

# Lie Down on the **RUN**

By Amanda Shyne, photos by Alicia Dube



Speed is intoxicating. The excitement of running a fast dog on a challenging agility course is addictive—and I am definitely an addict! However, if you are running a dog with speed but no control, the thrill of running agility gradually turns to frustration as your dog takes the wide path, has difficulty with contacts and start-line behaviors, and is generally unpredictable with any of the more controlled aspects of agility (such as weave pole entries or threadles). These dogs, while fun to watch, often have such a low qualifying rate that their humans suffer from a lack of positive reinforcement.

One easy way to increase the frequency of the handler's positive reinforcement, good/clean runs, is to teach the dog some self-control. One easy drill that helps to rein in these high flying dogs is to teach them to lie down on the run (sometimes called a moving down). This skill not only im-

proves your dog's body control and responsiveness to verbal cues, it can also improve your dog's stopped contacts and table performance.

## **EXERCISE 1: HEEL OR DOWN?**

**Pre-requisite skills:** 1) the down behavior is on a verbal command and 2) your dog understands a verbal release cue

Begin in an open area with your dog loose at your side. Ask your dog to come into a loose heel position on either side of your body and slowly walk forward. Reward as often as you would like. Then, while your dog is walking at your side, ask him to *Down* as you continue to walk forward. If your dog decelerates and moves into a down position, click your clicker and immediately go back to him and feed him a treat while he stays in a down position. Move to

a position about 5' in front of your dog, look back at your dog, smile, say "Good dog," then go back to him and give him a second food reward. Stand up and verbally release your dog from the down position.

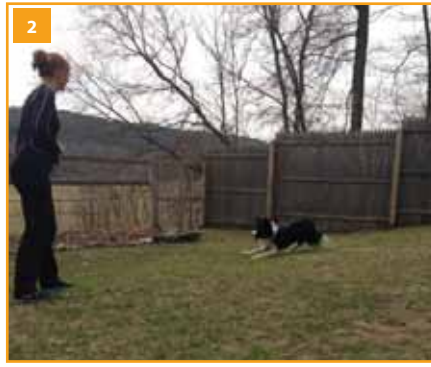
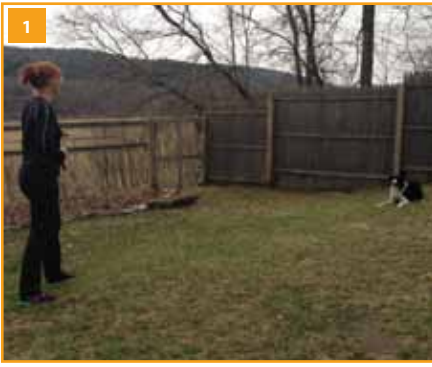
Make sure your body is completely still when you release the dog—pay particular attention to keeping your hands under control so that no little hand flicks cue your dog to break position.

Repeat this exercise on each side of your body, increasing your speed as your dog becomes motivated to lie down when asked and more proficient at controlling his body.

## **EXERCISE 2: COME OR DOWN?**

**Pre-requisite skills:** 1) the down behavior is on a verbal command and 2) when verbally released your dog will approach you

One easy way to increase the frequency of the handler's positive reinforcement, good/clean runs, is to teach the dog some self-control.



Begin this exercise with your dog in a down-stay. Walk 20' in front of your dog, then turn around and face him as shown in **Figure 1**. Release your dog from his stationary behavior. As your dog is running toward you, ask him to lie down as shown in **Figure 2**. If your dog immediately drops into a down, run forward to reward him, verbally rewarding him the whole time. If he does not immediately collect and start moving into a down, bend over and move toward your dog as in **Figure 3**. This puts physical pressure on him and will help him to slow down his

motion and control his body. As soon as he begins to move into a down, praise him and stand upright (to take the physical pressure off of him). Repeat this exercise several times.

*Troubleshooting:* If your dog is struggling to move into a down position while moving toward you, reduce the starting distance between you and your dog as in **Figure 4**. When beginning this exercise with young dogs I often start 5' in front of the puppy. Almost as soon as I release the pup forward I ask for the *Down*. My position, directly in front of the

puppy, helps him to control his body and move into a down as shown in **Figure 5**.

### **EXERCISE 3: DOWN TO A "DEAD" TOY**

Being this exercise by placing your dog in a stationary position, then throw a toy forward. If your dog will not release to a "dead" toy then use food as the lure instead of a toy. Move to a position between your dog and the toy on the ground as in **Figure 6**. Release your dog from his stationary behavior. As he moves toward you and the toy, ask him to *Down*. If he





immediately moves into a down, reward him with either a food treat or a game of tug as shown in **Figure 7**. If he continues moving toward the toy, turn toward him, step in front of him, and repeat your *Down* command. By positioning yourself between your dog and the toy, you will retain some physical control over your dog and reduce the chances of him rewarding himself with the toy. Repeat this exercise several times. Do not move on to the next exercise until your dog will move into a down without requiring your physical intervention on the way to the toy/food lure.



#### **EXERCISE 4: DOWN TO A “LIVE” TOY**

This exercise is similar to the last, but now the toy will be in motion (live) making it far more difficult for your dog to maintain his self-control. Begin with your dog loose at your side. Throw a toy forward while you move forward to encourage/allow your dog to move away from your side to approach the toy as shown in **Figure 8**. (Even when playing fetch with my dogs, I do not want my motion to give contradictory information. If I am allowing my dog forward, then I step forward. If

I throw a toy and do not move forward, my dog should remain at my side until I release him with forward motion.)

As your dog runs to the toy, ask him to *Down*. Some dogs will naturally lie down facing the toy and some will spin to face you as they lie down. For this exercise either behavior is acceptable. Depending upon your dog’s contact performance, you may want to spend some additional time teaching him to lie down focused forward, on the toy. When your dog moves into the down, run toward him and reward him while he maintains the down position. Then, move back to your starting position and release your dog forward to the waiting toy.

If your dog disregards your *Down* command and continues forward to the toy, simply tell him to *Leave It*. If he does leave it, great! If not, simply take it away from him with as little interaction as possible and try the exercise again. If your dog disregards your *Down* command a second time, repeat Exercise 3 (Down to a “Dead” Toy).



## EXERCISE 5: RUNNING IN A PACK

This exercise is very difficult for dogs and I tend to train it only when confident that I have thoroughly trained the “lie down on the run” behavior. You need two dogs. I use my 15-year-old deaf Aussie and whatever dog I am training. If you don’t have an older deaf dog to employ, just use a friend’s pet. Do not use a second competition dog when training, you need to focus on one individual at a time.

Allow the two dogs to run around your yard. After they’ve had a run and are quietly walking around investigating or engaging in other inactive behavior, ask your dog to *Down* and reward him as soon as he does as in **Figure 9**. Repeat this several times before increasing the difficulty of the exercise.

Next, begin playing with the other dog. Either encourage him to play with you



or get him to run after a toy. Let both dogs run for a minute or two and then ask the dog you are training to *Down*. If he does, immediately run to him, reward with a high-value reward, and then release him to play with the second dog. If your dog does not immediately go into a down, stop playing with both dogs and walk toward your dog while repeating the *Down* command. As soon as he moves into a down, reward him and allow him to continue his social play.

*Troubleshooting:* If your dog is struggling to lie down while another dog is running, you can use a second trained dog that will respond to a verbal *Down*. This way, when the command is given, the older more experienced dog will stop the play so that the youngster you are training is unable to reward himself for engaging in incorrect behavior. In **Figure 10**, you can see naughty Happy still wanting to play after I have asked both dogs

for a down. Unfortunately for Happy, Dilly responded immediately to my *Down* command and the game ended.

## THE BENEFITS OF SELF-CONTROL

Teaching my dogs self-control is not as much fun as running sequences or even taking a walk through the woods. But, the benefits of dog self-control make both running sequences and even walks through the woods more enjoyable. Sequences are more fun when they are fast, tight, and accurate, and walks through the woods are only fun if I trust my dogs to listen to commands when deer, other wild life, or cars distract them from our walk. Teaching a down on the run is not the only way to teach self-control; however, when you have a reliable down on a verbal command it is suggestive of a dog capable of controlling himself. 🐾

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*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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto:amandashyne@gmail.com).*

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