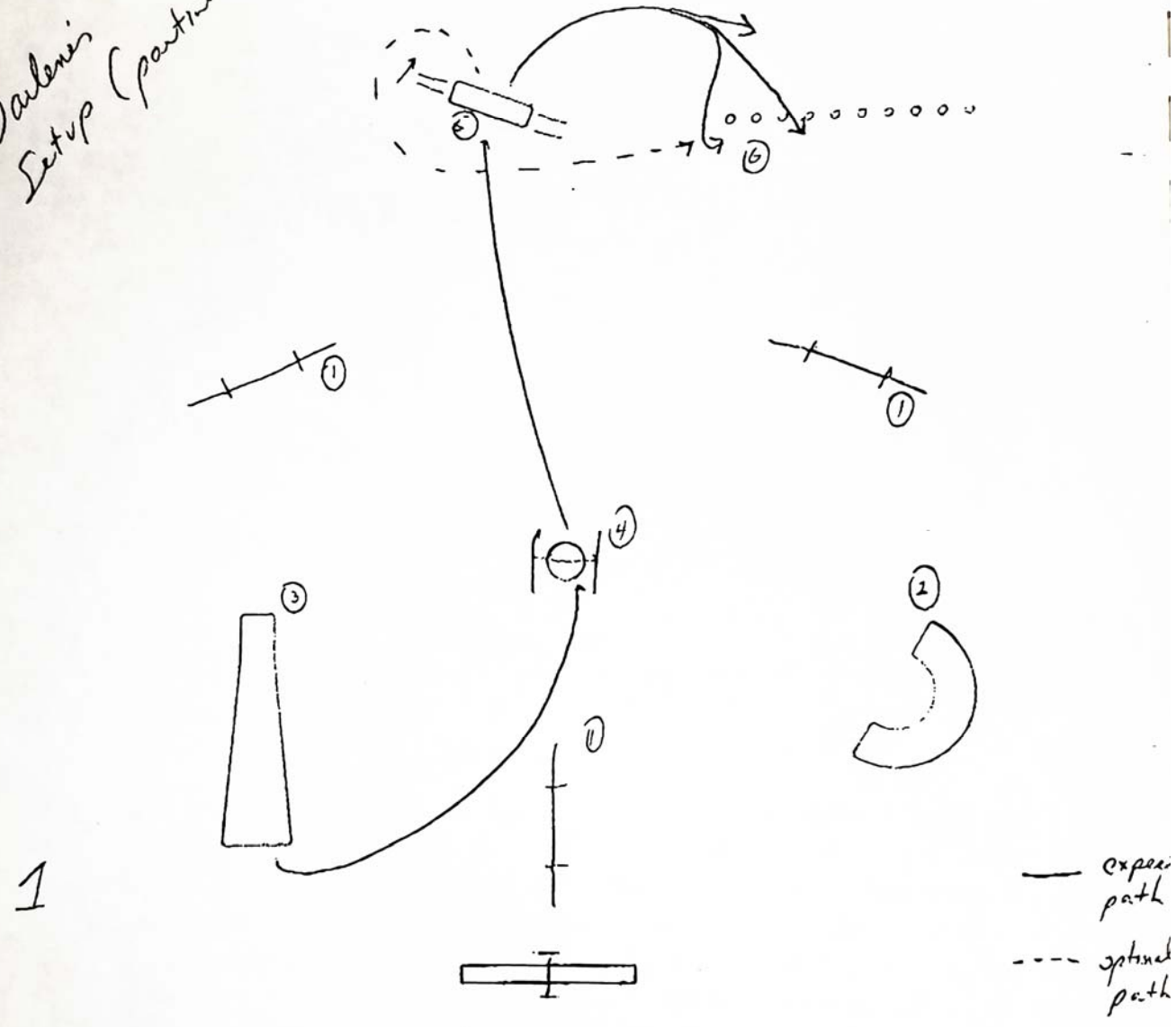
Hey Bud -

Got an idea for some training sequences after the San Diego show this weekend. Darlene had a sequence in the Masters/Advanced snooker course where you went from a tire to a double bar to the weave poles (4-5-6) (See illustration that follows). A lot of dogs had a difficult time with the sequence into the weave poles due to the approach that they made into the double bar. The most obvious course was to take the dog over the spread and then turn it right to the weave poles. The problem was that quite a few dogs got nailed for refusals and improper entries at the poles due to the wide approach. Those handlers that did not fault the poles had to really call the dog hard to pull the dog to the proper entrance which slowed the dogs down considerably. The less obvious path was to take the dog around the long end to the left and then straighten the dog out to take the weave poles. At first it looks like this was a more time consuming path but in actuality, it was the faster of the two options. The two dogs that made the left hand turn ended up with the 15% placements. (Paul and Zoo, and Recce and me).

Looking back on this sequence, I remember practicing something like it in class about 6 weeks ago. I set up the sequence in the back yard (Figure 2) and challenged the students to run the sequence as fast as possible. The same results happened. Those dogs that took the turn to the left had a much harder time and generally took longer getting into the poles than the dogs that turned to the right, despite the longer distance travelled.

The Houdini Sequence

Dauben's Setup (partial)



Backyard Setup

