

10 MINUTES TO
BETTER HANDLING

Dynamic Warm-up

BY LORI HANSEN PHOTOS COURTESY OF KENNEL BOY VIDEO PRODUCTIONS

Picture this: you attend a professional football game and arrive early enough to watch your favorite team get ready for the big event. The team enters the stadium and the defensive unit takes to the field for a thorough warm-up while the offensive players stroll over to the bench, sit down, and begin to chit-chat. You're shocked! How can they expect to perform well as a team at kick-off time? This scenario seems bizarre, but I see something very much like it at every agility trial. Handlers religiously warm-up and stretch their dogs, yet do nothing to prepare themselves for their role as a vital member of the team. In just 10 minutes you can perform a dynamic (with movement) warm-up and stretch routine that will rouse you from that post-lunch coma, save your hard-earned entry fee, raise your Q-rate, and drop your course time. Seems like a pretty big return for such a small investment.

What is a "dynamic" warm-up and stretch?

Let's start with what it isn't. Dynamic warm-up and stretch is not the slow, static (held in place for 30 or more seconds) stretching, that you see joggers doing in the park. I do see a few conscientious competitors doing this type of warm-up at dog trials. As a handler, I applaud their initiative; as a personal trainer, I cringe. Slowly stretching a cold muscle before an intense speed event like dog agility does little to prevent injury and can actually impede your performance. Stationary stretching (done pre-event) reduces the muscles' ability to contract enough fibers in enough time to produce sufficient force to get you to that critical front cross.

Dynamic stretching is also not to be confused with ballistic stretching (those rapid, bouncing, four-count, toe touches we all did in junior high gym class). That type of movement not only leads to ripping and tearing your muscles and tendons, but also those tight jeans as well!

A dynamic warm-up consists of steady, rhythmic exercises and stretches done *while moving* that elevate the body's core temperature, put the joints through a functional range of motion, and prepare the body for the more intense activity to come. It takes about 10 minutes and the benefits last for approximately 10 minutes, so don't warm-up the morning of a trial and expect it to last all day. But you can do bits and pieces as you stand in line waiting for your turn to run, and since movement is so compelling to your dog, it's a great way to get his attention and focus on you.

Better handling in 10 minutes

Perform the following routine in a smooth and moderate manner, matching your movement speed to the nature of each specific exercise. For example, you wouldn't do the more moderate "Moving Hamstring Stretch" at the same tempo as the quick "Happy Feet" exercise. The former is designed to increase hip mobility while the latter fires up the muscles for the speed your run will require. Find a safe surface and perform each exercise for 10-20 yards or 30-45 seconds. If space is limited you can do the exercises in place. Focus on your form (see "How Not to Run Like a Girl," *Clean Run* May 2006), use common sense, stay within your own comfort and fitness zone, and remember to *breathe!*

Dynamic Handler Warm-up Routine

Jog or walk briskly for 3 minutes then do the following:

The Bear

Loosen up your spine. Stand tall, with your arms hanging loosely at your sides as you initiate a comfortable rotation from your torso or core. Be like the drum-on-a-stick toy that has two balls attached to the sides of the drum with strings, and a stick attached in between. As the stick turns the drum back and forth, the balls swing and strike the drum. Your spine is the stick, your arms the strings, and your hands are the balls. Alternately lift your heels as you turn so you won't twist your knees.

When doing "The Bear" keep your shoulders relaxed and let your hands swing free.





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CONTENTS	
Table of Contents	3
Sign of Agility	7
Tip of the Month	8
The Strategy "Q"	9
Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Agility...	9
Dear Salter Sports Vet	11
Backyard Progs	14
Don't Walk a Boulder Collier	16
Developing Jumping Skills, Part 3	18
Beyond the Backyard	20
Our Canine with Joint Laundry	24
Ask the Experts	32
Building the Agility Practice Map, Part 2	39
It's Not Just a Vet	42
About Agassians in Training	46
At Day We Train—Getting Ready for the Rainbow Bridge	48
Long and Shorter	51
Agility Drills	62
Good Behavior: Bad Behavior	66
How Do You Know? Part 1	70
Safe Training Tips	73
Check It: Spine Struck and Its Implications for Canine Owners and Professionals	78
Medical Care Isn't a Dirty Word!	82
Change Up Your Training Program	82
Distance Challenge	82
The Judge's Dilemma	84
The "Q" Line	87
Practice Treatment Right	88
Canine Diagram Keys	84

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Happy Feet

Run in place as fast as you can, keeping your feet quick, quiet, and low to the ground. Keep your upper body relaxed, yet still and stable. This is a great way to wake up your mind and your muscles, and your dog will find you fascinating!



Snap out of that afternoon trance with 30 seconds of "Happy Feet."

Hug Knee to Chest

Loosen up your hips by walking forward with good posture and alternately drawing one knee up at a time toward your chest. Hold your lifted leg around your shin or underneath your thigh if that is more comfortable for your knees.



For "Hug Knee to Chest," use the grip that feels most comfortable to your knees.

High Knees

Jog or march quickly forward bringing your knees up high in front. Use a good 90° elbow position and try to make the thigh parallel to the ground. Stay up on the balls of your feet and don't let your hands or knees swing across the midline of your body.



Run across an imaginary bed of hot coals to help you perform "High Knees."

Moving Quadriceps, or Thigh Stretch

This stretch is also called “Pink Flamingos” since you look like a lawn ornament if you do it right. Walk forward, alternately drawing one heel up toward your buns. Keep your knees in line with your hips as you wave at, spank, or catch your foot, stretching out the front of the thigh.



Even if you can't grab your foot, you'll still benefit from the “Thigh Stretch,” just reach as far as you can toward your foot.

Side-to-Side Hip Glides

Place your feet wide apart with your toes pointing forward. With a straight spine, push your buns back and hinge at the hips. Rest your hands on the small of your back and slide your hips from side to side. You should feel this along the inside of your thighs. Polish an imaginary wall about 12" behind you with your backside.



With “Hip Glides” never allow your knees to drift out beyond your toes.



Remember to **glide**, not twist.



Butt-kickers

With good posture and arm action, jog or march forward. Alternately draw your heels up to your buns. Stay up on the balls of your feet and don't let your foot trail behind your body.



Doing “Butt-kickers” will help you practice good running form.

Moving Hamstring Stretch

Walk backward with good posture. Slightly bend the back supporting leg as you hinge at the hips, extend the opposite leg, and push your buns back. Pull the toes of the front leg up toward your face. Curl your tailbone up as you alternate legs.



You should feel the “Moving Hamstring Stretch” along the back of your outstretched leg.

These are just some of the activities suitable for a dynamic warm-up. For more options see Human Agility Training Vol. 1, our DVD available through the website listed below or from Clean Run.

Performing a dynamic warm-up before each run is a great way to practice proper running mechanics and incorporate exercise into your day. If you are running your dog a minimum of twice a day, that's 20 minutes of activity you might not otherwise get.

Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. *Do* perform gently held stretches at the end of the day, or during the week for cool-down, flexibility, and relaxation. Just don't do them right before you go in the ring! If a health care professional has given you a specific routine to address a particular medical or orthopedic condition, *do not* stop following their instructions in favor of this regimen. Always check with your physician before beginning this or any exercise program. 🐕

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