

Dock Jumping 101: The First Event

By Ty LeGarde

Something I see on a fairly regular basis at events—this is especially true at indoor events—is the confident new-comer who has not yet competed but will say, “Oh my dog will be fine. She jumps all day at our cabin.”

A response to this is hard to say at an event especially when dealing with not only this new-comer, but dozens of others. Here is a quick tip for handlers (new-comers and old-timers): *You are no longer at your cabin.*

I am positive that a lot of the dogs that never make it off a dock at a competition are very proficient jumpers. I can see it in a dog’s drive. I can see it in a dog’s conditioning. I can see it when the dogs whine, bark, jump, twist, and spin at the end of the dock looking at the toy their handlers have thrown thirty-five feet out across the pool. But the dogs still will not jump. Why? There are a few reasons for this.

Many times when I see this happen, it is a “dry-dog” at the end of the dock. Think about this. The first time Scruffy jumped at the cabin, did he know there was water at the end of his jump? Probably. Through proper introduction to the water, or from his own playing around, Scruffy was fairly confident there was water at the end of the dock for his jump.

At most indoor events, the scaffolding dock is at least eight feet above the ground. The lighting is artificial. There are bleachers—that are usually packed—on at least two sides of the pool and sometimes on three sides. There are kids who line the edge of the pool hoping to get wet. There is music playing, there are judges, and there are announcers keeping the crowd entertained and informed. This is about as different of an environment as one could ask for from the cabin. A key for success is proper introduction to the venue. I will try and give some observations that have been successful for handlers who are attending their first event and getting their dogs to jump. Non-jumpers that finally jump are big crowd pleaser. No matter what, I am happy to see any and all handlers get out to events. But for those

who want to see their dogs succeed on the dock—the following is for you. Hey, it is *your* twenty bucks—might as well take home a ribbon. I hope these tips help.

1. *Get the dog wet.* Let the dog climb up the ramp to the edge of the pool. Splash a little water in front of it. Put the throw object (toy, DFT, etc.) right outside the edge of the dog's reach. Encourage the dog to walk down the ramp to get the toy. When the dog does this successfully—PRAISE PARTY, BABY! If you are not a little embarrassed by your antics when your dog does something well—you are not praising the dog enough.

Handlers can also expand on this technique by throwing the toy a little farther into the pool. A quick dip in the pool will let the dogs know there is water in this big, blue thing they have never seen before. They know water. They do not know a gigantic blue wall that towers over them.

2. *You are not trying out for the New York Yankees.* I see it all the time. A new dog standing on the dock for the first time. The handler does everything right. The handler takes the dog on lead to the end of the dock and then hurls the toy thirty-five feet out into the pool. Then the handler takes the dog an additional forty feet away in the opposite direction, has the dog sit, releases the dog, and when the dog does not jump the handler is perplexed.

Here we go. The throw was way, way, way out there. The toy is thirty-five feet away from the end of the dock and then the dog is an additional forty feet back from this point: this a total of seventy-five feet. Imagine you are the dog. Dogs can only see certain colors. A small bumper or DFT floating in the water is not the first thing in the field of vision. As a dog, you are aware of all the people in the background, you are on unfamiliar ground, and a run of forty feet ahead of you before even *thinking* about finding the location of the toy. At that distance, as a new dog—I would not jump for anything less than the California Condor DFT—and I do not think Tom Dokken has make this one yet.

Shorten the throw. Toss the object out there around six to seven feet from the end of the dock. For the first time jump do not worry about the dog's jump distance. *You cannot achieve world class jumps without building a foundation of confidence.* Let the dog jump from the edge of the dock. If the dog goes

without hesitation—perfect! You are on your way to having a “bone” a fide Big Air dog. However, if the dog hesitates a little bit—repeat this process. You will notice the word confidence has snuck into this article a couple times. This is what Big Air and success is all about. Building the dog’s confidence.

A great example of this happened at the Redmond, Oregon event. This was an indoor event with all of the elements I described earlier. A young man named Marco Hendricks and his great dog, Lady, were having trouble. He knew she could jump, but she was not jumping at the venue. Marco approached Will Gutman and his dad Bill for some advice. Marco used the methods I just explained—Lady started out small—around nine feet. By the end of the event, Lady had jumped over sixteen feet. Two weeks later, Lady gained another foot and dropped a 17.03. This is a dog that will add a foot to her distance each and every wave because of her growing confidence. Lady’s success was directly because of some good advice—and a handler who followed it. Watch out for these guys!

Please do not get me wrong. I am not writing this because I think I know more about your dog, dog training, and dock jumping than you do. I am writing this because of what I have observed, tried and seen that works. There are dogs that will jump anywhere, anytime—but if that is not your dog—try these two simple techniques. See what happens.

Keep checking www.sportmutt.com. This section is the beginning of what will become an expansion on the already great tips from Tucker.

Build that confidence—and always praise your dog for any success—however small.

Jump ‘em large.