

2014 CONFERENCE REPORT

Welcome

Our 2014 Annual Agility 1st Conference has once again proved to be a great success with over 30 of our members travelling from as far afield as Fort William to join us!

Once again we thank our guest speakers for giving up their time to work with us to provide an interesting and varied programme of events.

Maria Johnston - Movement Skills for the Canine Athlete

Emma Fretwell - Canine First Aid

Ruth MacGill, Yvonne Croxford and Mark Laker - Weaves Masterclass

What follows is a short summary of each of the presentations and activities from the day.



**Movement Skills for the Canine Athlete
– Maria Johnston**

A basic understanding of the dog's anatomy is important to understand a dog's movement, there is huge diversity in the canine species but they are all built the same, it's the size of bones that affect their conformation.

Skeletal structure

Dogs are rear wheel drive, most of their energy and propulsion comes from the hindquarters. So working with the dogs proprioceptive system helps them to move properly and reduces the risk of injury.

Knocks to bones very near to the surface can be very painful for the dog and it is important to consider handling around this – is the dog physically able to do what is asked of it? Has it got enough understanding of the training to be able to compete at its full height without risking unnecessary knocks and bumps from poles?

Dog Development

Dogs develop at a different rate depending on the dog's size, larger dogs develop more slowly. Growth plates start to close at 6-9 months for tiny dogs and at around two years for giant breeds. It is important to take this into account when offering training - is the dog old enough to do the work the handler wants it to?

Muscle Tension and Stride Length

Dogs do not have a clavicle bone, the only thing holding the dog's front leg to the body is muscle. Any tension in these muscles can hugely adversely affect the stride length – a longer stride length equals more speed (a faster stride rate also has an influence on the speed a dog covers the ground). It is important to ensure that any tightness in the shoulders is addressed to ensure peak performance from the dog. In addition, if a dog is not working correctly from the hindquarters they can get sore areas in their spine.

Strengthening the Dog's Core

A dog is a quadruped, and the current trend for some types of tricks purported to be core strengthening can in fact be detrimental. In Maria's opinion there are better ways of strengthening a dog's core muscles – through much more simple sit to stand, stand square and sit square exercises as well as through the use of hydrotherapy.

It is important to improve the core strength of a dog as if a dog has a weak core there is more movement through the lower back than their spine and this can lead to injury.



Proprioception

Awareness of the body space, allows better movement and safer work, better ability to alter and adjust for obstacles.

There is a strong trend at the moment to encourage teaching dog's tricks such as walking backwards. In Maria's opinion a few steps backwards is proprioceptively enriched, but the stifle joint is designed to move forward so being aware of this in limiting the amount of backward movement.

Injuries

There are a tiny set of bones in the dog's neck that can be easily damaged by pulling against their collars. Harnesses that allow clear movement of the legs prevent this from occurring.

Many injuries result from a long period of micro traumas which don't result in a big issue when they occur, but can mount up over time making them more acute. Make sure you know your dog and watch for changes and encourage your students to do the same.

2014 CONFERENCE REPORT

Toenails

Dogs stand up on their toes, with pads to protect underneath. Long toenails are a big problem, they push into the ground which alters the position of the toes and then adversely affects movement further up the leg, causing tension and in some cases lameness as a result.

Muscles

- Grow stronger with correct repetition of movement
- Muscles generally work in pairs, opposite muscles to contract and extend
- Most muscular injury happens where the muscles join the skeletal system
- Often an issue that presents in one place is a result of an injury somewhere else. Often injury presents across and diagonally.

Warm-ups for agility

A warm-up is a period prior to exercise to prepare without tiring the dog. The aim is to increase heart rate and respiration, blood flow and temperature all to support muscle activity and ease of movement. A good warm-up routine can reduce the risk of injury.

Mobilisation – includes: walk, trot, canter. The type of activity depends on the level of the dogs fitness and the situation to hand.

Movement of the joints within the range of motion - not static stretching, ask your dog to give paw, etc (dynamic stretching). Pick up the foot and place it back down to lubricate the joint. Hold the toe joint and gently curl the toes in press the joints very gently.

Sports specific – many competitions do not allow the use of warm-up jumps so instead get creative, use your own body to create a jump, or weave through legs.

Tuggy games - not manically, think about over extension of movement that can occur, and manage your dog's games accordingly.

Cool downs

The aim of a cool-down is to gently bring the heart rate back down, reducing stress on the body, there is some evidence that it may help to reduce muscle soreness for the dog. Cool-downs are simple - Walking briskly and then gently slowing down. Always provide your dog with plenty of water after exercise.

If you have any concerns about the dogs in your classes always refer them to their vet.

Maria Johnston – Active Balance Physiotherapy

<http://www.activebalance-vetphysio.co.uk> Tel: 01455 613469



Canine First Aid – Emma Fretwell

Emma for provided us with an information packed and very practical session on canine first aid!

Most Important when dealing with any first aid situation:

Calm down and don't panic.

CPR

Think ABC has the dog got a clear airway, breathing, circulation.

- CPR is performed when the dog is not breathing and has no pulse.
- Rescue breathing when has pulse but not breathing

To check if breathing – place the back of your hand in front of nose or mouth, or use a piece of grass to check for air movement, if the dog is breathing go to directly to a vet.

Rescue Breaths

If not breathing you will need to perform rescue breaths. To do this tilt head back and close the dogs close mouth, firstly moving tongue out of the way the breathe into the dogs nose) check for chest rise as the air goes in, if there is none then check for airway blockages. A note of caution – even though a dog is unconscious it can still have a strong bite reflex!

Rescue breaths are ideally performed with the dog on its sternum but don't move the dog if there is any risk of injury.

Chest Compressions

If there is no pulse then perform chest compressions x 5, then one rescue breath. Then check for pulse. When you feel a pulse stop compressions, but keep checking it. When pet is breathing stop rescue breaths.

Chest compressions are best done with the dog lying on right side, although only reposition if no risk of further injury. Press down 1/4 to 1/3 of the chest size.

Finding the pulse

Using fingers on inside of hind leg between hip and knee, towards the front of femur. Pulse should be between 60-80 bpm at rest. Practice this with your own dogs so that you can easily find the pulse point. Alternatively you can feel the dog's heartbeat directly in its chest.

Injuries and Bleeding

Apply direct pressure with gauze, adding more gauze if blood is seeping. Then add padding to support and bandage with vet wrap to hold in place. Make sure bandage is not too tight.

For wounds on the ear, sandwich ear between gauze and lay the ear over the head and bandage to the head, ensuring the dog can still see and breathe.

If something is sticking out of wound leave it in as you can do more harm taking it out. However if the object is huge and you can cut it without moving it then do so. Secure the object in place with bandages.

2014 CONFERENCE REPORT

Choking

If the dog is trying to cough up the obstruction let it try and go directly to a vet.

If the dog is unconscious - extend head and neck, move tongue and try to remove the obstruction but be careful of not pushing it further in. Beware of the bite reflex!

If the airway obstructed then use abdominal thrusts - support spine against your body with the dog's head facing upwards and its backside on the floor, then below the sternum, apply five quick upward thrusts to attempt to dislodge the object

If not successful hang dog upside down and use back of hand to slap between shoulder blades.



Fractures and broken bones

To the vet immediately! Muzzle your pet straightaway, and do not move the limb any more than possible. Put the dog on blanket or board to move it. If you are far from a vet then immobilize the area, with stiff magazine, splints, sticks etc if the break is straight; however if the break is angled do not try and straighten it, just keep it still and get to a vet as quickly as possible.



Sprains

Do not use pain medication unless vet advised.

Ice to reduce inflammation. Beware of internal injuries.

Hyperthermia (Overheating)

Move the dog to a cool location. Take your pets temperature - if it is between 40-41 degrees then begin the cooling down process: get the pet to drink, water or Gatorade etc. then stop cooling down process at 39 deg.

If the dog's temperature is over 41 get moving to the vets first then start the cooling down process in the car. Monitor the dog's pulse and breathing.

Cooling down process - Lay wet towels over dog especially over the feet and belly, and use a fan to increase the effect. Do not use cold or iced water. A cold pack, wrapped in towel and apply to groin, feet and armpit can be used, also apply to the neck and head area as well.

Emma will be running an online first aid course in New year.
www.Emeraldchiropractic.co.uk 01386 443999

Weave Master Class - 2+2 weaves

Main points covered

Aims of training the weaves using this method:

- To encourage the dog to work it out for himself, this makes consistent, accurate weave entries more likely.
- The dog learns to adopt the correct foot placement and reduce its speed of approach without the handler having to intervene.
- To use a high value reward based method of training the weaves and in particular the weave entry.

Introduction

- This method relies on transferring value from a toy or titbit (target) to the weaves or to the obstacle.
- Lure based training is reverse conditioning.
- Other methods of teaching the weaves can be described as patterning.
- Upping the reward for achieving the success criteria can increase speed of learning.
- This helps to encourage the dog to offer behaviours as it is rewarding for them.
- If taught correctly it makes the common problem of a dog popping out of the weaves before the end less likely.
- The handler / instructor needs to be quick to reward the behavior they are looking for. Correct timing of the reward is critical.
- The dog learns there is considerable value of going through the 2 poles when it passes through them correctly with their left shoulder closest to the first pole in the sequence.
- "Choice games" are a good way of teaching the dog how to learn.
- Dogs that lack drive may take more time to achieve the desired behavior so keep the sessions short, fun and rewarding.

2014 CONFERENCE REPORT



Method

- Start off with two poles only to begin with.
- Use the two pole method to target simple entries at first & vary the arc of entry to make it more challenging.
- When the dog is entering the weaves consistently approaching in a straight line, start to increase the challenge.
- The rule is when the dog does what's needed three times in succession correctly then up the game by adding in extra poles, or by making the angle of entry more challenging.
- Imagine drawing an arc towards the approach to the weaves, move the dog's starting point towards the weaves around the arc.
- Work the dog around the arc to increase difficulty of the entry, don't set the dog up to fail, always go back a few steps if the angle of approach is too challenging

Weave Master Class - Channel weave method

Main points covered

Aims of training the weaves using this method:

- To break the approach to training the weaves into a number of simple stages.
- To create independence early on; this method encourages the dog to work the weaves without worrying about where the handler is.



Introduction:

- This method can be cheaper for starter handlers if they want to practice at home; they can buy some kit if they want to (stick in the ground poles).
- There are 5 steps from working with the poles in a channel to the point when there are 12 poles in a straight line.
- The method works well with groups as moving through the channel can be turned into a game for both handlers & dogs.
- Wait until the behaviour is strong before adding a word (command) to it.
- Try to build distance to the reward to encourage independent working.
- When the dog is moving through the channel towards the reward add in lateral distance and crossing in front of and behind the dog.
- The method is used to promote effective foot placement while weaving.
- Top tip: create a chute at the beginning of the channel and at the end.

Method

Stage 1:

- Position two lines of 6 poles about a metre apart to start with.
- Make it easy for the dog to run through the channel to a reward placed at either end of the channel.
- Have the handler at one end of the channel and the instructor at the other.

Stage 2:

- The instructor gently restrains the dog while the handler runs towards the reward at the other end of the channel.
- The dog should run to the reward not the handler!
- Start about 2 m from start of poles.
- Reward at each end of the poles back and forth.
- Build distance towards the reward.

Stage 3:

- Starting building lateral distance between the dog & the handler. The dog should be driving independently to the reward regardless of where the handler is
- Need to spend some time developing this stage before considering moving to stage 4.

Stage 4:

- Imagine drawing an arc towards the approach to the weaves, move the dog's starting point towards the weaves around the arc.

Stage 5:

- This is where the poles are gradually moved closer together to form a straight line. Always be prepared to move back a few steps if the desired success criteria or rate of success is not being achieved.

2014 CONFERENCE REPORT

Weave Master Class - Weave Guides

Main points covered

Aims of training the weaves using this method:

- To teach technique first.
- Encourage the dog to perform independently of the handler from the beginning.
- Encourage the dog to get it right first time & all the time.

Introduction

- The speed of performance should come naturally to the dog as it works out foot placement.
- The dog learns to decelerate as it approaches the first pole in order to get into the channel created by the guides.
- When introducing a dog to the guides only do one or two to begin with and then reward. This helps the dog get used to seeing the guides and the channel between them,
- We do not want to encourage the dog to jump over the guides.
- Confidence builds in the dog; this helps to increase motivation, drive, speed and focus.
- The guides can be put back on at any time to help to help address faults in technique.

Method

- Place a guide on every other pole on one side and do the same on the other side so it makes a channel for the dog to go through.
- Then encourage the dog through all the weaves with the guides on, once this is achieved give loads of praise.
- When the dog understands then you can start to increase speed and forward focus, using either food or toy.
- Once this has been achieved you can start to teach independence by sending your dog through to a toy and create lateral distance by running wide of the weaves, etc.
- When the dog is happy and proficient with weaving start to remove guides from the middle, leaving them on the entrance and exit while you practise different angles of entry.
- Gradually remove the guides from the entry & exit.
- Remove all the guides when the dog is entering and exiting consistently.



Website Open Forum

The Agility 1st Team held an open forum on the websites and on all aspects of the Agility1st programmes. The team introduced Coz McLavy who supports Agility 1st with the website management and marketing programmes.

The conference participants suggested the following improvements to the on-line learning programme which will be investigated further by the Agility1st Team:

- Possibility of having word doc versions of the resource cards as a download
- Allowing attachments for the free text elements of the assessment answers
- PDF to be able to download all pages of one module at a time
- Suggested reading lists

Your Feedback

Your Feedback on the Conference and the Agility 1st Programmes is important to us. Below is a link for a short survey for feedback on the conference for those who attended and also for general feedback on Agility1st.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7GWDPVK>

As always please contact Steve or Mark with your views and for further assistance with the website please contact Coz on coz@agility1st.co.uk.