

COME To HEEL *Part 2*

By Amanda Shyne, photos by author



Teaching your dog to move with you in a “loose” heel position on either side allows you to accurately cue upcoming sequences. If your dog is not aligned with your line of motion, miscommunication is inevitable. Heel in this case is defined as your dog positioned alongside you so that both you and your dog are facing the same direction and your dog’s topline is parallel to your line of motion.

The exercises this month build on those in last month’s article and are more difficult than typical heel work. They are designed to provide your dog with a good transition from walking at heel to running agility courses.

EXERCISE 11: TRIANGLE EXERCISE

Purpose: This exercise teaches your dog to always return to a loose heel position after leaving your side.

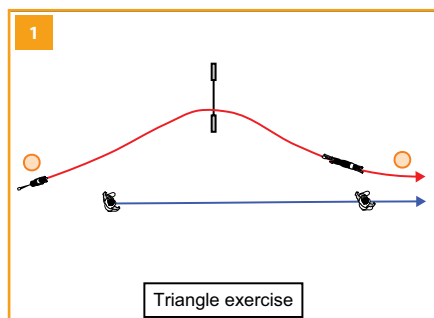
Procedure: Set up a single jump and two markers in a triangular arrangement as shown in **Figure 1**. The markers are simply props (trees,

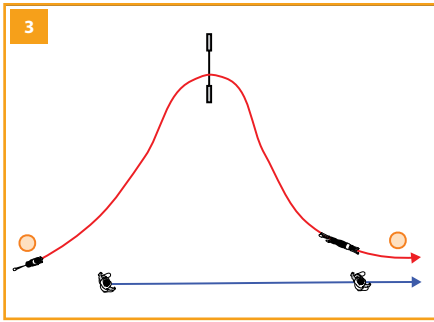
cones, half cones, rocks, etc.) that enable you to judge your dog’s proficiency and let you systematically increase the difficulty of the exercise. If at any time your dog begins to cue off the markers, change the markers to less obvious ones such as flat rocks, sticks, or large leaves.

Begin at one marker with your dog next to you or take a short lead-out. To cue the loose heel position you must be ahead of your dog when he takes the jump; therefore, a short-lead out sometimes helps. The marker should be located on the opposite side of your dog. Move forward and send your dog to the jump at the top

of the triangle as shown in **Figure 2**. After sending your dog, continue moving on a straight line toward the second marker. As you approach the marker, make sure your shoulders are open and pointed directly at your dog, inviting him to fall into a loose heel position. The goal is for him to be in heel position before you move past the second marker.

This exercise is designed to teach your dog responsibility for finding his heel position. Try not to decelerate or turn into your dog to cue him. Avoid anything other than opening your shoulders to assist him in finding heel position. If the exercise is too

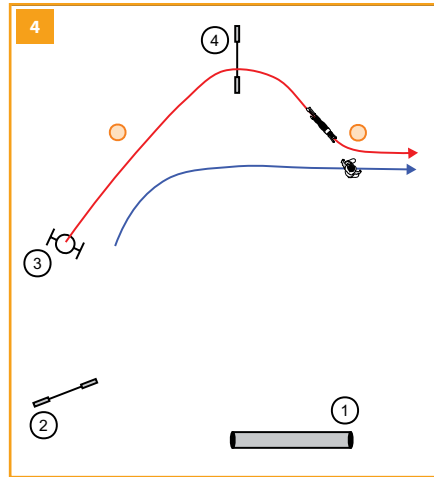




difficult for your dog, widen the angle at the top of the triangle by spreading out the markers. This will reduce the angle of the turn your dog has to take over the jump, decreasing the difficulty of the exercise.

Move the jump to the opposite side of the cones and practice the exercise with the dog finding heel position while working on your right side.

Once your dog is doing well, begin changing the triangle to look more like an equilateral triangle as shown in **Figure 3**, and begin to increase your running speed. If your dog is doing very well, set up the sequence

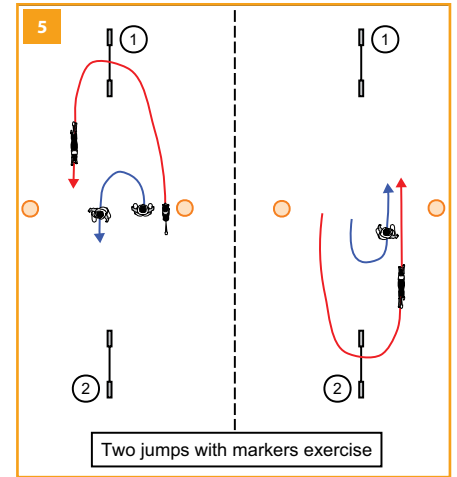


shown in **Figure 4**, which ends with the triangle exercise set up in a tight arrangement.

EXERCISE 12: TWO JUMPS WITH MARKERS EXERCISE

Purpose: This exercise is designed to improve your dog's motivation to drive back to you on a straight line after turning tightly over a jump.

Procedure: Set up two jumps about 30' apart. Place two markers (cones,



flat rocks, etc.) between the two jumps as in **Figure 5**. The markers are a prop designed to help you delineate your dog's path, systematically reward exceptional behavior, and slowly and accurately increase your dog's criteria. Ideally, you want your dog to turn tightly over the jump and then instantly drive to your side until he is released forward. (There are many wonderful articles detailing ways to teach your dog how to turn tightly over a jump or around a jump

FPO 1/2 Ad



standard. Revisit some of these in past issues of *Clean Run* if your dog is struggling to turn tightly.) The focus of this exercise is not the tight turn over the jump, but rather the dog's path following the jump.

Begin between the two jumps with your dog on your right and send him to jump #1. Once he is committed to that jump, begin moving toward jump



#2. As you move, make sure your shoulders are pointed at your dog, inviting him to fall into a loose heel position as he approaches you. See **Figure 6**.

If your dog's path falls inside the first marker, either break off the exercise and reward him or allow him to continue to jump #2, whichever is more rewarding to him. If his path

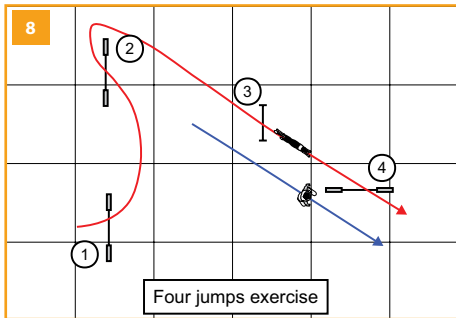
takes him wide of the marker as in **Figure 7**, stop your forward motion and reevaluate your expectations. Is it physical possible for your to turn tightly enough that his path will fall inside the marker, or were you too ambitious? If you believe your dog is capable of turning tightly around the jump and remaining within the boundary of the marker, repeat the exercise. Make sure to support your dog with eye contact and an open shoulder.

If your dog continually runs beyond the boundaries you have set up with your markers, move the markers to a location that is more appropriate for your dog's ability. Then reward your dog for any repetition where he remains within the marker boundary and ignore any repetition where his path takes him beyond the boundary.

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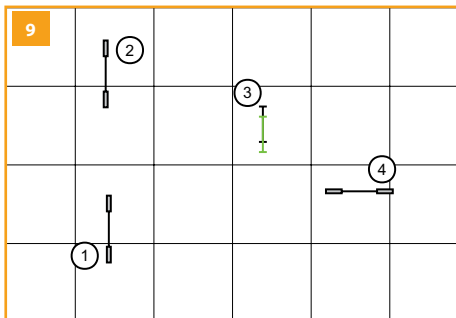
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As you run through these exercises be aware of the positioning of your shoulders.
If you want your dog to take the inside jump, make sure your shoulders are open
and your inside shoulder is pointed at your dog



The markers simplify your training: if your dog's path falls within the marker, reward. If his path falls outside the marker, ignore. This will make you a more consistent and systematic trainer.

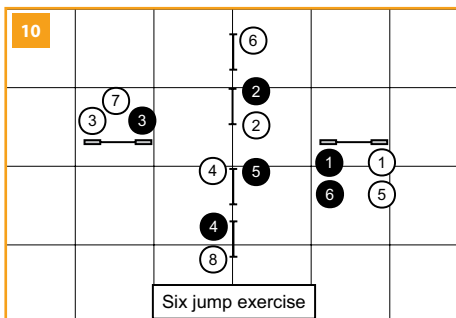
Make sure to practice the exercise going in the opposite direction so your dog has to find heel position while working on your left side.



EXERCISE 13: FOUR JUMPS EXERCISE

Purpose: This exercise teaches your dog to return to a loose heel position during performance of a typical jump formation seen in many courses.

Procedure: Set up the sequence in **Figure 8**. Regardless of how you choose to handle jumps #1 and #2, turn your dog right over jump #2 and then take off running with jumps #3 and #4 on your left. As you run, make sure your inside shoulder is open so you invite your dog to take jump #3. If your dog turns tightly over jump #2 and then digs in to take jump #3, reward him lavishly.



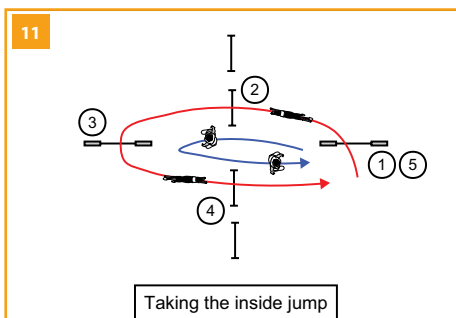
the turn. Have fun playing around with this exercise! Every time your dog succeeds at finding and taking jump #2, move it for the next repetition. Try moving the jump 1' to the left or 1' closer to jump #2. All of these variations are possible at a trial and can have a big impact on your dog's execution of the sequence.

Set up the mirror image of the exercise to play the game again, working your dog on the opposite side.

EXERCISE 14: SIX JUMP EXERCISE

Purpose: This exercise is designed to teach your dog to fall into heel and to educate you about the importance of your body position—in particular, the position of your inside shoulder. If you open your shoulders and point them toward your dog, he should fall into a loose heel at your inside shoulder. If you roll your shoulders forward, your dog should interpret that as permission to drive forward on his current line.

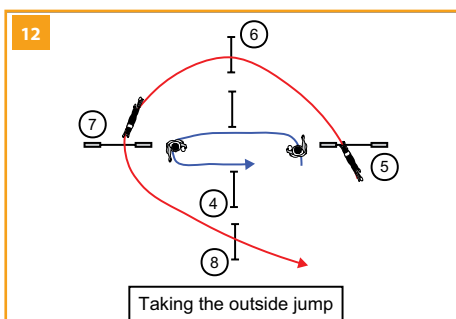
Procedure: Set up the sequence in **Figure 10**.



If your dog is successful, move jump #3 to the left by 1', as shown in **Figure 9**, to make the sequence more difficult. If your dog is struggling with the turn at jump #2, spend some time reviewing past articles in *Clean Run* that discuss teaching your dog to turn tightly.

The focus of this exercise is the line your dog chooses after completing

As you run through these exercises be aware of the positioning of your shoulders. If you want your dog to take the inside jump, make sure your shoulders are open and your inside shoulder is pointed at your dog as shown in **Figure 11**. If you want him to take the outside jump, roll your shoulder forward to cue forward motion as shown in **Figure 12**. 🐾



Amanda has been competing in agility for 10 years. She and her Border Collie Dilly were 2008 and 2009 USDAA Dog Agility Steeplechase finalists at the Cynosport World Games. They were also finalists in 2007-2009 in the Grand Prix at Cynosport, placing 3rd in 2008. Amanda is a tenured professor of Psychology at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts and teaches classes in statistics, learning, dog evolution, and animal behavior. She is a frequent agility seminar presenter and can be contacted at amandashyne@gmail.com.