

This photo shows an exceptional set point. The dog is very organized with his body and legs; the head is down and the back is relaxed.



Flight: The dog's head is still down; he has all the information he needs to know where he is going. His back is still relaxed.



Jumping... From th

By Susan Salo

Path?... Distance?... Height?... Weight transfer?... Elevation? These are the questions that a dog *must* have the answers to at the same rate of speed the dog is traveling toward the jump in his path if he is to successfully clear it. When breaking down the dog's list of necessary information even further, one quickly begins to understand this process from the dog's perspective.

The higher the rate of speed, the flatter the dog's stride becomes, which then makes the all-important weight transfer (dog reloads his weight to the hindquarters) even more crucial for the angle of elevation to create successful flight.

This process must, obviously, be accomplished in a fraction of a second to not interrupt the dog's stride and forward motion. To accomplish this task at speed requires precise articulation of the pelvis, which rocks open and back. When correctly performed, the dog's head will bob down as the dog lifts off the ground. When incorrectly performed, the dog's head will jerk up, or up and back: this tells you that the dog is actually using the muscles in the neck to help lift the shoulders and forelegs off the ground. In the long run, incorrect use of the body in this way will put too much stress on those muscles and, in time, can cause pain. In equine terminology, this is referred to as the "set point," the place where the dog organizes his body to leave the ground.

While watching gymnastics, one sees the athlete run at speed along a path, and then set off to jump with both feet and legs *equally* leaving the ground to perform the vault. Should gymnasts leave the ground with their weight unequally distributed, they would fail to meet the intended goal. The entire process of jumping requires the athlete, human or animal, to have a good understanding of this process for flight to be smooth and efficient. Simply put: if you were a world-class hurdler, you would

be well aware of the parts of the body used for the task and the dynamics of how they work. We all have the same body parts, but most of us are unaware of how we use them.

The set point, through repetition, is the place where understanding of the task is built. This point where the dog organizes his body should be practiced slowly and quietly with many repetitions before it is expected at speed. Repetition, done correctly, creates understanding, and therefore, relaxation of the body is possible.

To facilitate a good set point, a placement jump is used to indicate to the dog where the task is to be performed. This placement jump is *always* very low (4" to 8") and simply facilitates the placement of the dog's hind feet (set point). The actual jump should start at lower than the dog's measured jump height but can be raised rather quickly to a more realistic height once the dog understands what is expected and has shown that he can perform it. The spacing of this work becomes the important component: the distance must be tight enough to prevent a stride while being comfortable enough for the dog to accomplish the task.



The dog is placed close to the low jump.



The dog steps in...

The dog is landing, still with head down, back relaxed. This is an excellent landing, which allows for only a light load on the joints and tendons.



Because of the excellent set point, the dog has maintained his relaxation throughout flight and landing, allowing the haunches to be drawn well up under the body to create a long and fluid stride upon landing. If the process is done incorrectly, the dog's shoulders have a difficult load upon landing, causing the first stride after the jump to be a short and choppy one.

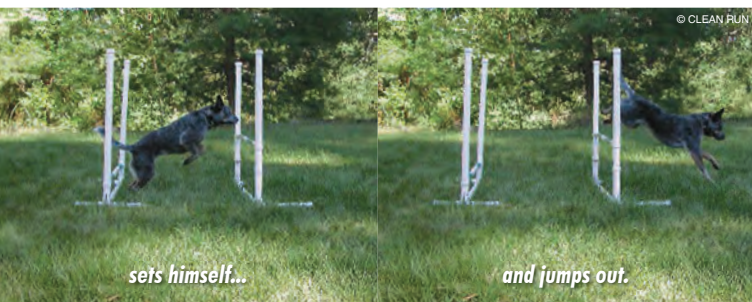


PHOTOS BY SUSAN GARRETT

e Dog's Perspective

For a very small dog, such as a Norwich Terrier or Toy Poodle, the distance can be as tight as 18" from the 8" jump to the actual jump. For other small breeds, such as JRTs, Border Terriers, Papillons, and small Shelties, the distance can be about 3'. For the larger dogs, such as BCs, Aussies, and Tervs, the distance is approximately 4' and can be up to 5' for the even larger breeds, such as German Shepherd Dogs.

I use a V-shaped bounce jump to teach this skill since it aids in the weight transfer; but two jumps placed in the above-mentioned way will also work to help the dog understand where and how to accomplish this task. An important note to this drill is the placement of the dog: The dog needs to be placed close to the first little jump (12" from it) because you would not want the dog to run into the tight space and slam into the jump. Or with too much room coming into the two jumps, the dog may well perceive the combination as all part of one jump. The exercise requires



the dog to step in, set himself, and jump out: a bounce. If the dog completes one stride in this area, the distance offered is too large. Tighten the distance a little until the dog understands he has to perform the task more quickly.

Good jumping skills have many components. Jumping is actually quite a complicated skill set, and all the basics begin with a good foundation; the set point is a good way to start. The handler should either recall the dog or send to a target at first. Running with the dog at the beginning can be far too distracting and may cause the dog to rush at the jump. When the dog's skill level is good, you may run with him and allow the dog to load himself into the bounce; however, this step should not be rushed.

From the perspective of a rider, I can tell you that sitting on a 1200-pound horse that is off balance and is now careening through the air at warp speed is *not* a comforting feeling. Therefore creating understanding of how to "set" oneself for flight becomes very important. Great amounts of time and care are given to this process to have it performed successfully at speed. Thus, I hope you spend an equal amount of time and care in teaching your dog how to set himself correctly for jumping at speed.

The human perspective in agility is simply "Dog, Jump!" I hope this article has given you a new agility perspective on jumping... from the dog's point of view. 🐾

Susan Salo has offered her insights into jumping at both Power Paws and Clean Run Camps and is proud to have been a part of the Say Yes Team for Susan Garrett's Graduate Skills Camp in Toronto. She currently resides in Woodland, California, where she lives with a 15-month-old Jack Russell named Patrick. Susan trains with Rachel Sanders and Susan Garrett and can be reached at Jumpdogs@aol.com.