Motivate the Height

Contributed by Tom Dropik at SportMutt - December 2010

The discipline of Extreme Vertical made its debut at the 2005 Western Regional Championships in Redmond, WA in the Spring of 2005. Since then, and with the help of Iron Dog, it has become very popular with the competitors. And because of its Instant Gratification, it has become very popular with the spectators as well. DockDogs is by far the largest Dock Jumping organization and has grown by leaps and bounds since that event in Redmond and Extreme Vertical has grown Right along with them. As the Inventor of Extreme Vertical, and as a very enthusiastic Fan of Extreme Vertical, I've taken it upon myself through the years to be very active in the growth of this discipline.

It really started as a training tool to help Tucker increase his distance in Big Air. From there it has progressed and formed in to a discipline that is more about HEIGHT than it is for distance. After all, Big Air is all about DISTANCE, right?

In the SportMutt article "**A Toy Motivated Sport**" I talked about Toy Motivation in general and how to condition our dogs to perceive the Toy as the reward, thus teaching them to perform in anticipation of receiving that reward. In the SportMutt article "**Motivate the Distance**" I talked about using that Toy Motivation to teach our dogs to run faster and jump harder and hopefully increase their distance in Big Air. In this article I'd like to discuss how you utilize that Toy Motivation through proper marking techniques and dock work to help you and your dog achieve maximum results in Extreme Vertical.

It starts with understanding the simple differences between Big Air and Extreme Vertical. I say the "simple differences" because they really are simple. In Big Air SPEED comes first and HEIGHT is secondary. In Extreme Vertical HEIGHT comes first and SPEED is secondary. Also, in Big Air, the Toy has been, or is

being tossed by you and the dog sees that. In Extreme Vertical, the toy is NOT tossed by you. In Extreme Vertical the toy is suspended a certain distance out from the dock and a certain distance off the surface of the water. And that's it.

Now that we've indentified the differences the training for each discipline becomes much simpler.

At SportMutt, we always start with the 'Toy being suspended challenge' and work the SPEED and HEIGHT after that. The question really becomes "How do I get my dog to see the Toy if he didn't see me throw it and he didn't see someone else throw it?".

As in all dog training we always start short and close and progress from there. We start by setting the toy on the ground and not letting the dog see us do that. So we'll put the toy on the ground while the dog is in the kennel or in a place where he can't see us do that. Once the toy is on the ground we'll go get the dog. We'll keep him on a leash and walk him toward the toy. We'll walk him slow until he is able to see the toy. At the same time we'll use some verbal's like "Where's the bird?" or "Where's the Toy?". This helps him associate those verbal's to him looking for the toy. That way when we get on the dock we use those same verbal's and he knows to start looking for the toy. Once your dog sees the toy you stop. Now, using some sort of motivated verbal like "Gonna Get It? Gonna Get It?", and holding him back, let him get it. This entire routine has just taught your dog to get a visual on the toy when it wasn't thrown by you or someone else. At the same time it's using Toy Motivation to get him to go after it hard. From there it is a simple progression of putting distance between the dog and the toy.

Once you feel comfortable with this routine it's time to suspend the toy off the ground. At SportMutt we'll use an Agility hurdle to accomplish this, but really it can be any creative method. We'll hang 2 strings from the cross bar of the hurdle and clip the bumper to the strings, very similar to DockDogs method of suspending the toy. We start with suspending the toy at eye level and keep it at eye level. For safety reasons, we don't like to restrain from doing any jumping on dry land higher than that. Once the toy is suspended the routine becomes the same as before and progress from there.

Congratulations, you've just taught your dog to see a Suspended Toy. It's now time to take it to the water. If you have access to a dock, that's great. If you don't have access to a dock, you're going to have to work this at practice time during a DockDogs event. Because your dog has been trained to mark the Toy at eye level, you're going to want start on the dock with the toy a close to eye level as you can.

Now, we start thinking about the Speed and increasing the Height. The important thing to remember with Extreme Vertical is simple, produce as much HEIGHT as you can and use the necessary SPEED required to get your dog to the suspended toy. Since the toy is only 8' feet out from the end of the dock, it doesn't require near the speed that Big Air does. The dog needs to be slowed down. And we want to accomplish this without teaching him to run slow. The last thing we want to do in this game is to teach out dog to run slow, right? The right way to do this is to simply shorten his run on the dock. After years of studying other dogs, working with other dogs, and working with our own dogs, we at SportMutt have determined that a good rule of thumb is 3 strides. Start your dog back far enough for them to produce 3 strides to get them to the end. However, we've also learned that every dog is different and there are always exceptions to the rules.

When you get to the dock, see if you can get the toy to be suspended at eye level or as close to it as possible. When you get up on the dock go through the same routine you taught your dog on dry land. Keep him on leash, use the same verbal's, and walk him to the end of the dock. If your training was successful on dry land, your dog will see the suspended toy. Now take him back 3 strides and use the same verbal's "Gonna get it? Gonna get it?".

Let him GO.

Congratulations, you now have an EXTREME VERTICAL jumper. . .