DESIGNING COURSES

BY

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Designing courses for agility.

When designing courses for 4-H agility you need to consider the level of your 4-H members. Designing a course too simple is not fair to your 4-H members. They will not be able to compete with other 4-H clubs or at the state fair.

It is also not fair to make the courses too simple so that the 4-H member who is not working his dogs can get a good score. You need to make courses that will fit the middle of the group.

I know that many 4-H clubs do not have a large facility to accommodate an agility course therefore it is important to understand the basics of course designing!

For beginners working three jumps in a row will cause the dog and the handler a lot of problems. For this reason when I design my beginning courses, I usually use a maximum of two jumps in a series. There may be times that you will have to put three jumps in a row to have the course flow correctly. I will attempt to show you some of the best ways to layout a course on a tight floor. It is not necessary to keep all the equipment in a straight line. Although this does work well for beginner courses it does not necessarily build handling skills. On the other side of that it does build confidence in the dog to a point. One of the biggest things that you will find is that when a dog gets comfortable working a tunnel the tunnel becomes one of the biggest traps on the course.

Agility is a team sport

It is common for most courses to start with jumps. The two most common finishes are jumps and tunnels. The problem with setting a jump for the first piece of equipment is the start line.

If you do not have a separate start line back from the jump, the handler will set the dog right in front of the jump. This is where you will see a lot of dog's fail the course because they will knock off the bar. For this reason I will set the log jump or the brush jump as the first piece of equipment in the beginner class. These two jumps do not have bars to knock off. When you're setting the course it is important to remember the level that the dogs and handler are working at.

By placing the teeter totter in front of the dog walk will cause some dogs to refuse the dog walk. The reason being the ramp of the dog walk will appear to the dog as the teeter-totter. Putting the A frame in a curve will cause some dogs to fail to get over the frame on the first attempt. Putting the table in front of the teeter-totter will give you a slower approach to the teeter-totter. By putting a jump in the approach of the teeter-totter you'll find that some dogs will fly off the teeter totter. Placing a tunnel so the dog will see that as well as the next piece of equipment that they are going to work will cause some dogs to take the tunnel over the next piece of equipment. When placing the weave polls in a course you'll find that more dogs will fail the first attempt coming straight at the polls. Putting the hoop tunnel on an
angle approach will cause the dogs to enter that tunnel in the wrong place. As you see by placing equipment in different locations and different sequences will change the difficulty of a course.

When you set a course up you need to make the course for the ability of the handlers. When training, you should set up a lot of these situations. You will see some sequences on the courses. Training is the place for you to learn to control the dog.

You can buy a course-designing program. There are several on the market. The one I use is by Clean Runs, Course Designer 3. This program is easy to use.
DESIGNING AGILITY COURSE

Distance Between Obstacles

The first thing you need to remember when setting up a course is the spacing between the obstacles. Jumps need to be 15 ft. apart as a minimal distance. You need 15 ft. for the approach to the A frame and 15 ft. on the downside. The distance between the tunnel, table and the dog walk can be less than the 15 ft. required for jumps and the A frame.

Making Turns In An Agility Course

I do not set the tunnel straight through. Although in the beginning class all I do is put a slight bend in the tunnel. Dog should be taught to drive through the tunnel without hesitating or stopping in the tunnel. If the dog is allowed to stop or hang up in the tunnel they will mark the tunnel and you will have to crawl in it to clean it up. The open tunnel is a very good obstacle to make turns in your course. The table is also a good obstacle to make turns as well as it slows the dog down to gain control of the dog.

C. Placing Of The Teeter-Totter

Any time you are setting jumps in front of the teeter totters you must be aware of the fact that this can cause fly offs. A lot of times I will set the table in front of the teeter-totter. This will allow the handler to get control of their dog at that point.

D. Size Of Floor and Equipment

When you set up a course for a club you need to remember to find out the size of the floor you will be using and the size of the equipment. There is a major difference of the distance that is needed for a 12-foot dog walked as opposed to the 8-foot dog walk. Also a 9-foot A-frame takes up more space on the course. Although 4-H uses the 8-foot A-frame there are some clubs that have 9 foot A-frames. For this reason, you need to make sure you know the size of the equipment.
E. **Surface And Size Of The Floor**

   Also the surface of the floor is very important. If you're on concrete with no mat the floor is usually slippery. You need to take into consideration the turns and how the dog will respond to this type of surface they are on. Although I have judged on many different kinds of surfaces, I prefer grass or dirt. As a rule this gives the dog a better footing and less likely to cause injuries when jumping. Smaller floor causes tighter courses and sharper turns. If you have big dogs and make a lot of sharp turns you will slow the course down dramatically and have lower scores. You will also see more bars knocked off and more run bys and refusals on equipment.

F. **Refusals On Equipment**

   Refusals on equipment are usually caused by a dog not being comfortable with the approach to that piece of equipment. Run-bys on jumps are usually caused by the same reason or a health reasons on a dogs part.

G. **Jumping**

   The biggest problem I see in jumping is that people try to make the dog jump at the wrong location or out of stride in front of the jump. They allow the dog to get too close to the jump and then try to make them jump rather than back them up to get a better run at the jump. The starting line is usually a problem for new handlers. They will sit the dog as close to that line as possible. If you have the jump too close to the start line this means that they will be sitting the dog too close to the jump for the dog to properly maneuver the jump properly. A lot of the time I do not set a jump that has a displaceable bar for a starting jump. I like to use the brush jump or a log jump. The log jump is a little better for beginners to have for the start because it is not as high as other jumps.
Hoop Tunnel & Weave Poles

The hoop tunnel is one of the most deceiving pieces of equipment on a course. Many people don’t think of it as much of an obstacle. Placing the hoop tunnel on an angle to last piece of equipment will cause the dog to enter in the wrong location if not handled properly. Placing the hoop tunnel so that the next piece of equipment is not in a straight line or on an angle can cause the dog to come out the side.

The same is true of the weave polls. Making a fast approach to the weave polls and going straight at them you will see a lot of dogs fault the first attempt. When laying out a course it is important to consider all angles and approaches to all equipment. You should try to set a course to challenge all the handlers

Determination of Actual Course Time

The Judge will set the ACT by first measuring the typical efficient dog’s path through the course, preferably with a surveyor’s measuring wheel for accuracy. He will then divide the course yardage by a yards-per-section (YPS) factor that he feels is reasonable, considering the complexity of the obstacle arrangement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>YPS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (extremely simple)</td>
<td>2.00 YPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (fairly simple)</td>
<td>1.85 YPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (average difficulty)</td>
<td>1.70 YPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (fairly complex)</td>
<td>1.60 YPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (very complex)</td>
<td>1.50 YPS</td>
</tr>
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The second way to measure the course is to use a stopwatch and walk the course at a brisk pace and add 10 seconds to the time.
This spacing will make it hard to do this equipment.

This is the minimum spacing for safety.

Most likely entry.

This angle will cause a run-by.

This angle will cause wrong entry and exit.

Course 1

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