

Kiwi Dog Agility

Sharky's Diary - Chapter Twelve

Well the weather is improving, there are a few more dog shows around that I am attending, and the training continues.

Over the last month I have been running longer sequences to try and prepare for the day that we will be facing 18 or so obstacles in the ring. When I first started doing this, Sharky would expect his toy after a few obstacles or would race off to get it once he thought he had done enough. He also found it different with me sprinting beside him (well getting out of a jog anyway). It didn't take him long to settle down, and now is more likely to see obstacles in the distance and want to go and do them. From this I have realised what sort of focus I am likely to get in the ring, and that I will need to continue training close work as Sharky loves to go for a hoon around the equipment, and is not particularly worried about where I might be, or where he is actually supposed to be going!

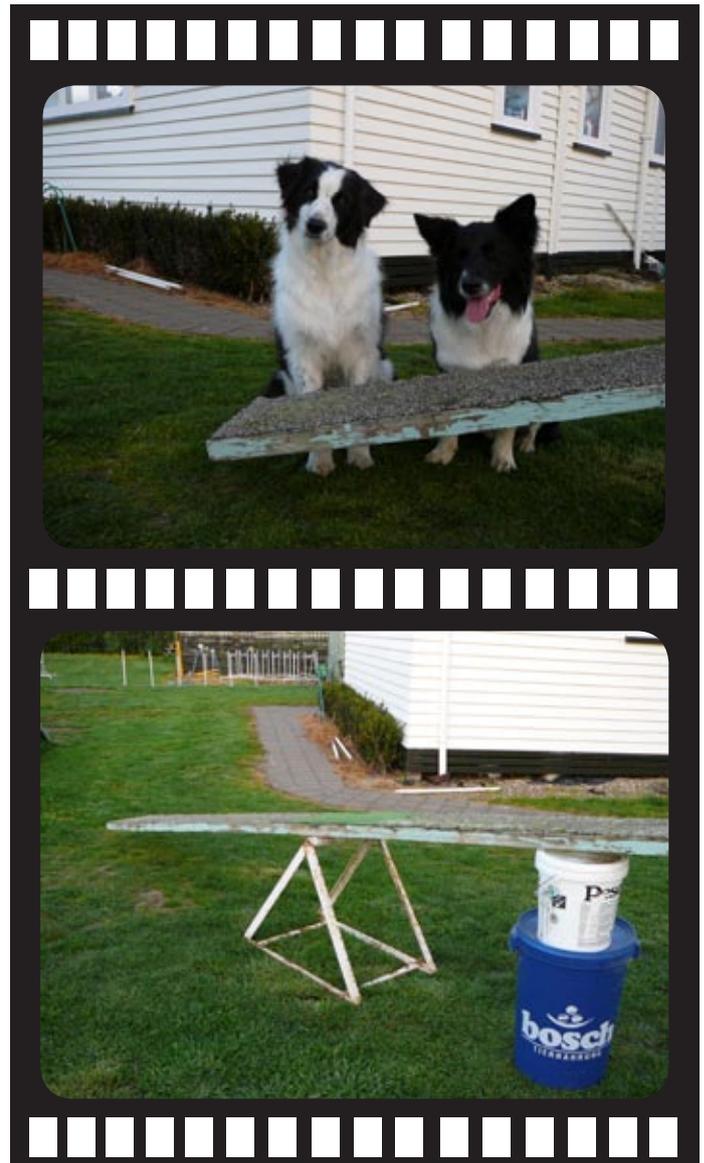
Sharky is also prone to taking huge leaps over jumps when doing a course without putting in extra strides. Because he doesn't always make it over the jump I need to continue to encourage him to think about his striding, so I am still using jump bumps to regulate his stride at various times.

I have recently watched a DVD put out by Joe Canova called "World Class Weaves". This is available from the NALA library, or www.cleanrun.com. This really is aimed at dogs who are already weaving, and shows methods by which to proof entries and exits from the weaves. It is a brilliant step by step method, and if you progress through his steps, your dog should understand how to weave regardless of where you are. His entry proofing only uses 6 weaves, and I have started working through these with Sharky and Cannon. After only a few sessions, I have had great results with successful 90 degree entries from the left and right with me running with dog, doing a lead-out to the end of the weaves, or crossing behind. Even though I thought Cannon's weaves entries were pretty good, working through these steps put me in positions that I felt really uncomfortable about being in. Because I had done all the steps prior to that, even though I felt uncomfortable, Sharky and Cannon knew what to do. I thoroughly recommend this DVD for people who want to improve their weaves. I will continue to work through his steps over the next few weeks, and intend to re-visit them from time to time after that.

Sharky starts competing in 5 weeks time at Central Hawkes Bay, and at his 2nd show (NDTA), I have entered him in the AD trial. So I thought maybe it was about time to teach him the see-saw. Even though I did a lot of work with him as a puppy with my table on wheels, and rocking him on the see-saw (as mentioned in a previous article), I have not done anything like this for quite a while. While teaching him the dog walk, which he now does confidently at full height, I didn't want to confuse him with training a plank that moved at the same time. My dog walk is rubber chipped while my see-saw has artificial grass on it, so in my back yard there is quite a difference between the 2 obstacles which is good.

To start my see-saw training, I propped the end of my see-saw up on a barrel and 10l paint tin so that the see-saw was just off the ground – you can see this in the following pics with Sharky and Cannon giving a perspective as to how far off the ground the see-saw is.

I then asked Sharky to leap on the see-saw from the side as shown in the pics last month which is how I have started all my contact training. He has to ride the see-saw down until it hits the ground, and then do his 2o2o behaviour. I call this the bang game, because the see-saw bangs down to the ground. Once he was happy with this, I moved the barrel further down the see-saw, so it was resting higher off the ground.



Because he was so comfortable with this, in the same session I moved to having the see-saw parallel with the ground, and he was very happy to ride it to the ground. And then because I am always pushing the boundaries, I did the entire see-saw with him, and he flew off the end. The next time, he slowed down about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way across with good 2o2o behaviour at the end. So, in a very short space of time, he was doing the whole see-saw with reasonable speed, and no worry. But, my desired action on the see-saw would be for him to run right to the end before riding it down. Because he was slowing up before he got to the end, it would result in a slower see-saw. I will now go back and train variations of the bang game, all with him running to the end. I do feel confident that by the NDTA, he will have a reasonable see-saw.

When training Sharky, I still have food and a toy on hand at all times. I try to remember to reinforce his waits with food regularly to maintain the great lead-outs that I have. My goal for the contact equipment was for Sharky to know his 2o2o behaviour with a nose touch regardless of where I was, and without needing a command. The idea is that I ask him to walk-on, and that means run to the end with a nose touch. I am very pleased with my result so far, and will be relying on my good (but slightly stropy) friends to remind me to be consistent with that behaviour when I start competing.

One of the reasons that I have had good results with Sharky is that I am ever mindful of the difference between doing something right and wrong. For a right behaviour, Sharky always gets some sort of verbal marker to tell him it is right – yes, good dog etc. If he does something wrong, he doesn't get told off, we repeat the exercise and he tries his hardest to do it right the next time. My worries about him failing too many times in the weaves in his initial training are groundless. He has great enthusiasm for the weaves, and due to my recent proofing he has shown me that he now has a good understanding of what is required. Recently at a show I saw a very unfortunate young dog who popped out of the weaves at the end about 3 times. Each time he was taken back to the start to repeat it. When he finally got it right, he got the same reaction but then carried on with the rest of the course. I could totally understand why the dog popped out, because I couldn't see any difference in the handler reaction between right and wrong. If I was the dog, I wouldn't have known what the right thing to do was either. If I had that situation with my dog, once he got it right I would have verbally praised the dog, and possibly stopped for a bit of a game. It is so important to ensure the dog knows what the right behaviour is, and therefore the one that you want him to repeat. It can be easy to forget this particularly with older dogs, but if your dog gets it wrong it is generally not because he is being naughty, it is because you have not made it clear what the right decision is. One of the sayings I love is that if your dog does something

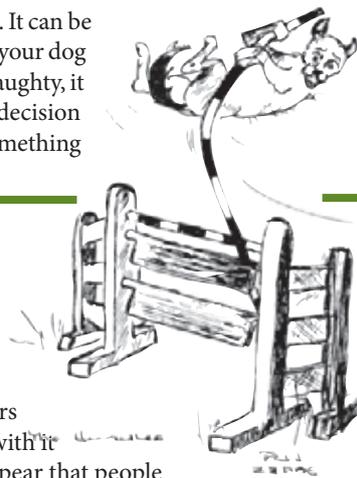
wrong in the ring, then you should kick yourself for being such a crap trainer. So often it is the dog that gets kicked (not literally) for having such a crap trainer! Sounds a bit unfair to me.

So the focus over the final month before Sharky makes his debut is to:

- Continue taking opportunities to practise courses in as many different locations as I can find
- Continue the weave proofing (great for Cannon as well)
- Use jump grids to reinforce various handling manoeuvres, with jump bumps to regulate strides in some instances
- Do more bang training on the see-saw
- Move a-frame to full height
- Make sure I proof lead-outs in a stand, sit, and down in as many different locations as I can
- Make sure he knows all the various tricks he needs to do in his dancing routine for the NDTA!

Have fun training your dogs – spring is certainly here and is such a great time of year to get enthusiastic about agility!

Fiona Ferrar



WHAT DO I DO?

So often, in recent times people have been upset or annoyed about something which has happened at an event but seem unsure about how to address the issue on the day. This has resulted in competitors grumbling amongst themselves instead of dealing with it at the time and coming to a resolution. It would appear that people struggle to know what to do about concerns when they may not want to go as far as putting up their money and going down the formal complaint process.

Concerns include such things as bitches possibly in heat on the grounds, judges bad-mouthing/abusing competitors and other judges, competitors being overly firm if not harsh handling etc.

As with anything, there is a good way and many not so good ways of dealing with problems arising at events. For example, marching up to a judge during course walk and loudly demanding changes to the course for example is not the best way to deal with a perceived safety issue! It is unlikely to be met with a positive response or to achieve any change you may wish to see.

So what do I do?

OK so lets pretend you have an issue with something in regard to a handler/judge/official at an event.

Firstly it pays to remember that not everyone has been around as long as you have and simply may not know the regulations or may be unaware of any problems. For example John Jiminy is looking after his mother's cockapoo while she's in the hospital and he's arrived at the show with her in season. He has never had an entire bitch before and it probably has not crossed his mind that the dog may be in season. How do you deal with it?

Approach John and ask him if it is possible that the bitch is in season. He may not know what to look for. If that's the case a nice approach will probably gain the best results. A little understanding and assistance may be all that is required – bitch removed – problem solved!



As a first step having a quiet chat with someone over a perceived problem will probably resolve most worries without any bad feeling or animosity. So what if it doesn't?

The bitch does indeed appear to be in season but John will not acknowledge it or voluntarily remove her from the grounds, your next port of call is the Test Manager. You should not have to lay a formal complaint in order to receive assistance. The Test Manager should probably enlist the services of a vet and go and talk to John about the bitch. If she is indeed in season, then she MUST be removed from the grounds – being in the car/trailer etc is NOT good enough.

Again problem solved. No NZKC involvement and as little fuss as possible.

If John then refuses to remove the dog, the Test Manager should demand that he does so immediately. Further issue with this should result in the Test Manager notifying the NZKC of the events of the day.

Of course, this is only an example and there are a myriad of other worries at events which people are often heard grumbling about.

The short answer is, no matter what the problem is, it is much better to have an informal (and calm) chat with someone in the first instance rather than going down the "big stick" route from the beginning. Often people do not do this as they do not want to upset anyone. The problem is that the bad feeling resulting from not addressing an issue is often worse than something that is raised, dealt with effectively and with a minimum of fuss and then forgotten.

Remember that grumbling amongst your friends is not going to solve anything. Give people the chance to fix an error/omission etc in the first instance with a direct positive approach and our sport will be so much the better for it.

The members of the Agility Committee are always available to chat to if you have any queries about how to approach or address something – when in doubt ask!

Fiona Hodgson