

Showing Your Dog

Topics

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Walking the Course

The first time you walk the course, simply follow the numbers so you know where everything is. The second time, look for possible problem spots and concentrate on handling techniques. This second time should last 3-4 minutes. The third time, run the course as if your dog(s) were there WITHOUT looking at the numbers. You need to know exactly where you're going because while on course, there won't be time to find the next number! You may need to walk the course an extra time, especially if you need to figure out a strategy for each individual dog. If there are quite a few dogs that run before you, stick around for the first 4-5 dogs and watch the flow of the course and how that particular team is dealing with the spots you perceived as being a problem. Remember that most people tend to dwell on the most obvious problem spot, but ignore the not so obvious traps that usually catch them in the end! (Karen Canaday)

First walk the course to see the flow and get a general idea of where you'll need to be. Then look at it from the dog's point of view to look for the challenge (not problem) areas. Also break it down into sequences. Then rehearse it. Run your imaginary dog, complete with commands, body position, hand signals. This also helps when running multiple dogs in two-ring trials. Quickly rehearse one then go to the other. The main point is, try to get as many senses involved in the memory process through rehearsal. It might help. (Shannon Chenault)

To avoid congestion at walk throughs, consider starting your walk through at the table. This puts you ahead of the main pack in the first few minutes. After walking the later half of the course, you'll have a less of a crowd while you consider your start and opening sequences. Be persistent about using posted course diagrams in advance of the walk through to identify key handling points. Learning to visualize a course from looking at a diagram isn't easy and takes practice. So don't give up on this skill, rather persist and remember to reward yourself for progress. Drawing the courses yourself can be very helpful in developing this skill. (Sally Sheridan)

It all depends on the individual. Some have a real hard time with spacial relationships. Try to learn the course first as a pattern, which helps a lot. Then break the pattern into segments in your mind, such as picturing a loop to the dogwalk. When you're pretty sure of the overall layout, start analyzing the course, but not until then. Work out the side changes, study the angles, decide what commands you're going to use where, etc. After walking the course a few million times, stand, look at the ground, visualize it, and say it to yourself. When you pass that test, then run the course. Running it will help your timing of commands and positioning. Practice things like where you're going to be at the table and how you're going to get wherever you want to be without looking and without crashing into things! Run any changes to make sure they are going to work and gage the distance between you and your dog on the flowing segments. Finally, leave the course but watch the runs before you to see what the differences in strategy are and whether or not they are working. You should only rarely change what you've planned because it's too risky, but you might want to if it looks as though something you've planned really isn't going to work. If you have a long wait, do the visualization test every now and then. (Anne Smith)

Get yourself down to the dog's level and see what the dog sees as you look the course over. What may have appeared difficult to the handler can be easily overcome by the handler that has looked at it from the dog's perspective. Jumps that may appear out of alignment to the handler may indeed show a straight line path to the dog. Traps or challenges on the course can be identified by seeing what the dog sees as it enters the area. Stand behind the bend in the tunnel and visualize what your dog will see as it exits for example. This is where you will find the areas that you will need to make handling adjustments. Mind boggling for novice handlers include just getting started on course, do you set your dog square to the first jump or set it up to perform the opening sequence of the course? Look closely! Some handicap the dog before they've even begun by not seeing the opening sequence as the dog may see it. The dog is taken through unnecessary wide loops to get started when a fast opening sequence actually existed to excite the dog and get a good start. And don't forget the closing sequence or where that finish line is!

While having copies of courses (an earlier thread) may be convenient for getting an early handle on where to go while planning, many get bogged down worrying over handling procedures before ever having seen them actually set up. Don't obsess on it until you actually see it, usually a completely different picture is presented once you actually walk it.

If you're worried about remembering the course itself then focus on shapes of the loops on course, left loop or right; or colors of the jumps or other obstacles. A biggie when running jumpers when all the jumps on first the first look may appear to be the same. The course can usually be broken down into several elements that will help the handler put it all together and show the dog where to go.

So start your first pass by familiarizing yourself with where you need to go. Then look to see where it is that Fido is going to go and put the two together. Then spend some time visualizing where it is you and your dog will be together and when then when it's your turn trust your dog to do as trained and run it out! Handling is a lot like flying a kite, pull the kite in when you need to and let out more string when necessary!

(Katie Greer)

After you walk the course, run it in your head with your eyes closed and keep doing it until you can get through the whole thing without opening your eyes. To cheat, memorize the obstacle color instead of the actual obstacle, or see if there is a letter similar to the course pattern R, K, S, etc. These were all tricks used for showing Hunter/Jumpers and they really worked, at least on the horses' back.
(Jean Owen)

Stuart Mah says that there are 3 places a handler is most likely to get lost - after the contacts, the weave poles, and the table. Why? - because in all these instances you are more likely to be babysitting the dog and watching her quite intently instead of where to go next. Try to keep that in mind when you walk the course and pretend the dog is actually coming down the A-frame for example. Then as you look at the contact zone, turn towards the next obstacle to see if you are heading correctly. This will be more complicated if you elect to do a front cross after any of these obstacles as then it is even easier to become disoriented. If on any of your walk throughs you do not end up heading the right way after these obstacles, do that part again and again and again. Also do more than walk. Walking the course does not simulate running especially with a Border Collie. Running can be quite tricky if your class is large and you have to weave through the other exhibitors but it helps to do this a couple of times. Usually the crowd thins out at the end and that's when you can try to jog around the course.

Can you still get lost sometimes? You bet! Almost everybody does.

Sometimes you will have a problem if the dog is not where you calculated he would be while walking the course. With experience, you will learn to improvise at the last second. Sooner or later everyone is faced with having to go to "Plan B" on the fly. That's one of the challenges of agility! It does get better... really.