

Training Secrets of The Stars



Raising a Wicked Agility Dog Part 6

By Bernadette Bay

The wicked puppy is almost grown up! Hex turns 18 months old on 5th November. She has always been a very mature puppy and is now a very confident adult.

Speeding up the dog walk

I am still working on increasing Hex's speed on the dog walk. I would prefer her to gallop along the dog walk rather than trot. I find that her speed is much better if we do some exciting jumping sequences before the dog walk as this gets her revved up and moving faster.

I often change where I am in relation to Hex on the dog walk to prevent her from just running along at my speed. Sometimes I am running on past her, sometimes holding back and letting her get ahead and sometimes pulling off laterally to another obstacle. While I am working on harder dog walk performances I will put her target back out for a few sessions to help keep her driving down into position. As we do more repetitions I will alternate between sometimes having the target out and sometimes removing it. Her reward varies between a thrown toy and thrown food. The toy and food are now thrown to keep her thinking about driving off the contact when I release her.

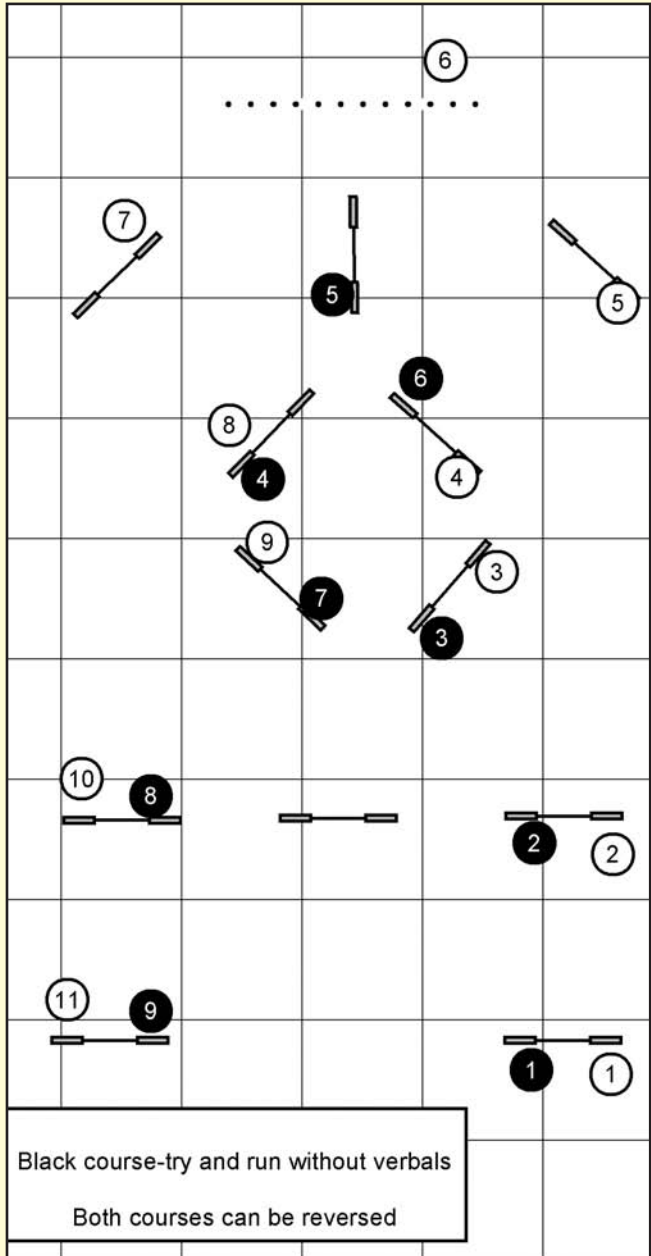
I ask Hex for solid contacts every time although the length of time I hold her on the contact varies. She has learned to keep her back feet on the contacts no matter how fast she is going. It is my job to allow her to perform this contact on her own and to trust her to do her job. Hopefully at her first shows, she will perform them perfectly! I will make sure that I then take the time to praise and release her after different lengths of time. I want her to understand that her criteria for doing her contacts are the same in the ring and in training. It is so easy to lose your contacts in the ring even if they are perfect at training.

Our first training day

We do most of our training at home, combined with regular private lessons with Lesley Olden. So I was interested to see how Hex (and I!) performed with an audience, on different equipment and around other dogs at a training day given at a friend house.

Dave Jolly gave a fun and interesting three hour training session. We got the chance to run a few jumping sequences with Dave instructing us to just use our body language to direct the dog. I tried to whisper some directionals to Hex, but Dave heard and made us be quiet! His point was that the dogs could follow our body language better than we thought.

With Dave's permission, I will include a few of these jumping sequences. Try running them without the usual screams and calls or rights and lefts.



Dave also discussed weave pole performances and contact performances. This was great as then Hex had a few opportunities to do weaves and contacts on strange equipment. I was really pleased that she performed as well as she does at home. Her contacts were solid and quite fast. I was especially happy with her A frame as she is flying over the top and running into her 2 on/2off position.

Dave had us doing a round circuit of contact obstacles as illustrated below. By repeating this circuit twice, you have the opportunity to vary your rewards and the dogs really start speeding up as they find it very exciting!

I love training days as there is always the opportunity to learn something new both from the instructor and the participants.

What Comes Next?

The great thing about agility is that there is no shortage of sequences to train. I try to find interesting sequences and courses on the internet and try them out with Hex. Some of these sequences seem impossible at first but eventually Hex and I figure them out! As long as I keep the training fun, Hex takes all the difficult sequences in her stride and is very patient with me!

Hopefully at our first few shows the courses will be open and flowing for my little Novice girl. My job is to keep her happy and protected at the shows and to give her all positive associations with being in that ring.

This is my last instalment on Hex's early training, but I will be sure to follow-up with a description of her first show experiences. Keep your eye out for a cute little tri sheltie barking at the start line; most likely that will be the Wicked One also known as Hex!

