Agility

Beating the Winter Blues:

Training Ideas for the Off Season



Paws up on object



Walk another dog

Shorter days and miserable weather make it difficult to do Agility training over winter, particularly if your Agility club takes a bit of a break during this time. It can be hard to stay motivated and to find ways to keep your dog entertained, especially when it feels like the only option is to walk in the dark. However, winter is a great time to give your dog (and yourself) some time off from doing the sexy Agility stuff and to dabble in playing some other games.

Practice your lead-outs There are so many ways to test your lead outs inside and outdoors. Can you throw food and/or toys away from your dog while they stay in position? What about throwing them towards your dog, so it's landing right at their feet? Run in front of and behind your dog. Jump around, sit on the ground, make funny noises, say nonsense words. Really test how well your dog understands staying in position, regardless of what is happening around them.

Hide some food around the house: Lock your dog outside or in a crate and hide their dinner in different rooms around the house. Place the food in corners, on chairs, on ledges, under desks, behind partially closed doors, inside boxes. You may need to show them the general area until they get the idea, but once they get the hang of it, there will be no stopping them! It's a great way to tire them out, and if you want to get into Scent Work, this is a good starting point. You could do the same with your dog's favourite toy.

On that note, you could also start imprinting your dog on odour for Scent Work. Look on the Dogs NZ website for more information (**www.dogsnz.org.nz/scent-work/scent-work**).

Tricks Teaching different tricks is a great way to bond with your dog, as well as getting them to use their brain. Here are some suggestions of tricks other than your typical wave, sit pretty and roll over:

- **Ring stacking:** pick up some of the colourful stacking rings made for toddlers from the Warehouse and teach your dog to stack them in order. You can also get some small plastic bowls and teach them to stack these too.
- **Reverse around your legs:** lots of people teach their dogs to go around/behind their legs forwards, but have a go at teaching them to do it in reverse.
- **Individual rear leg lifts:** you've probably taught your dog to wave or shake hands with both front paws, but it is great for rear-end awareness to teach them to lift each back leg independently. I taught Seismic by getting her to target a cone with her back foot.
- **Basic fitness** Another great thing to do over winter is to work on fitness exercises. You can start by teaching the basic things like two front feet on a platform, two back feet on a platform, and all four feet on two platforms. Build duration for how long your dog can stand in these positions — you might find it is a challenge to get them to stay still! Make sure you talk to a professional, such as Kelly Daniels or Rochelle Jager, before doing more advanced fitness exercises to ensure you are doing the correct thing.



Recalls Practice your recalls either around your house and property, or while you're out on walks. If you have a second person in your house, get them to hold your dog while you hide in another room. Call your dog once and see how long it takes them to find you. You can also do this while on walks by hiding behind a bush or a tree — you could also do it without calling your dog's name and waiting to see how long it takes for them to find you.

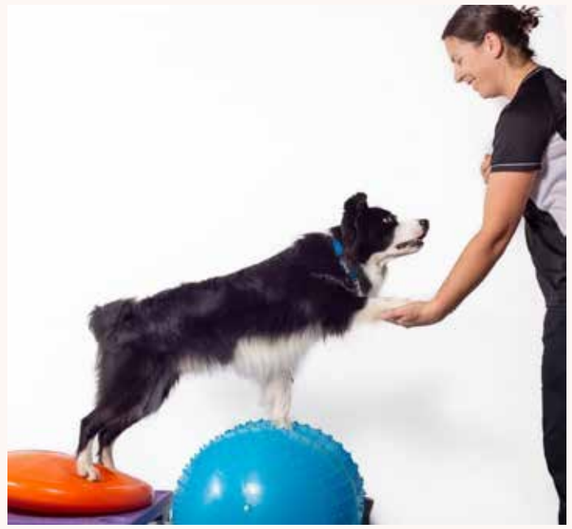
Jump skills If you have one or two jumps and a bit of space to use them, you can also revisit testing and proofing your jump skills and cues. There are so many different ways a dog can take a jump, and your motion and positioning can make it easier or harder for the dog. Test your verbal cues without any movement or arm cues and see if your dog still understands what they are supposed to do. You can add in a cone wrap or two to increase speed and motion too.

Toy rules Are you able to put your toy on the ground while you're training, and your dog will ignore it until they are told they're allowed to get it? It is very useful if you are able to do this, but not so useful if your dog helps themselves! Try going back to basics and teaching them a marker cue that means they can only have the toy when they're told — it helps teach self-control and is a great aid in lead-out proofing, as I mentioned earlier.

There is always the option of getting another puppy — that will keep you occupied for winter and beyond!

Happy winter training!

Caitlin Frater



Top and bottom, Kelly Daniels working on canine fitness!

Off Course with Chris

Two 8-foot household ladders.

Ya what??

It's the answer to my trivia question from last month: "In the original 1978 Crufts demonstration where dog agility was born (originally created as a half-time entertainment to fill a 20-minute gap between obedience and group judging), what was used to create the very first A-Frame?"

Yep. John Varley didn't have a Lyn Sayers lying around to manufacture bespoke equipment back then. He literally took two standard ladders, hinged them at the top, and threw some wooden planks over the rungs to create the obstacle we know today. So, the next time you're worried our equipment isn't absolute state-of-the-art, just remember that back in the day, dogs were basically doing parkour on DIY hardware from Mitre 10.

It's not just the equipment that has evolved since then – it's our connection with the dogs. The level of trust, precision and pure joy we see in the ring is next level. We aren't just sending dogs over obstacles anymore – we are speaking a completely distinct language with them at a dead sprint – ok, maybe not the best term of phrase, but you get the gist.

It's also amazing how the community pulls together. Every weekend, armies of volunteers arrive, often in the dark, to set up rings, lug around equipment and put together courses that bring out the best in our dogs and handlers.

So, given that last month was National Volunteer month, and we have been talking about volunteers in other parts of the magazine, I want to take this chance to personally thank all those club members, partners of club members who get dragged along and voluntold, and everyone for the countless hours put into making this sport great.

THANK YOU!!

Chris Richardson

AC Chair & EC Agility Representative

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