

Dock Work

Contributed by The Crew at SportMutt

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Janeil and I met in May of 1999. As our relationship grew, so would talk of traveling and seeing the country. Talk of romantic dinners in quaint little restaurants in small towns no one has ever heard of. That's right, Janeil and I. It just doesn't get any better than that.

Janeil and I are traveling all right, along with Bailey and Tucker. We're managing a few romantic dinners, but the small towns turned out to be Orlando, Atlanta, Indianapolis, Little Rock, Northfield, Lake Placid, Springfield, and Missoula. Not sure if they're really small towns that no one's heard of though.

Instead of doing the normal travel things like site seeing and shopping we're working and competing in Dock Dog events. What can I say? It turns out we love it. Where I'm competing, training, and judging, Janeil's administrating, announcing, and running the camera. We have more video than our local video store has on their shelf. This allows me to study all the different aspects of dock jumping and the methods the handler/dog teams use..

Let's start with achieving maximum speed. I've seen many great jumping dogs loose distance simply because they where not able to reach their top speed running down the dock. Why is that? Maybe they ate 3lbs of dog food and their handlers McDonalds lunch right before the big event (I won't mention any names Little Morgan). Maybe they just don't have the drive that day. But, on the day that all is well, that's when you'll want to do things right.

We have a term in the snow skiing world that refers to the direct route to the bottom of the hill. It's called the "The Fall Line". Imagine taking a tennis ball covered in black paint and rolling it down a ski hill. The ball will take the fastest direct route to the bottom. The line the ball leaves in the snow is considered the fall line. You want your dog to take the direct route to the jump point.

Proper use of the dock will result in maximum speed and accurate jump point, two critical pieces of a successful dock jump.

Imagine your dog running down the dock with black paint on the paws. You want those paw prints to go in a straight line preferably down the center of the dock.

Start your dog in a sit position at the start. Dogs in this position tend to spring forward with their legs getting them up to speed much sooner than if they started in a stand position. Dogs that start in a standing position tend to trot a few steps causing them to get up to speed somewhat slower. If a dog is able to get up to speed sooner he'll have more time to adjust for the jump point.

Now let's talk about the accurate jump point. First I'd like to compare an agility course to a dock. The differences are obvious but think about this, a successful agility run is measured by the combination of many jumps through out the course. This allows the dog to make any necessary adjustments to the speed or stride after each jump. A dock dog makes only one jump off the end. The only opportunity for adjustment is what they do on the dock prior to the jump.

It is easy to understand why we want the jump point to be and the end of the dock, since all jumps are measured from the end of the dock. After hours and hours of studying different dock jumps I've come to a preliminary conclusion. A dog will mark the jump point well before they get to it. During that time the dog will make necessary adjustments to the stride to make sure the point is hit.

Once the adjustments have been made the dog will maintain stride through out remainder of the run. There are other factors that can contribute to the dog making adjustments such as the toss for the toy and the site of the toy in the water. We will go over these issues in a later issue.

So the trick is to find a start point on the dock that allows time for adjustments and will focus the dogs jump point off the end.