

Understanding Physical Conditioning

Contributed by The Crew at SportMutt

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We play several roles when it comes to our K9 friends. As Responsible Owners, we make sure our dogs have homes and all the essentials for living long and prosperous lives. As Trainers it is our responsibility to guide our dogs on a path that allows quick learning. We continuously build and improve a working relationship that structures the dogs thinking and willingness to learn. As Handlers it is our responsibility to execute and do all the right things to make sure our dogs execute and perform everything right.

There is another area that is often overlooked and is essential to performance. We must make sure our dog is physically prepared, starting with a sound body, strengthened through exercise, proper nutrition and excellent health care.

At SportMutt, we refer to this as the "Conditioning Coach." As "Conditioning Coaches" we must understand that it is not enough to provide training without also providing the opportunity to become physically prepared. Physically fit dogs are better prepared for the demands of our sport such as the ability to get up to speed quicker and the ability to explode off the end of the dock. Also, a dog that remains physically active has less chance of becoming overweight which can lead to heart and lung problems as well as hip and joint problems. A physically fit dog leads a happier healthier life.

When it comes to conditioning, we must understand that there are different ways that we can train to produce different Results. We must train to produce results that prepare us for our sport. After all, if a greyhound trained to build bulky, powerful strength, neglecting the build-up of strength endurance, then come race day, the dog would falter. Likewise, a dog that competes in sled-pulling and works on building up his aerobic strength and neglects power strength will be doomed at the starting line. Understanding the type of training necessary is key in dog performance. That way, we will never have to worry about bulky grey hounds and pencil-neck sled pullers. Make sense?

In the sport of Dock Jumping we need to focus on **SPEED Strength**. There are 2 types of Speed Strength:

- 1) **Starting Strength** *The ability to turn on instantaneously as many muscle fibers as possible. The dog uses this for getting up to speed as quickly as possible on the dock.*
- 2) **Explosive Strength** *The ability to keep your muscle fibers turned on for an extended period of time against a resistance. The dog uses this to maintain the speed throughout the run as well as turning on more muscle to produce the Lift at take off.*

In the sport of Dock Jumping we have two disciplines in which we must physically prepare for, Big Air and Extreme Vertical. Two similar disciplines yet very different when it comes to Strength Training. In Big Air, Speed is primary and Lift is secondary. It is import to produce as much Speed as possible and produce as much Lift as we can with the amount of Speed obtained. In Extreme Vertical, Lift is primary and Speed is secondary. It is important to produce as much Lift as possible and just enough Speed to carry the dog to the object.

The idea is to build a program that is most beneficial to a dog and that meets the expectations of a handler or trainer's goals. The program should utilize both areas of Speed Strength training in a way that the overall results will meet the needs of the sport. In this case, the sport of Dock Jumping.

The program needs to accommodate rest. During a workout, muscles will break down and tissues with in the muscle will actually tear. Rest gives the muscle opportunity to heal and it's this healing process that actually rebuilds the tissue and makes its bigger and stronger. Rest is very important when it comes to the muscles rebuilding.

The program needs variety. Muscles can become conditioned to a routine and will become very difficult to rebuild if the routine is the same day in and day out. We need to refrain from routine so the muscle will condition itself to the change and learn to rebuild ever day.

The Program should be in place year round with changes and variety in intensity with intensity being maxed prior to an event. We can actually teach the muscles to peak, and we want to make sure they peak during an event.

Always give a dog at least five days rest prior to an event. This will allow the muscle plenty of time for rebuilding and the dog will be more ready for the intensity of an event.

Remember, dogs come in different sizes, shapes and age, and some have more ability than others. A training program should reflect these differences and be tailored to each dog. SportMutt recommends consulting a veterinarian prior to starting any strength program.