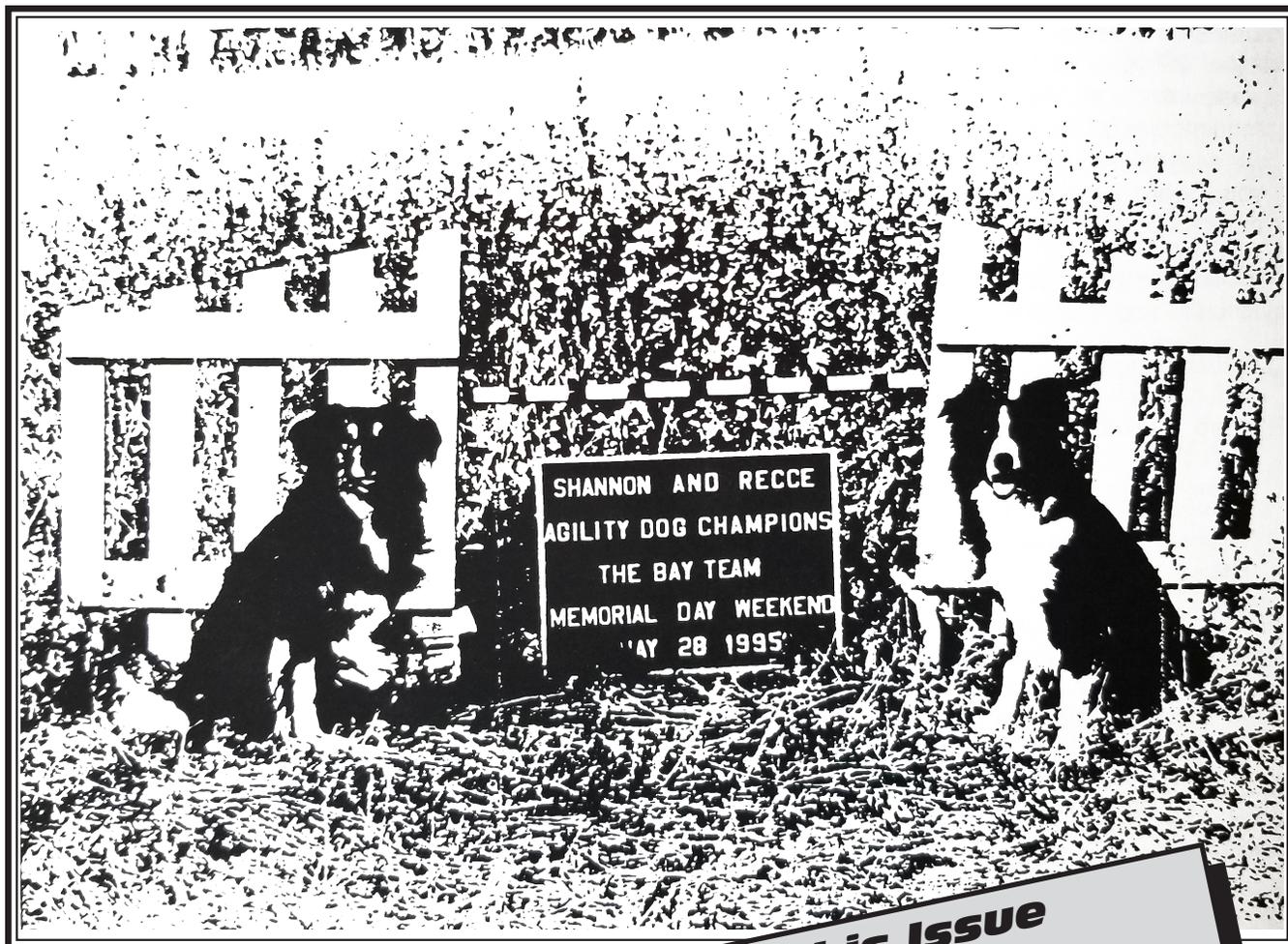


# *Clean Run*

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VOLUME 1, NUMBER 32



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**\$2.00**

# Clean Run

For Agility Instructors and Other Serious Students of the Game

**About This Publication:** It is not the scope of *Clean Run* to impose an ideal or standard for handling a dog in agility. Instead, the focus of this publication is to present many different looks at obstacle sequences and handler challenges. We will suggest alternatives and encourage you, the handler, to experiment with many different possibilities.

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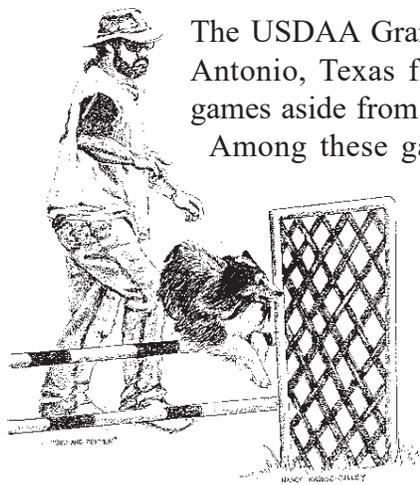
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**Submissions and Comments:** We welcome your observations and adaptations of the exercises in this publication as well as your own training exercises and suggestions. We also encourage readers to submit original agility artwork and photographs for our cover.

Please send editorial comments, articles, artwork, and any other submissions to Bud Houston, P.O. Box 45438, Phoenix AZ 85064.

**On the Cover:** Stuart Mah's ADCH dogs Shannon and Recce.



The USDAA Grand Prix Finals in San Antonio, Texas featured several open games aside from the Grand Prix itself.

Among these games was something called Gambler's Choice.

The game was a hybrid of the gamblers game we play all year long. It featured an opening round with two on-course gambles

and a secondary scoring period in which point values for all obstacles were doubled. The handler could keep all points earned if the dog crossed the finish line by the second whistle.

I believe we really missed an opportunity by presenting gamblers in this hybrid form. While the game was fun, and provided plenty of entertainment to spectators, we got no opportunity to *show our stuff*. The purpose of the gamblers class is to demonstrate the ability of the dog and handler team to work at a distance. There was no distance work required in this class...it amounted to a rack-up-points version of a time gamble.

There are some very awesome dogs in the USDAA who would have thrilled us with truly amazing feats of distance control, directionals, and obstacle discrimination. This is the stuff we do all year out in the hinterlands. So why do we play a watered-down, milk-toast version of the game at the Finals? And, correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't this the second year in a row we didn't have a real Gamblers class at the USDAA Finals?

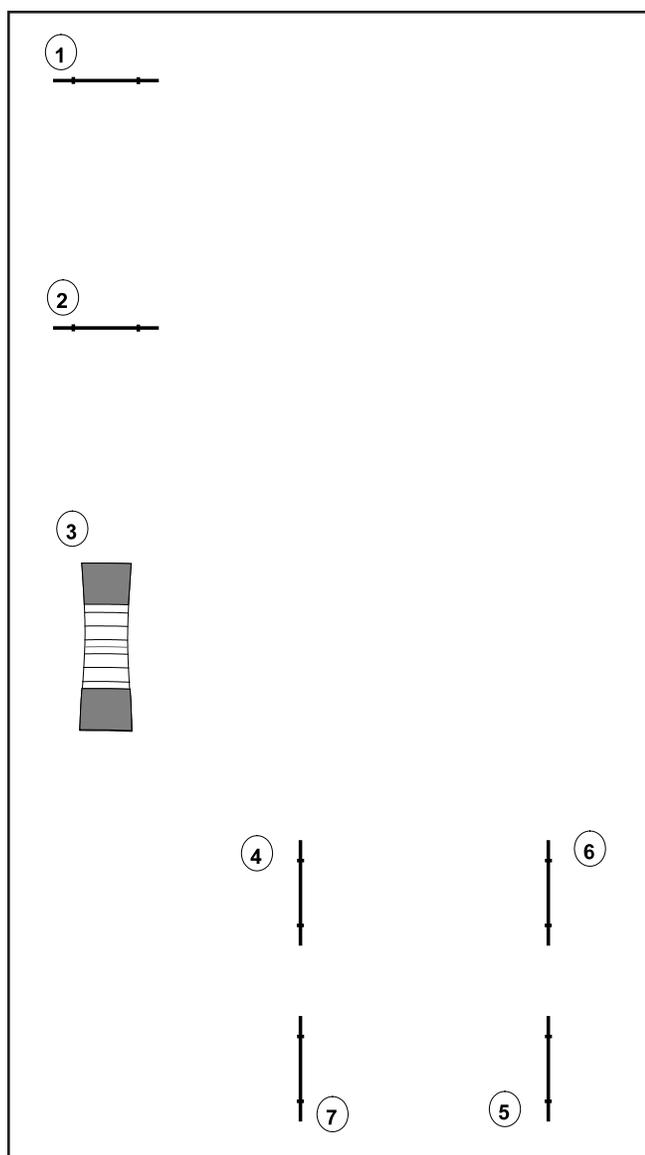
— Bud Houston

*P.S. About the cover...I got an envelope in the mail with this photocopy of Stuart Mah's two dogs. Off to the side was a scribbled note: "I thought you might want to see what a couple ADCHs looked like!" As we're beginning a new series of training exercises with Stuart this week, I thought I'd share this picture with you. If it's not really obvious, Stu was teasing me a bit (cuz I had two MADs before he did). But to be fair about it, Recce was looking for standard legs to finish both MAD and ADCH (from which I'm still rather distant with my dogs), because Stuart has this little problem training his dogs to hit CONTACT ZONES.*

## Mah's Bootlace

We are pleased and proud to bring to you the first in a series of *seven* advanced training exercises designed by Stuart Mah. Our advanced and intermediate training plans will be designed around each Mah exercise to give your classes balance. You will find certain recurring themes in these exercises, so expect after this seven-week series to have a pretty good understanding of these principles.

Some people would argue that we should present all of the exercises together, at once. But no. Think of it like ice cream. If you bought a gallon of ice cream you wouldn't dream of sitting down and eating the whole tub at once. That would be way too much for your system to endure. (For those of you who have actually *seen* me eat ice cream, I offer this caveat: Do as I say...not as I do.)



Stuart has several observations on this exercise.

### Proper Body Position and Movement

*...will always get you out of a jam.* In true Socratic fashion, Stu doesn't tell us what *is* the proper body position for this exercise. Take a pencil and draw a line to describe what you believe to be the dog's path, given probable direction and velocity. What you'll probably come up with is a very straight line from the A-frame through jump #5. A lot of speed is built up in this flow, so that the transition to jump #6 is a wide loop with an awkward approach to #6 and a problematical transition to #7. How will your students position and move their bodies?

### Trust the Dog

*The exercise will go much better if the handler places an obstacle between himself and the dog.* Stuart's point in this exercise is that it's not likely to be beneficial for the handler to pass to the right of jumps #5 and #6 to micromanage the 180° turn to jump #7. In fact, this lack of trust will probably get the handler in trouble.

### A Dog Turns Only as Fast as the Handler Rotates in the Direction of the Turn

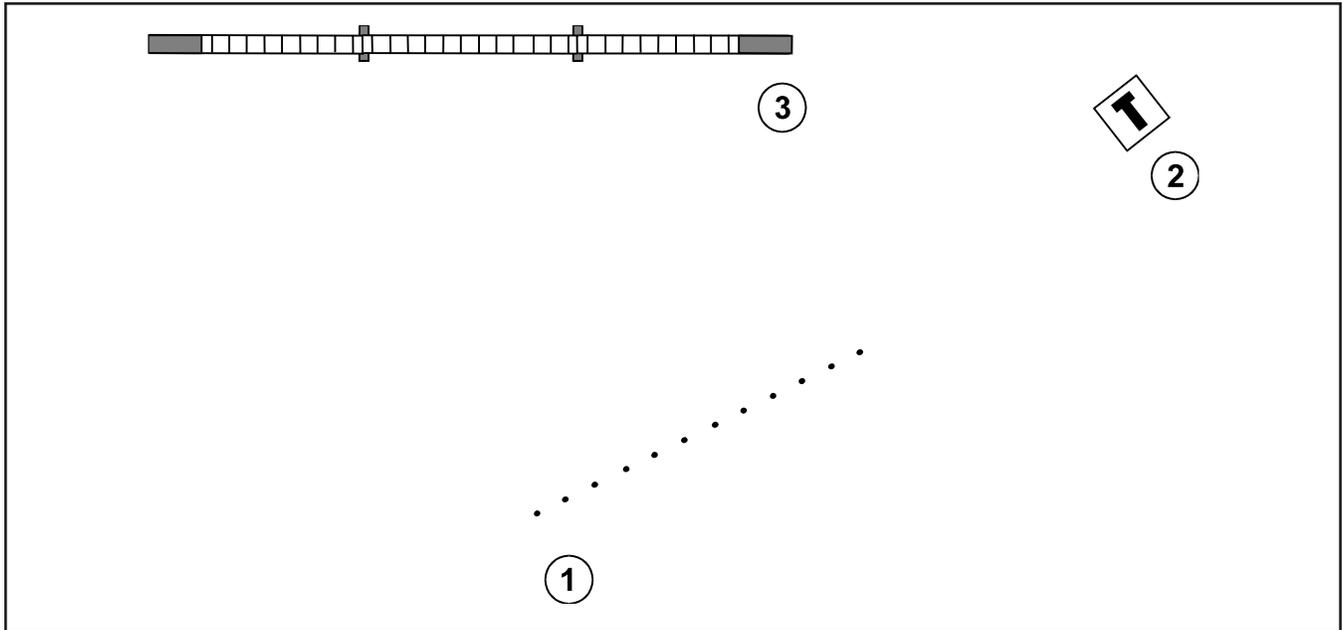
*If a handler wants to turn a dog tighter, he should rotate faster in the intended direction of the turn.* As square and blocky as this exercise appears to be, it is actually full of turns. The initial turn from the A-frame to jump #4 is fairly important. The handler needs to turn quickly to keep the dog in a tight line with *both* #4 and #5. Turn too slowly in this transition and the dog's path really creates an awkward handling problem; indeed, the dog might even be pushed off-course and back jump #7. Using Stuart's rate-of-turn principle, a handler might also influence the distance the dog has to travel in the 180° transition from #5 to #6. Turn fast and the loop is tightened.

Stuart goes on to say, in the same vein: *What if this method turns the dog to the wrong obstacle? The answer is to reverse turn or counter-rotate the turn.* An example of this point is the transition from #6 to #7. As the handler rotates (counter-clockwise), an off-course (back jump #4) is presented to the dog. To minimize the possibility of an off-course, the handler might do something like this: For the 180° turn from #5 to #6, the handler rotates counter-clockwise very tightly to get the dog to turn quickly; the handler then steps up between #6 and #4 and counter rotates (clockwise) as the dog is committed to jump #6; this effectively removes the possibility of an off-course for a dog that's paying attention to its handler.

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## Advanced Training: How Hard?

We frequently include training exercises in the *Clean Run* that frankly are not too challenging. Consider the exercise illustrated below.



On first glance it's no big deal. The complete zealot trainer might want to scrap the plan for something that invites (even requires) changes of side, obstacle discrimination, call-offs, etc. etc. The advanced student might even look at the exercise with some disdain and approach it half-heartedly.

Philosophically, there are two compelling reasons for setting up simple training exercises:

1. Success...If you put up four or five exercises that beg your students to fail fail fail, you will be frustrating both student and dog. Not a good idea.
2. Even this simple exercise offers a variety of distinct training challenges to match your students' immediate training objectives. Consider the following:

### **Weave Poles**

Work on correct entry starting from a variety of approaches. Work the dog on either side. Work on sending the dog ahead. Work on new speed.

### **Table**

Work on a prompt down. Work on sending the dog ahead. Work on bold course positioning (for example, handler moves while dog is down).

### **Dog Walk**

Work on contact reliability. Work on new speed.

### **The Sequence**

The advanced handler can work on new motivation or treat the sequence as one enormous gamble. The advanced handler also might want to try omitting the table on alternate repetitions or reverse the flow of the sequence.

## Deliverance

On the face of it, this is a simple exercise—but we will add a little bit of challenge to spice it up.

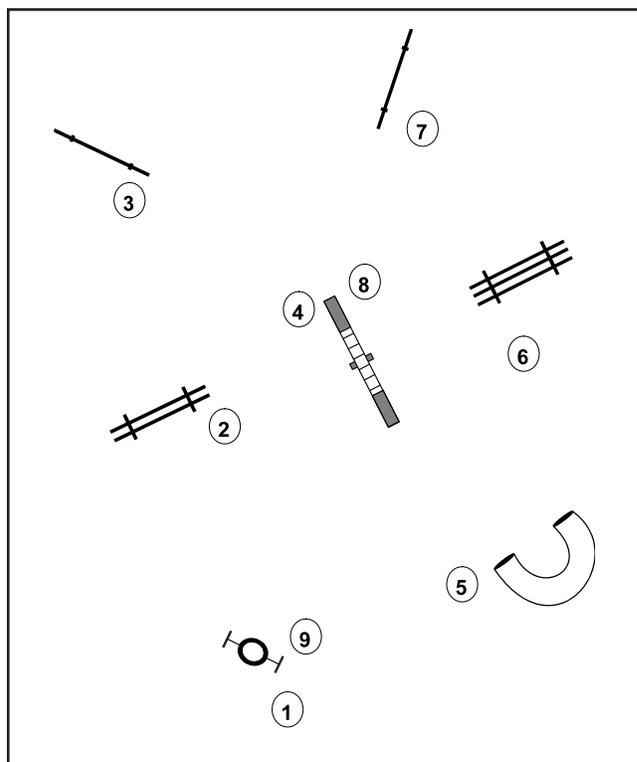
Avoid omitting the double and triple spread jumps. Your students really need to see these in practice.

Now, the challenge...

Run the sequence one time requiring your students to stay on the left side of the see-saw at all times. In the next repetition, make them stay on the right side of the see-saw. Then make them stay below the pivot point of the see-saw. Finally have them stay above the pivot point of the see-saw.

Keeping in mind that although the dog is progressively becoming patterned to the exercise, it is still likely that the handler learns something valuable in each challenge.

Which was the hardest *stay* for the handler?

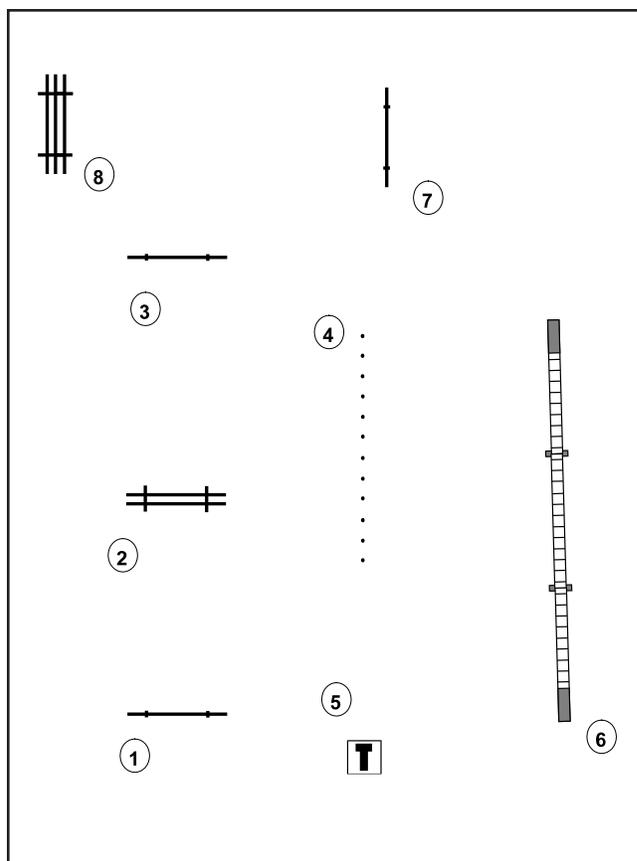


## Intermediate Set 1: 180° Turn to the Weave Poles

This exercise features a 180° turn to the weave poles. You will see this kind of handling challenge required in competition. While it makes competitors nervous, it is really not too difficult. In fact, the dog is less apt to fault the entry to the poles in this turn than if the sequence set up a fast flow to the poles.

There is some potential for an off-course (a back jump at #7) if the handler doesn't completely turn the dog into the poles.

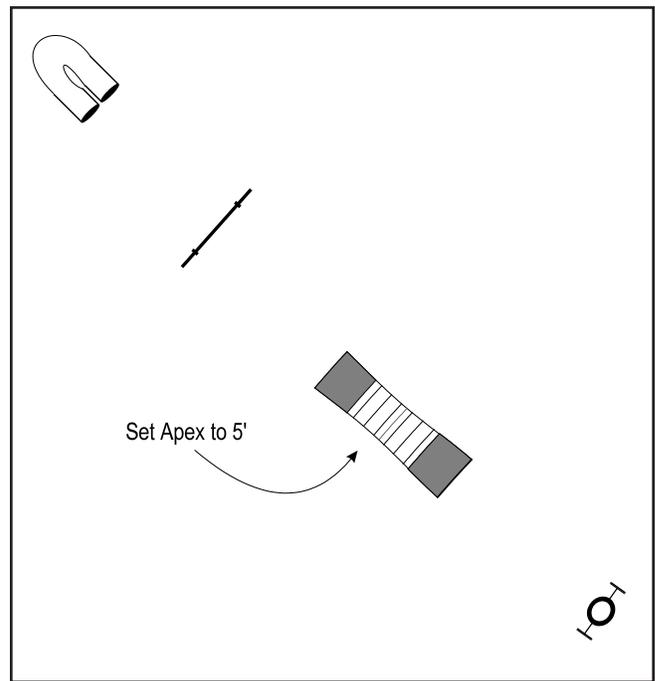
The exercise ends with the triple jump. Keep an eye on students who take shorter and shorter strides as they approach the triple. This might cause the dog to slow, losing momentum, and crash the bars. Remind students to step through performance of the triple-spread.

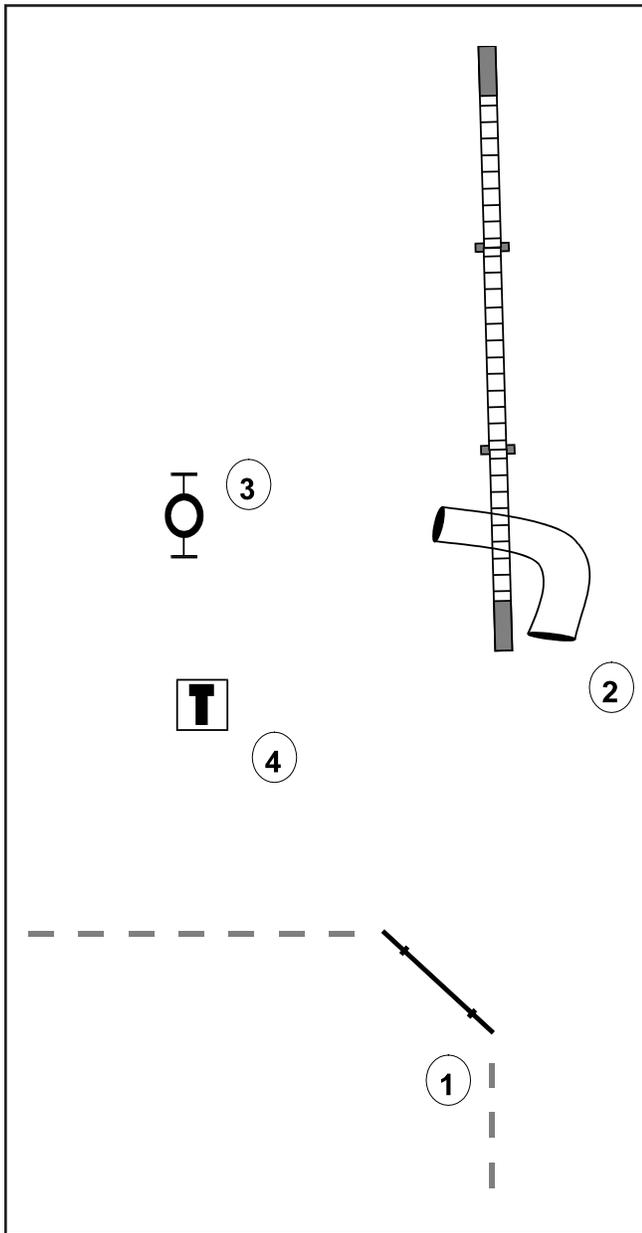


## A-Frame Speed

This intermediate exercise gives your students an opportunity to work out several performance problems:

- Dogs will hit the A-frame twice in the sequence. With the apex set at 5' and plenty of speed potential in both approaches, students should focus on *speed* over the ramp.
- The tunnel is set with the openings side-by-side. Do *not* require students to make an entry on a specific side—allow the dog to choose. Handlers should be able to push the dog ahead to the tunnel from increasingly greater distances.
- The exercise allows a blind cross (handler crosses dog's path while the dog is in the tunnel). This will give your students valuable practice and confidence in performing this essential handling maneuver.





## Gamble Review

—Dan Prestby

This was Laura Yarborough's Masters gamble in Van Nuys, California.

Twelve seconds were allowed to do the gamble. Steve Boettcher's "Tippy" was the only dog to do the gamble within the allotted time, which was especially nice since it finished "Tippy's" MAD title. All the remaining obstacles were up and away from the start of the gamble, requiring special handling to be at the first gamble obstacle when the whistle blew.

A few dogs successfully did the gamble, but not within the allotted time. "Judy" (ed note: Dan's dog) missed a leg by .42 seconds.

The only way to do the gamble was to remain silent when your dog exited the tunnel and just hope that the dog would take the tire. If you said *anything* it would draw your dog's attention back to you and back towards the table. Almost all of the dogs went jump, tunnel, table. Only a few dogs went up the dog walk after the jump.

This gamble looked deceptively easy when you were walking the course, but, since only one dog got a leg, it proved to be anything but easy. It was a fair test of a master level dog, although the distances were such that the time was a bit tight. Naturally, I would say that since I missed the leg by .42 seconds!

The distance from jump #1 to the tunnel was approximately 18'. There was approximately 18' to 20' from the exit of the tunnel to the tire jump. The table and tire were exactly three feet apart.

### Editor's Notes: Trying Out This Gamble

When you set up this gamble for yourself and others to try, experiment with different ways of handling the transition from the tunnel to the tire and make some observations about what works and what doesn't work.

- See for yourself what happens when you give a tire command versus when you don't.
- Does a handler with a dog that has some type of a "get out" command (meaning move away from the handler on an angle rather than coming in towards the handler) in his repertoire have an easier time getting his dog to the tire? Or, does giving the dog any sort of command as he comes out of the tunnel cause the problem that Dan describes?
- What happens if you make full use of the handler's area and keep moving the entire time the dog is performing the gamble. For example, if you send the dog to jump #1 from a distance rather than going all the way up to the jump (thereby preserving space you can still use at the front of the handler's area), can you push the dog out to the tire by moving towards the dog as he exits the tunnel?

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# A Philosophy for Training to Win—Part 1

—Monica Percival

In preparation for a seminar several years ago, someone asked me to put together a list of what I thought went into “training a dog to win” in agility. I think the person expected a laundry list of agility skills to work on; instead, she got the list below. While many of these principles may seem to state the obvious or be messages that we strive to communicate to our students in every class, I find that it's helpful for students to have a handout like this that they can take home and think about from time to time. (Part 2 of the list will appear in a future issue.)

- **Maintain a positive attitude.** You help shape your dog’s attitude with the attitude that you project. A happy dog is an enthusiastic worker who is willing to accept challenges!
- **Have fun.** If you aren’t having fun, your dog isn’t having fun. Success on the agility field is not a life and death issue. Have you ever met a dog that cared whether or not he got a qualifying score?
- **Dogs are “only human.”** Dogs make mistakes and have bad days just like us. When your dog makes a mistake, don’t jump too quickly to blame him. Look at what you might have done to cause the error (such as giving a late command or standing in the wrong position). Think about what you could have done to prevent the dog from making the mistake. Evaluate whether or not the dog really understands what you expect of him.
- **Agility is a team sport.** You and your dog must work together. You are the team captain.
- **No harsh corrections.** Harsh corrections can destroy a dog’s confidence. No praise should be your harshest correction.
- **A dog in top physical condition has an easier road to achieving top performance.** A top tennis player must have more than a killer serve and a great forehand to win—he must have strength, endurance, flexibility, timing, balance, and coordination. While we’re born with some measure of these abilities, we can enhance them with regular exercise. The same holds true for dogs...Agility requires greater overall physical fitness than what can be achieved by just working the obstacles. As with people, a regular exercise program will help increase your dog’s strength and endurance, improve his concentration, keep him from becoming overweight, prevent injuries (“soft” muscles are more prone to injury), and make him feel better overall.
- **Every dog needs different training.** If this isn't the first dog you are training for agility, recognize that every dog is different and what worked for your other dog may not work for this dog.
- **Set achievable goals in both training and competition.** Setting realistic goals allows both you and your dog to achieve success in every training session and every competitive class you enter—success builds confidence! If your goals aren’t realistic, you will constantly be frustrated with your dog and the dog may lose interest in agility. Don’t let the success of other people’s dogs cause you to set goals that your dog can’t achieve—just because Fido learned the weave poles in a month doesn’t mean that Rover can.
- **There are no shortcuts.** Just as a child can’t progress from learning the alphabet to reading *War and Peace* overnight, a dog cannot progress from performing individual obstacles to running courses overnight. Slowly increase the number of obstacles you ask him to perform in sequence. Likewise, you cannot start teaching your dog to work at a distance by trying to send him 20' to the tunnel. It’s important to build good basic agility skills that you can fall back on when you have a training problem in the future. If you try to take shortcuts in training, it will catch up with you later when you try to do more advanced work with your dog.
- **The training process never ends!** Just because your dog did a particular exercise right yesterday, doesn’t mean he’ll remember how to do it right today or tomorrow. Even when a dog is competing successfully, you’ll always run into new problems—such as the dog that forgets what a contact zone is or thinks it’s better to begin weaving at the second pole. That’s the challenge of agility.