



## Spy Kids Trial Time

By Nancy Gyes, photos by Marcy Mantell Photography

**Sweep just turned 19 months old. In my last installment, I wrote that Sweep was ready to begin his competition career, and indeed he has. On the last day of a four-day USDAA trial in Dixon, California, Sweep was exactly 18 months old and eligible to compete. We entered him in the two Starters/Novice classes available that day: Gamblers and Standard. While Sweep was chomping at the bit, Jim was not quite so eager. He had the flu and had spent two of the four days in bed instead of competing. And if that was not enough, he had pulled his calf muscle on the first day of the trial.**

Jim and I talked about whether he felt up to the task of running Sweep. He decided he would try to limp through; otherwise, we would scratch Sweep from his very first trial. Jim exercised Sweep and got him ready for the class. We talked ahead of time about possible “error” scenarios—what Jim was going to do if Sweep moved on the start line, missed a contact, ran around a jump, or missed a weave pole. But we had not made a plan for what happened at the third obstacle. Jim led out two jumps and Sweep sat perfectly until Jim released him. The third obstacle was the A-frame and we expected Sweep would do a great running A-frame contact. So, why did Jim stop moving and grab hold

of the A-frame? It turns out he had totally ripped his calf muscle. He limped with Sweep to the next obstacle, the table. Sweep was good on the table and Jim tried to move forward after releasing him, but he could hardly walk. Jim limped to the edge of the ring while Sweep wondered what all the fuss was about. This was not a fun way to start a young dog!

I took Sweep into the Gamblers class later that afternoon with a bit of trepidation since I had only run a handful of agility drills with him and those were usually only to take photos for these articles. Jim is his handler, and while I helped with lots of the ground work when Sweep was

young, that was months ago. Sweep was totally attentive. I did a long lead-out with a fast approach to the weaves, which he missed (in hindsight I did not help him much). I had to call him back to my side, wait for him to get lined up by me, and then release him to weave. His weaves were fast and he had no problem staying in.

We did the A-frame, dogwalk, jumps, and tunnels, and they were all good. I did the dogwalk twice because the first time he did more of a four-on-the-floor with a nose touch instead of a two-on/two-off with a touch. The whistle blew and we finished the opening. Sweep went straight through the gamble sequence, but not before the time was up.

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*Nancy Gyes and her husband, Jim Basic, run Power Paws Agility in San Jose, California. Nancy has been the AKC World Team Coach since 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 the FCI Agility World Championships. 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. Contact Nancy at [www.powerpawsagility.com](http://www.powerpawsagility.com) where you can also view other articles and videos.*

I was thrilled with his performance and Jim was **happy** too. I wasn't trying to qualify; that is never my goal with a young dog. The distance on the gamble was not really any more distance than we do in regular handling, which is the only reason I even attempted it. Our goals in these first trials are just to see where we are in training, find out where the holes are, and help Sweep logically follow our handling moves while he is gaining confidence on different equipment in a new location.

Sweep was entered in a trial the next weekend but Jim was still limping, so I got the handling assignment again. This time I was really looking forward to it. Sweep and I got into a nice rhythm over the weekend with short warm-ups and play sessions before each run. I kept his attention on me while tugging and keeping him a little bit away from the starting gate. I took the leash off outside the ring, but loosely wrapped it back around his neck while we approached the first jump to get lined up.

The first class of the weekend was Gamblers. Sweep was almost perfect, though he did

hit the weave poles so hard he knocked himself right out of them and we had to restart. I was especially proud of how attentive he was to me on the start line and how he stayed perfectly, every time. He followed my body language cues and seemed so easy to handle. If I slowed, he steadied and gave me great turns; if I moved laterally, he came with me; when I drove forward, he accelerated and drove toward the obstacles. He did the simple gamble, which ended on a serpentine that was right on the handler line, so there was not really distance handling involved. He did a perfect serpentine, I managed to keep my feet off the gamble tape, and he got his first-ever USDAA leg!

Then he won the Jumpers class and qualified in round one of the Steeplechase with a pretty hilarious run. I could not believe we made it to round two at a competitive trial his first time in Steeplechase. There was a point on the course that Sweep needed to drive straight out of a tunnel to a spread. I honestly can't tell even when watching the video what

we did wrong, but he took the spread going sort of sideways over the wing of the jump. I stopped moving forward, thinking he would come around the opposite side of the jump, but he hit the ground running and went on to the weave poles without me. I was still back at the spread, wondering what happened. You can watch the Steeplechase antics as well as Sweep's Gamble and Grand Prix runs at [www.agilityvideoservice.com/node/1975](http://www.agilityvideoservice.com/node/1975).

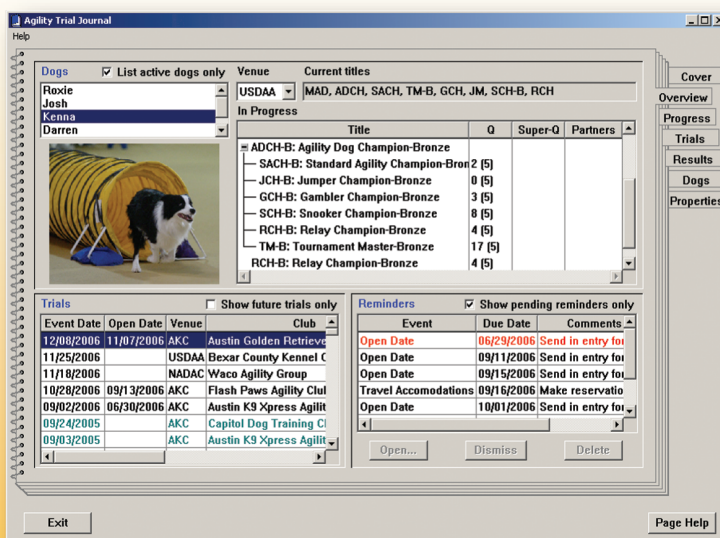
I had another funny run with Sweep in the Standard class. Everything was going well until he hit the teeter so fast he seemed to fly off it while still trying to lower his



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head into a nose-touch position. I stopped moving forward and before I could call him to my side he threw himself back on the teeter from the middle of the board and started nose touching. Even the judge found it amusing, but alas she would not let us go on after that. At least he was trying to do his job! I love that he is being a bit silly and creative, and seems to have a nonserious, humorous side. It makes training fun and lighthearted, and I know he is trained well enough to not worry about his little errors.



What we learned from these two events is that Sweep is a great little dog and he is fast enough to be competitive. We've done a good job on the basics, but we have a ways to go before he can be called a well-trained dog. He is great on his weaves at home (how many times have I heard *that* line from students!), but with the excitement of a trial, he is not decelerating and working for the entry. We may need to help a little more so that he doesn't wrap himself around the second pole so hard. We have lots of fun weave drills to help

him prepare for weave entries at speed. I also want Sweep to lower himself on the dogwalk and teeter contact a bit. He is in a more upright stance at the shows, not in the tighter and lower position (like a bow) he usually gives us at home. We will be rewarding his contacts lower and between his legs this month, and watching that his front feet are not stretched out too far off the contact. We also have lots of unfinished business with obstacle discrimination, left and right training, and contact and weave proofing.

For now, though, we are at the end of the Spy Kids column. Our 18 months of training articles have come to an end. I will miss writing to you about Sweep's training and exploits, but hope I can find a way to keep you updated on his progress. We are happy with how Sweep has progressed this past year and Jim is excited about competing with his dog.

I hope you enjoyed training your pup as much as we have enjoyed training ours. 🐾

## Training Drills for Weave Pole Entries at Speed

Here are some drills Jim will be doing with Sweep so that he learns to collect himself as he approaches the weave poles.

