

Jumps: From the

By Susan Salo, photos by Jeanine McAnaney

When I teach a foundation seminar, I always try to educate the participants about jumping from the dog's point of view. This requires handlers to learn to look at courses from the dog's vantage point and not generalize their own viewpoint of a jump here, a tunnel there, and another jump over there. The dog

sees each and every jump as a separate entity because from the dog's point of view, each jump is very different from the last. For example, see the jumps in **Figures 1 and 2**. Both jumps are doubles, yet each jump presents a very different picture to the dog. Most people find this part quite fascinating since they have not really considered these differences before. I always think of my horse training experience first; therefore, I look at the picture the animal sees to consider its effect on the animal and how it affects the performance of a particular obstacle.



Hierarchy: Rating Jump Bars

To begin to understand this process we look at the jump bars themselves. In **Figure 3** you can see several bars on the jump. I have rated the bars from top to

bottom in order of dominance, meaning how quickly your or your dog's eye is drawn to it. If you look very quickly at the photo you will see that the top bar

with its bold striping is really the first one that catches your eye. The second pole with the red spiral stripe would be the next most important, followed by the blue-striped pole, and the least dominant pole would be the faint lavender-colored one on the bottom.

So just what does this mean to the dog? Consider the rate of speed your dog is moving on course and then consider what is in your dog's line of sight along with the jump. Is there a favorite piece of equipment just before or immediately after the jump? If this was the case with perhaps a tunnel immediately following a jump, the dog would be far better served to have the most dominantly striped bar on that jump as opposed to the least dominant bar (bottom, lavender-striped pole) so that it is clearly visible to a fast-moving dog that needs information very quickly.



Dog's Perspective

Light Conditions and Similarity

Besides this information you must consider the time of day and the light that is shining on the jump. Because dogs' cones and rods in their eyes work differently than those of humans, the dog's visual acuity can be in conflict when bright light reduces an already unimportant jump bar to almost invisible because of light conditions or objects in the dog's line of sight. I would not suggest that handlers get on hands and knees to see what is in the line of sight for each jump, but these things can impact the dog's performance to a high degree; therefore, handlers must at least become more aware of these influences.

At this point you need to consider whether all the jumps in your training arena look alike. Most prefer the jumps with a fixed ground bar because of the ease with which they can be moved around. This preference is, however, a huge mistake from the standpoint of the dog's understanding of jumping. For example, several years ago I was teaching a seminar at a facility that had only a few freestanding wings (no attached ground bar), and *every* single dog added strides before those jumps. The reason for the stride addition is the jump has less definition, and so an appropriate place for takeoff is less clear, causing the extra



On a quick overview these jumps may look the same to you, but to the dog they're quite different. Which bar will the dog lock onto in each example?

stride. The next time I returned to this facility there were at least 20 new jumps, all of which had no ground bar. One of these dogs (arguably one of the best small dogs in the world), still struggles with doubles that have no ground bar, even four years later. Dogs, like horses, should be schooled and comfortable while at home with all the variables they will encounter in the arena. Dogs should be in a comfortable environment so they can work through these issues and meet all their jumps coming forward without patting the ground, measuring, or otherwise trying to buy themselves some time to figure out where an appropriate takeoff place might be.

If you look at **Figures 4 and 5** you will see two doubles (oxers). Both are without solid ground bars. I personally have a hard time with the fact that in the dog



world, the doubles have a cross bar at the bottom. I think this can be very misleading to dogs since it tends to draw their focus down instead of up to the top bar, which is where they need to focus. When you look at these two jumps with a generalized view, they are just two doubles; now think about the example above of the difference in the striped bars. If you were to place a dominant bar in the front and the least important bar to the back of this double, which do you think the dog would lock onto and see as shown in Figure 3? Exactly! The placement of the bars themselves can be of crucial importance. In the world of show jumping for horses, the building of the course has risen to the level of an art. Deciding just where on the course a specific jump should be placed to maximize its difficulty for a technical course is paramount.

Homemade Jumps Redux

When I first began the sport of agility, I, like many others, had quite a few homemade jumps. After I took the sport seriously (it is a *very* addictive game) I purchased new and well-made equipment to use and put away my homemade obstacles. I have since returned many of them to use for the purpose of having the

dogs I work with come forward boldly to whatever is put before them. In **Figure 6** you can see this panel jump is very busy and bright. There have been a huge number of young dogs that opt to go around this jump the first time they see it and need a few repetitions of jumping it before they are comfortable.





In **Figure 7** you can see my flower box that I use as a ground line or in the center of a large double. This jump also causes many seasoned competitors to add strides or go around it altogether the first time they see it. My young dog and my training partner's young dog will boldly go to it and jump it beautifully.

In **Figure 8** you can see a very busy and imposing jump that has both a solid-appearing picket fence and a jump bar



on top. This jump also is very challenging to dogs since the solid-appearing picket catches and traps their eye and often they will see the top bar late unless they are well schooled to take in the entire picture early on in their view. Again, many seasoned dogs do not want to go to this fence and jump it well because it is challenging to them unless they are comfortable with the job of jumping and understand their job well.

Serving Your Dog a Varied Menu

You must provide your dogs with all the obstacles they will ever see in the ring and then some, while schooling them at home in a safe and comfortable environment. You don't want your dog to be taken aback by a strange looking jump during the one or two classes per year that *really* count. So the more dogs are exposed to at home, the better their performance will be during those times when it truly counts.

If all your jumps are the same, if all your poles are the same, you are not doing your dog a service. You really do need to mix it up and have at least a few different types of jumps and poles so that there will be no surprises in the ring, where it counts the most. 🐾

A lifelong horsewoman, Susan Salo has offered her insights into jumping for dogs in agility in seminars around the country, including Power Paws and Clean Run Camps, and is proud to be a part of the Say Yes Team for Susan Garrett's Graduate Skills Camp in Toronto, Ontario. She currently resides in Woodland, California, and can be reached at Jumpdogs@aol.com.

