

Howdy, Agility Partner

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Practice Makes Pawfect

You and your dog are a team when doing Agility. But there are times when including a third or even a fourth individual can really boost your progress. I'm talking about training partners. These are probably people on their own agility journeys. And journeys are usually more fun when you have like-minded people going in the same direction.

The first benefit of a training partner is just the camaraderie. Someone with whom to do the things that you both enjoy. Or someone to talk you into doing things that you think you might enjoy. Having a training partner is like having a workout partner. They add accountability and motivation just by expecting you to join them. A good training partner will support you when things aren't going so well and celebrate with you on your successes.

Having a training partner can also help financially. A semi-private lesson is much cheaper than a private. Taking turns gives you and your dog a break and you can still learn from what the other person is being told. Unlike in group classes, semi-private

lessons are still tailored to your specific needs and you will get plenty of working time. Field rentals are also better with a training partner. You have help setting up, can split the rental fee, and taking turns ensures the best use of the time you've paid for. If you are going to a seminar or a trial, you can car-pool and split gas or even lodging expenses.

Training partners can really be of benefit in your actual training sessions. A second person can be invaluable when training your dog distance and obstacle independence. For these skills, the dog's reward should not come from the handler's hand but should be given at the end of the dog's path. That second person can place (and guard) the reward so the dog only gets it after successfully completing the desired behavior. Weaves and contact training are great obstacles to use a 'reward person'. A remote treat-dispenser or a closeable container can work as well, but a person is more mobile and responsive.



A second set of eyes is always helpful. As your training partner manages the reward distribution, they can also be watching your dog more closely than you can. They can

notice things you might miss as you are running around. Did they drop the bar with a front foot, a rear foot or did they hit the upright? Are they taking off early or too close? Is the dog getting tired or stressed? Was this repetition better than the last?

Much like a second set of eyes, a second brain can also be useful. If they are more experienced than you, great! You will benefit from their expertise. Even if they are not as experienced or knowledgeable as you, your training partner will have had their own experiences and education. They may have read an article or gone to a seminar where the instructor covered the issue you are having. Maybe they are great at brainstorming or bouncing around ideas with. Two heads are usually better than one. If you don't agree with their ideas or

insights, you can always thank them and say you will look into that while you investigate solutions.

A final benefit of having a training partner is the fact they have their own dog(s). They can be training their own dog on the other side of the ring while you practice, providing a more trial-like environment with the action and noise from a second ring. Since you can coordinate with them, you can gradually increase the distraction level at a pace your dog can handle, something you can't always do at a trial or with a stranger. If your dog is a little nervous, having a known buddy can give them more confidence. So not only do you get a training buddy, but your dog does too.

You may have several different partners for distinct aspects of your agility life. Some may be great at the motivational side, others may be more utilitarian in nature. And partnerships may be fluid or transient. As in any relationship, a great partner can be wonderful and a bad partner is worse than no partner. Choose someone who supports you. Then be that supportive person for them as well. Better Practice!

Bigfoot Spotted Me at Colt Creek State Park!

Equestrians, beware! Two Bigfoots have been spotted hanging around the Colt Creek trails. While one seems to be staying around the walkers-only Lake Mac trail, the second is providing a great desensitization opportunity for horses just north of trail marker 15 on the red loop.

If you ARE lucky enough to sight the beast, stop in at the Rangers' Station for your very own t-shirt (\$20 plus tax) or sticker (\$3 plus tax) to prove you survived!



Colt Creek State Park Now Has Firewood

You can now be "taken to the woodshed" at Colt Creek, and it's a lot more pleasant that the old-timey experience! Ask at the

Rangers' Station to purchase your bundle of firewood to enhance your camping experience. The cost is \$10 plus tax.



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- *Primitive Equestrian Camping
- *Gate to the Hampton Tract

