

Training Secrets of The Stars



Raising A Wicked Agility Dog Part 7

By Bernadette Bay

Hex has now completed her first three agility shows. I was very pleased with how she performed. Yet, I still know that we have a lot of work to do over the winter. This is just what I wanted; to see how she compares with the other small dogs and to

find the holes in our training. Only by competing in a show environment can you really test the dogs training. We all have had those back-garden champions! They can do perfect at home, but fall apart in competition. So I was slightly worried to see how Hex performed.

So....how did she do? I don't want to list her placements or brag about her performance, as that was not my intention in writing these articles. My goal is to share my method of training and hopefully encourage more dialogue about different training methods. But I guess some people want to know the ending of this story!

At her first show (Newton Heath) Hex ran two clears in Novice Jumping and Novice Agility. Her contacts were dream-like perfect. I have watched the video over and over and smiled every time she ran into position and stuck! I know I must constantly reinforce these contacts and not take them for granted, but it was so nice to see her hold them perfectly in this charged-up environment. Hex came in a respectable 2nd place in both classes; beat only by her litter-brother! I always suggest to students that they video their runs, as you can learn a lot by watching them later.



Litter mates (pictured left) Indy (left, owned by Nicola Garrett) and Hex, after their 1-2 at Newton Heath. Indy won both Jumping and Agility, staying in Novice for around 40 minutes! What took you so long, Nicky? Hex was second in both classes.

I was surprised during the first run at Hex's distraction at the start-line. The dogs running in the ring next to her, with only netting between, was more than she could easily handle. The noise in that venue was tremendous and her barking added to the general din

in the building. My heart was in my mouth and my legs were shaky! I could not believe how nervous I was; I am not usually nervous on the start. Once I felt Hex was in control, we went thru our normal start-line routine and she held her start perfectly while I led out. I did feel she questioned me a few times on turns, but overall she was smooth and fast.

The next class was jumping. It was a very easy straight up and down course with the exception of the weave pole entrance. This entrance caught many dogs out, as it was a flat 90 degree left sided entrance. Probably one of the hardest weave pole entrances you can have and there was no room to straighten the dog out before the weave poles. To get the entrance you had a choice of over handling it and causing the dog to stop and spin or just trusting the training! After much hand-wringing, I decided to trust the training and send Hex on ahead. She did great and I was a very happy handler!

The next day we went to a local un-affiliated show. At this show, in four runs, Hex ran fast and clear and won every class. She seemed much more focused at this show as the rings were separate and we could hear each other. It was a great chance to work on our teamwork and reinforce the contacts with praise.

Two weeks later was our last show of the year, Southern Border Collie. Unfortunately, Hex broke her clean-run sweep by being eliminated in agility. What I learned from this run was that we need to work on her holding onto her weave pole entrances at speed. She attacked the weave poles and made the entrance but lost her footing and skipped the next pole. This seems to be an issue with her and something we can easily work on over the winter. I am glad the enthusiasm is there, she just needs to figure out her footwork to stay in with speed.

In the Open Jumping class, I was really interested to see how her course times compared with the more experienced dogs. She ran the jumping clear, but had a spin in one section where she thought I wanted her to turn. She easily corrected herself, but lost time. I think this was just a communication error between us due to our inexperience together. Again, I felt in one section that she questioned a turn and this will be our main focus during winter training. She turns tight and does not hesitate noticeably; but I feel that she can drive out of the turns much quicker. Anyway, out of an open class of 103, Hex came in a respectable 3rd place behind two really good small dogs. I was really chuffed with this and it has given me a well needed confidence boost.

This is the end of Hex's story for the Agility Voice but only the beginning of our journey together. I look forward to many years of training and enjoying this wicked little Sheltie.