

Agility

The Retired Agility Dog

I feel privileged to have dogs in my team that are now enjoying an active retirement. It is really important to me that the older dogs in my team continue to lead a busy and enjoyable retirement when their time comes to an end in the sport that they loved so much.

In my opinion just because a dog's agility career comes to an end, it does not mean that its fitness level and training should end. The golden years of a dog's life need just as much, if not more time and energy, than your younger dogs. They have special requirements with diet, exercise and mental well being. It is my personal belief that after so many years of putting their body on the line in the sport they loved so much, it is my responsibility to ensure that they live a comfortable and happy retirement.

10 top tips for a well balanced, happy and healthy retired agility dog

- Keep them a healthy weight and ensure that they are getting an age appropriate diet.
- Ensure that they get daily exercise to keep them fit, healthy and mentally happy.
- Do some research into joint supplements and look to provide your older dog with an appropriate supplement to support their joint health.
- Have them regularly checked by your Veterinarian and an Animal Physio. I call this having a WOF (Warrant of Fitness). It is best to know about small issues and how to manage them before they become big issues.
- Consider maintaining their balance, coordination and strength by completing suitable and appropriate fitness and conditioning exercises.
- Make time each week to take them on a special outing without the 'young ones' this could be a trip to the local park, a trip to the local coffee shop, a bit of fun through some agility tunnels or just a wander down to the mailbox with you.
- Keep them mentally stimulated with some problem solving games or toys, and consider teaching your old dog some new tricks. Nothing makes them happier than spending time with you and having some fun along the way.





Canvas picture by Antonia Pet Portraits

- Make sure they still have a daily job to do. It could be collecting the newspaper, helping round up the sheep, searching for toys around the house and putting them away. The options are endless...
- Where your older dog sleeps is also something to consider, they need to be warm and comfortable. An orthopedic bed works wonders and will help them to wake up each morning with a spring in their step.
- Most importantly make sure that each and every day you let your golden oldies know how much they are loved and appreciated as their time with us is limited.

Fitness and conditioning with the older dog

If you are thinking of introducing a fitness and conditioning programme to your older dog, I would highly recommend that your dog sees your Veterinarian and/or Animal Physio to receive clearance, before beginning. They can also make some recommendations of specific exercises that would be most suitable to your dog's needs.

Once you have clearance remember to start slowly and carefully. It is really important that you watch your dog for signs of fatigue or stress. This will usually be in the form of the dog avoiding the exercise, stress signals or you may notice that they are not able to hold nice form.

Our golden oldies really do benefit from specific exercises but it is important to monitor them closely and ensure that they are not fatiguing during the exercise. It is also important to monitor how they are straight after, a few hours after and the next day after they have completed the exercises. If they seem stiff and sore then you have pushed them too hard. The aim is gentle and careful exercises that will improve their quality of life.

Where to start you ask? Balance and weight shift exercises are an excellent place to start with the older dog. I would aim to complete 4-5 of these exercises every second day.

Some basic exercises to get you started

1. Have your dog stand on an even surface (aim for them to stand nice and square) and hold this stand for 10sec, slowly building up to 30sec. Repeat three times.
2. Have your dog stand (aim for them to stand nice and square) and encourage them to lift their head slowly up and down. Complete three sets of five repetitions.
3. Have your dog stand (aim for them to stand nice and square) and apply some gentle pressure to each side of their body to encourage some gentle movement/weight shift. The aim is to have the dog resist against your hand and hold their balance and position.
4. Walk your senior dog slowly around two cones in a figure 8 style pattern. Complete three sets of five repetitions.
5. Have them stand with their front feet up on a low object. Hold for 10 secs and repeat three times.
6. Finding some uneven surfaces for your dog to negotiate - slowly and carefully i.e. forest areas, a paddock with slight inclines, balance cushions etc. I find short obstacle courses are an enjoyable activity to do with your older dog.

If you would be interested in a video demonstration of the above exercises please feel free to contact me and I can forward this to you.

Excellent sites to visit

<http://www.greymuzzle.org/grey-matters/Health%20and%20Well-being>

<https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Caring-for-an-Older-Pet-FAQs.aspx>

About Lisa

Lisa Duff is an experienced agility competitor, dog trainer at Riverview K9s, and is also currently studying to become a certified Canine Fitness Trainer. She is passionate about keeping her dogs fit, healthy and in peak physical condition to meet the demands of her chosen sport. She works a busy full-time job so her fitness and training programmes are designed to be efficient, effective and achievable even in a busy work week. Her belief around canine fitness and conditioning is that it should be fun, safe and achievable. If you would like to make contact with Lisa you can email her: lisariverviewk9s@gmail.com

