

Extending Agility

By Christy Gammage
Practice Makes Pawfect

Dog agility is just running around and jumping things, right? Yes, but how you run around and jump can make or break your agility run. Let's look at when different types of running and jumping are needed.

Much like a horse, a dog can be either running full out or collected up in a shortened stride. While running full speed in extension is the fastest way to get somewhere in a straight line (think Thoroughbred racehorse), agility also has lots of twists and turns (think barrel racer). The ability to easily switch between these types of running and knowing when each type is needed is key to having a fast agility run.

We will start with extension; running full out with long strides and an extended body posture. Straight lines and gentle arcs are ideal for this type of running. The handler can encourage the dog to extend by letting the dog know that no sharp turns are expected in the next couple of obstacles. They can do this by being very far ahead of the dog with either their own fast running or a long lead-out before releasing the dog to the line of obstacles. If the handler can't show the dog where to go by their own position, they can cue the dog to just keep going forward with a trained "Go On" cue.



Obstacles that require or encourage the dog to extend while performing them include any sort of spread jump. The most obvious obstacle to take in extension is a broad jump. This is a series of boards raised slightly off the ground. The dog is required to jump approximately twice as far as they would be required to jump high. Example, a dog that normally is required to jump 16" high would have the broad jump set to be 32" across. For this jump it is usually only a few inches high and all the effort should be forward and not up. In horses, we talk about the "bascule" or natural round arc of the animal over the jump. For a broad jump the bascule would be almost flat and forward.

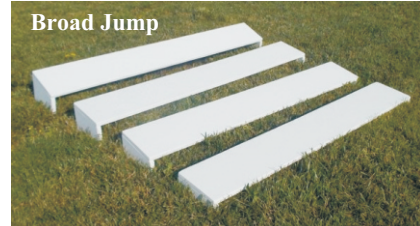
The other spread jumps have the normal height, but also include some distance. Like an Oxer in show jumping, a Double jump is 2 parallel bars instead of just one. It can either be set as ascending with the near bar being slightly lower or like a 'square' oxer with both bars at the dog's normal jump height. The distance between the bars widens as the height increases for the taller

dogs. Additional bars may be crossed under the top bars to fill in the space below. An ascending double encourages the dog to extend more, while the square style may encourage the dog to rock back a bit before jumping. The dog's bascule over these types of jumps will vary slightly but be much rounder than over a broad jump.

The Triple, as you may have guessed, is 3 bars wide. Its width is also comparable or slightly less than the dog's jump height. It is always ascending and should always be taken in extension for the dog to make it over the highest back bar.

Other obstacles that require some extension when jumping are a Wall jump and to a small extent, the Tire jump. Each has some thickness, but a straight approach and landing are more likely to encourage extension. A normal single bar jump can also be taken in extension when the dog's path is basically a straight line. The take-off and landing points will be significantly further from the jump as the dog's bascule is much flatter at speed.

Running in extension may or may not be desirable for Contact obstacles. If trained for running contacts, the dog should be able to



maintain extension all the way across the 36' long Dog Walk. If trained to stop at the end to ensure the contact zone is hit, the dog will have to start collecting as they come to the down ramp. With its higher height and shorter distance, the only true extension you might see on the A-Frame is as the dog jumps over the top.

In short, encouraging the dog to extend their body and run as fast as they can is great for straight lines and wide jumps. But it can also lead to wide turns where time is lost. That is where running and jumping in collection can give you a faster time and a higher placement in the ring. More on that in the future.

Happy Practicing!

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