

KiwiDogAgility

by Karen de Wit

WINTER AGILITY TRAINING

In New Zealand we are relatively lucky – we don't get snowed in for months at a time like some of our overseas cousins. For them the reality of agility is going to indoor venues, or resorting to practising activities in the garage or lounge.

Clubs in New Zealand vary with how they cope with the colder wetter months. For some, there is the option of going indoors, e.g. some clubs rent a local horse facility (the Riding for the Disabled centre), where evening agility fits in well with daytime horse activities. Some use other indoor buildings, e.g. DAWG uses the NZKC exhibition centre one evening a week. Provided members can get to training, they have a nice dry venue to practice in.

Other clubs train outdoors during the winter. Depending on where they might be located, or the type of grounds they use, or the availability of other facilities they may have to:

- cancel when the Council closes grounds
- cancel when the grounds become too soft
- cancel if the organisers decide weather is too severe.



Other clubs just close down for the 4–8 weeks over winter, with June and July being the worst months.

Cancellations are communicated to members via Facebook and text. Some clubs admit to seldom cancelling their training, "It's not often training gets cancelled, we are crazy down here."

Training at Club, whether it is on or not, takes care of one evening during the week. What do you do with the other six days? What training can you do during winter?

Jumping

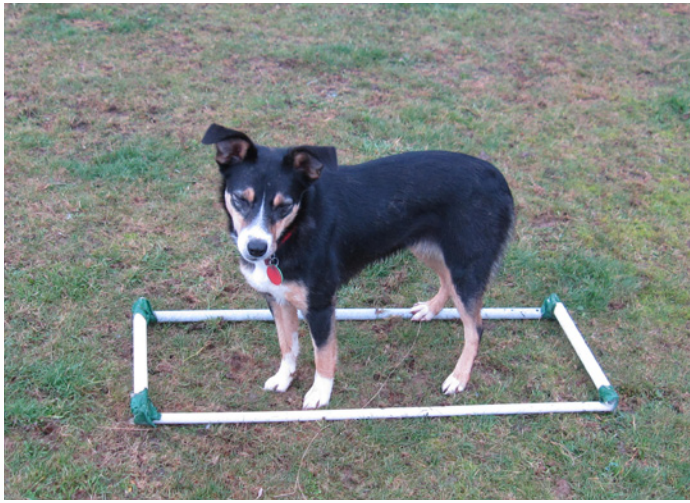
There are one jump systems where, as it suggests, you only need one jump! This means that you can bring in a clean jump from outdoors and set it up in your garage, or family area and improve your dog's ability to jump tightly, curling around an upright. If you have a puppy you can easily work through Linda Mecklenberg's jump programme using one jump, over the winter months. Another great resource uses three jumps – go to the www.baddogagility.com website and search for 'small spaces – beginner drills'.

Start line stays

This is one of those foundation behaviours that often gets a bit of early treatment and starts to fall apart during competition if you don't keep paying attention to it. You do not need much space to practice start lines stays. Inside you can add distractions such as food, toys, throwing things, doing distracting activities and rewarding your dog for staying.



Dee dancing



Teaching the dog to get into a box (early contact training)

Toys and tugging

Many people suffer from dogs that will not play with them. This is a real disadvantage in agility as the activity of tugging and chasing things really tends to excite most dogs, and enhances their performance in agility. The winter can be the time to work on this aspect of your relationship with your dog. You may still use food as a reward for interacting with the toy, or as the stuffing within the toy.



Walking backwards

Other activities

Walking your dog on a loose lead

At agility events dogs are required to be on lead unless they are being toileted or running a course in the ring. It makes life a lot easier walking around the ring, checking the running order boards etc of

you can walk your dog on a loose lead amongst other people and dogs. Sometimes just using a gentle leader head collar will assist, but you can have a dog that walks on a loose lead with just a collar. Start at home, reward him for being beside you. Do not reward if he surges ahead but stop or reverse up until he comes back to you.

Rally-O, Zoom and Handy dog activities (www.nzaro.webs.com)

All these activities will enhance your relationship with your dogs, and can be done in a very small (and dry) space. They are also good warm-up exercises, and will help your dog focus on you, the handler, rather than get over-excited and enter the ring too hyped with little attention on the handler.

Good exercises include: circles alongside handler, moving sidesteps, left (and right) about turns, halt-walk around, figure of eights, turn in/change sides, and NZARO changing sides exercises.

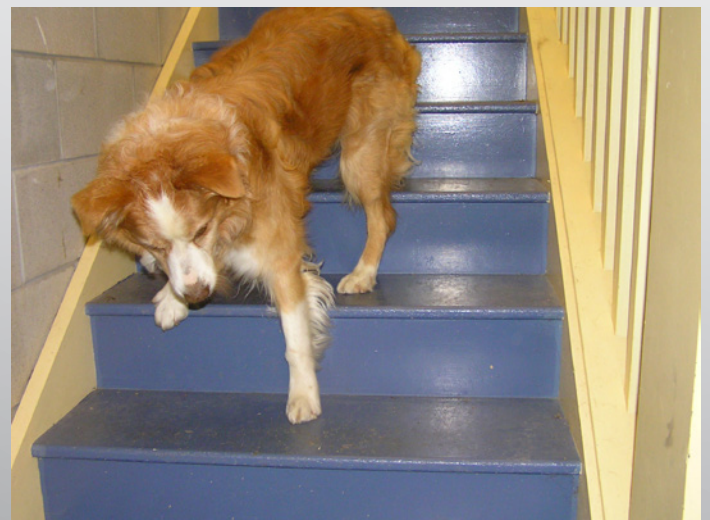


Raised pivot exercises

Tricks and hind leg awareness activities

Handy dog exercises include the raised pivot block. Other good exercises for hind legs awareness are backing up, spins and twists, dancing, begging, weave between the handler legs. You can teach your dog to get into a box, go to a mat, and shape targeting behaviours on steps/stairs.

I hope the weather where you are isn't too bad, but if it is take the opportunity to train some useful behaviours. Have fun!



Backing up the stairs