

Spy Kids

Planning for the Future

By Nancy Gyes, photos by Marcy Mantell Photography

Training time with Sweep has turned to focusing on the varied skills we need in place to start weave, contact, and jump training, and we are mapping our training schedule to fit in with our travel and show schedule. For some of the specialized training like weave poles, I know that I will want to be home for a block of time to focus on this part of his education, as well as video his training progress. When he is 13 months old Jim and I will both be home at the same time for a few weeks. This is the time we will set aside to schedule organized, twice-daily, weave training sessions. We do not believe in starting a pup on weaves until he is at least one year old.

We also have some training expectations and goals that need to be in place before we begin. Those are:

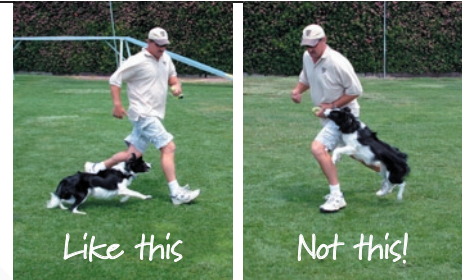
Line up on both the right and left side: To help show Sweep the path to the weaves we want him to swing into line with our leg and not to cut across the line our shoulders and feet make to the correct obstacle (or for weaves, the correct entry gate) and that line also shows which direction to move on exiting the obstacle or poles.

Stays: Sweep may be asked to line up and stay in different spots relative to the poles so we can position ourselves in different areas around the obstacle, before he is released to weave. His stays need to be rock solid before we start.

Retrieve and tug: Often Sweep will be rewarded at the end of the poles by throwing his toy. We will want him to move quickly to retrieve it and return to us for a game of tug, as well as release the toy to our hand when asked to do so.

Toy control: We will want to be able to place or throw a toy forward of the weaves and have Sweep wait for a cue to weave and then retrieve. In training now Sweep is asked to stay while we toss his toy out varied distances in front of him. He is released to the toy with *O.K.*, *Get It*.

Running groundwork: Sometimes we will be running with Sweep before and after the weaves as well as doing front and rear crosses before and after the poles. These skills have been taught by doing ground work circle drills. We have also instituted toy control at the same time. Jim carries a toy while running with Sweep, but he is never allowed



to grab the toy without a cue from Jim to do so. If Sweep forgets and grabs at the toy while Jim is running with him, the game ends quickly when Jim stops and takes the toy from Sweep's mouth. We want to be able to carry toys when we train obstacles like the weaves, but Sweep will not be allowed to take them without our permission.

Food/toy switch: It is possible to teach weaving and all agility for that matter without a toy, using only food as reinforcement, but it is much more difficult if you cannot use *both* food and toys, and choose the reinforcement that will most aid the skill you are training at the moment. We continue to expose Sweep to food/toy/food switching to insure that he is happy to take whatever we offer him as a reward. Following is one simple way to work on those skills.

Sit/Treat/Tug Game

Ask your dog to sit, praise immediately, and reward with a treat. Give your release cue, such as *Break* or *O.K.*, and then give your verbal cue to tug. Make sure you give the command for tugging after your release word. We say *Get It*. To restart the game, stop tugging by dropping your hold on the toy and ask for a sit. Do not pick up the toy until your dog sits and drops the toy. Immediately reward your dog with praise and a few tasty treats, then give your release word, your tug cue, and have another game.

The cues and behaviors should be as follows: *Sit*, dog sits, praise, treat while dog stays sitting; *Break*, dog immediately jumps up, *Get It*, dog grabs toy and tugs; *Sit*, dog stops tugging and sits, praise, treat... repeat.

If your dog is too distracted by the food to tug, then use kibble or less tasty treats as the food reward and find a high-value toy to tug. If your dog could care less about the treats and will not

release the toy, then up the food ante by playing while your dog is extremely hungry, and use something like steak or liver as the treat and a very low-value tug toy that your pup cannot sink his teeth into, such as a piece of rubber hose or even a piece of PVC pipe. Keep changing the values of the items you want to switch until you find the right level and then try to move to high-value treats as well as high-value toys in the same session.

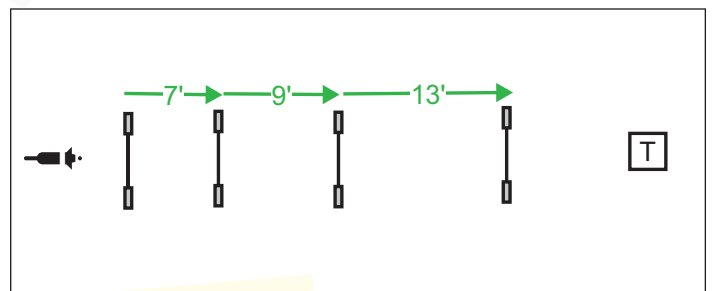
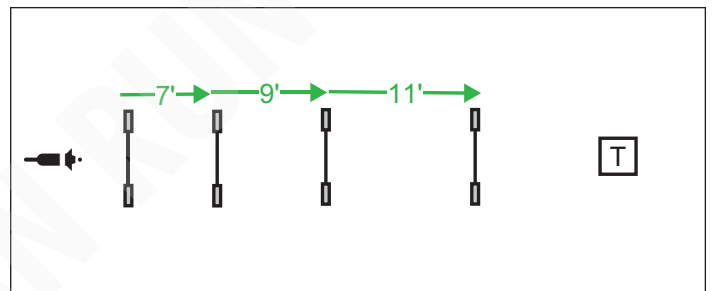
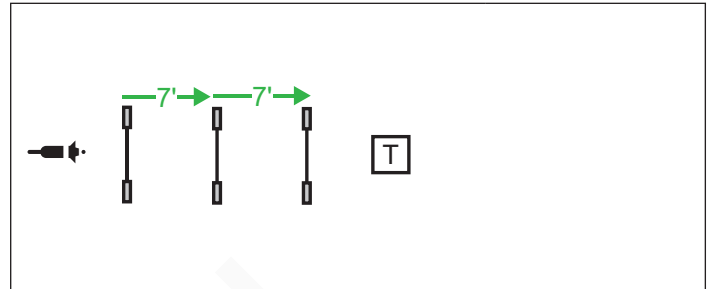




Introducing Bounce Jumping

We introduced Sweep to jump bumps a few months ago, and he has now progressed to jumping three jumps, set up as a bounce. Bounce jumping means that Sweep lands and takes off at the same spot between jumps. He does not take an extra stride on the ground between jumps. The photos show Sweep bouncing between jumps that are placed 7' apart to encourage bounce jumping. I've included three figures that illustrate the 7' distance and show the increase in distance after the bounce to encourage Sweep to lengthen his stride. We then begin to change the distance to focus on the way that Sweep adds a stride between jumps #3 and #4. When he is comfortable with the 9' distance between jumps #3 and #4, we pull jump #4 farther away. These grids are just suggestions on spacing and are based on ideas from Susan Salo's jump work. If your pup's physical structure varies from ours, you'll need to make adjustments to the length between jumps.

We stand next to his landing spot and toss a cookie reward into an upside-down stool. Some of the time we walk next to the jumps as he goes over them. What we do not do is stand still and send him forward to a toy or target on his own. We want him to do the jumps, but we want to be part of the picture and do not want to teach him to land past us at the last jump unless we are moving forward with him.



Handling Systems and Contact Training

Jim and I feel comfortable with the handling system that we have chosen to use with Sweep. We use Greg Derrett's handling system, which I will explain more clearly as we teach Sweep handling drills over the next few months. Sweep will be doing two-on/two-off dogwalk and teeter contact behavior, using a nose-touch method for training. We are teaching Sweep some varied skills that we may use as we experiment a bit with teaching him a running A-frame. Sweep's two-on/two-off method for the other two contacts will already be in place and it should be easy to switch to stopping if we don't feel he has the right body composition, or style and stride length to do a reliable running A-frame. Sweep is learning to do double targeting, which will involve him touching one target and then proceeding forward to touch another one as part of the same behavior. We have also introduced him to an electronic foot-touch target and stride regulators placed on a flat board. We have not yet made the decision about which aids we will use, but will describe this training further next month as Sweep learns to use these devices.

See you next month and have fun training your puppy. We are certainly having fun with ours. 🐾



Sweep at one year old, celebrating by learning the barrel and then the tunnel.

Nancy Gyes and her husband Jim Basic run Power Paws Agility in San Jose, California. She is the AKC World Team Coach for 2006 and has been on the AKC World Team seven times, four years with Scud and three with Riot. Nancy and Riot finished 1st in 2002 and 2nd in 2001 in Individual Agility classes at Worlds. Nancy also won the USDAA Nationals four years in a row, 1998 to 2001, with three different dogs, Scud, Riot, and Wicked. In 2001 and 2002, Nancy and Riot were the 24" jump height AKC National Champions. Scud retired in 2001 after winning the USDAA Veterans Championship. Contact Nancy at www.powerpawsagility.com, where you can also view other articles and videos.