

# Back to the Basics

*by William Linné*

Whether you are just starting out or are a seasoned pro, there is always room for advancement. We decided to cover some basic training tips that everyone should find useful. Over the next few newsletters I will cover some training tips and techniques to help both beginning and advanced teams improve.

Here are some things to remember when starting out with your dog. Always have your dog checked out by a qualified veterinarian before engaging in any strenuous activity. Disc play can be a very fun and exciting sport if done properly, but if done wrong can pose serious danger to you and / or your pup. Before starting to play for the day you should always do a field check. Walk around the field with your dog and look for any sticks, broken glass and holes. Always check the area even if you had played at that location the day before. While you are checking things out have your dog follow you around. Get them warmed up. Have them run a little.

You can work a puppy with rollers and retrieving drills at a fairly early age (12-16 weeks), as long as you don't push the dog past its limits. Remember they are still developing, so keep sessions to a minimum. Once a dog gets hooked on the disc, you will have to be the one to say when enough is enough. Always end your training on a good note. I advise against any hard jumping, vaults and high catches until the dog's bones have finished growing. This is usually around one year of age, but varies by breed. Check with you vet for more information on your specific breed's characteristics. Serious consideration should be given to any hard landings if your dog is over 55 pounds, due to the risk of hip and spin injury. Do not start playing with a hard disc until your dog's adult teeth have come in and are very secure.

A good disc to start out with is the "Floppy Flyer," a cloth discs with a rubber tube rim. It comes in two sizes and can be picked up at most pet stores. The discs are great because if they do hit the dog, they will not hurt like a hard disc, which might make the dog "gun-shy." Never let the dog play with any discs when you are not around. These should be regarded as "Special Toys". They need to see the game as a group activity that you do together. To enhance this, make a big deal about going out to play before you even leave the house. Before long your dog will know when it is that special play time just by the way you're acting. By starting and stopping on a good note your dog will begin to want to do this pleasant activity more often. When starting out with a puppy this can be a long process for the first year, but don't rush it. It is better to wait and let the dog develop naturally than rush things and possibly injure them for life.

Once you start training never attempt a trick that is far above your level of training. Always add to your trick repertoire a little at a time and gradually build from easier tricks to harder ones. When starting out, keep your training sessions short. Ten to fifteen minutes a day may be plenty. You do not want to burn the dog out. As soon as the dog starts to lose interest move on to something else and come back later. It is better to get four five-minute sessions in a day then one twenty minute session. This is a standard learning principle. Work with the dog for a given time, and then give them a chance to think about what they have learned. I have pounded things into my dogs head over and over again to no avail. Then after breaking for a day or two...Bam! It's like they have been doing the trick for years. Everyone wants their dog to master the sport overnight, but it takes time. The sport is an evolutionary process.

Before you start your training session for the day, pick one or two objectives on which to focus. It doesn't matter whether you are working on TossFetch™, or that new front paw spring to a triple gainer Freestyle trick. I realize not everyone is into this sport to become the next Capital Cup champion. Most people are into the sport because it is an enjoyable way to exercise their dog. The way you approach working with your dog is still the same. No matter what you are working on you need to keep it fun. If you start to get frustrated—STOP! Come back another day. Dogs are very sensitive to your emotions. They read body language extremely well. When you start getting frustrated, this puts added pressure on them, which in turn may cause them to do something that might get them hurt.

Most dogs want to please their owners. Often dogs don't do something, because they don't understand exactly what you want them to do. They may also be afraid of the outcome when they do what you ask (uncomfortable positioning, physical pain, or your reaction if they do it wrong). Some dogs will just lie down and quit rather than risk failure. Most of the time, the way they are reacting can be directly related to the way you are attempting to teach a certain trick. I have four dogs and I have to approach how I train each one differently. This is all part of building a special relationship so that after a while your dog will just know what you want, and do it. This is tough for both sides in the beginning. When starting out, most of the time you don't know how to get the results you want. Your dog will sense your apprehensiveness. It is not until your dog respects your decisions will they start to blindly do what you command. This takes time. You need to start slow and build on what you learn. As you do, your dog will become more comfortable with your requests.

Next month—start your dog catching discs!

## Starting Out

by William Linné

When you start out training a new dog the number one thing to remember is "Patience". The training of a disc dog is a developmental process, and is not something that happens over night. You may see advancements in short bursts, but the total overall advancement happens over time. Whether you are starting out with a puppy or an older dog, the focus in the beginning is to establish a positive interest in the disc. It is often easier to get puppies interested in the disc than adults, but don't let this frustrate you, it just may take a little more time with an older dog. Frustration and the drive to succeed can often cause one to lose sight of the fact that the purpose of our sport is to have fun and to build a relationship with our dogs. If you ever feel that frustration is causing tension in either you or your dog, STOP on a good note (a short simple toss will do), and try again another time. Dogs can be very sensitive to human emotions. Remember to keep it fun and you will get better results.

There are a number of ways to help get your dog comfortable with the disc. One way is to feed them out of it. Some dogs even like to play with their food bowls. The object here is to remove any fears the dog may have about the disc.

Your dog should view disc play as a cooperative team sport, so don't leave stray discs lying around to be chewed on, the Frisbee should be a "special" toy. When the time comes to practice, start getting your pup excited about playing disc even before you go outside. Use a happy voice

and associate a word or phrase such as "Do you want to go play FRISBEE?" This will get your dog excited, causing them to develop a positive association with the disc and starting your session off on a good paw.

If your dog already is playing fetch and retrieve, you are over the first hurdle. If not, then a dog's natural instincts can be used to develop interest in disc play. Many dogs will track movement, so try sliding the disc on the ground and entice them to go after it. This is a good time to start working on the two most important commands in canine disc play: The "Take" and the "Drop". Encourage the dog to go after the disc while giving the command "Take". Once your dog goes for the disc on command, give them a lot of praise. If they are not showing much interest to begin with try making a swishing sound. This can sometimes get them excited and cause them take interest in the movement. Your dog may not know what they are supposed to do with the disc. If they have a special toy that they like to chew on, try starting out with that and switch off to the disc so they get the idea that you want them to bite at it. Remember to always give a lot of praise the instant they do what you want them to.

Once the dog starts to become consistent at tracking disc motion, it is time to hold it in front of them and have them "take" it from your hand. This is different from earlier "takes" because disc motion should not be required. Move the disc around on the ground as before and then hold the disc motionless in front of the dog and say "take". If they do not grab it, then wiggle it or move it away from the dog while saying "take". This command is essential in guiding the dog through more advanced tricks later on.

Once your dog is tracking the disc and taking it from your hand, the time has come to try a roller. Simply hold the disc like you would for a normal throw, then tilt the disc clockwise 90 degrees (for "lefties", reverse things) and flip your wrist, rolling the disc along the ground. Praise your dog when they chase it. Don't worry too much about the disc being returned at this point; simply be happy your dog has the tracking instinct to chase it. Don't throw or roll the disc at your dog, since a collision at this point may cause fear of the disc, and of course that is the last thing you want.

These first training sessions are usually the hardest. Keep them short. A few five minute sessions a day will get more results than one long one, and will prevent you from getting frustrated. It may take weeks before your dog shows any interest at all, but patience will reward you. Some dogs need a break after 1-2 minutes of training, but can be worked up to 20 times over the course of a day in order to spark interest. The trick is to watch for the first signs that the dog is losing interest in the game. The moment you see the dog looking around, chewing grass, or otherwise avoiding the game, you should stop. The idea here is to leave the dog always wanting more. This rule applies throughout all aspects of canine training. It is very easy to ruin a dog by putting too much pressure on them.

## Training Tips: Catch and Retrieve

*by William Linne'*

Once your dog has mastered the retrieve and is bringing back rollers consistently you are ready to move on to longer throws. The trick to TossFetch™ and Accuracy competitions as well as safe play with your dog is consistency. The way to achieve good consistent, accurate throws is

practice. This should be done with and without your dog. I will cover different variations of throws in a later article, but for right now I will only describe the standard throw (description below is for right handed throwers, reverse for lefties).

In the standard throw you want to position yourself facing perpendicular to your target with your right side closest to the target. Stand with your feet about shoulder length apart and your weight evenly distributed. Hold the disc with all four finger tips touching the flat underside of the disc. Your pinkie may rest against the rim. Your thumb should rest on top of the disc just above your pointer finger. The rim of the disc should be held gently against your palm. Do not hold the disc too tight. Start your throw out by pointing the disc at your target with a straight arm. Bring the disc across the front of your body towards your left hip in a smooth single motion. Then in the same motion move the disc forward back towards your target in a faster motion. Remember to snap your wrist upon releasing the disc. If you miss your target to the left you are releasing the disc too soon. If your throw ends up to the right of the target then you are releasing too late. If your throws tend to pull a little to the right while in flight try tilting the edge of the disc that is farthest away from your hand toward the ground a little as you move your arm forward to throw. You can practice throwing with a friend or even by yourself. Try and concentrate on every throw you make. The smoothness of the throw is much like that of a golf swing. You need to train your body to do it in one smooth steady motion.

Now it is time to start getting you and your dog playing together. Once your dog is taking the disc out of your hand and returning rollers, you need to start holding the disc out in front of the dog and move it away from them in a straight line. Encourage them to go after the disc. As soon as they start to track the disc and take it from you while it is moving, start letting it go just before they take it from your hand. Remember to give your dog a lot of praise upon completion of a catch. As they become more and more comfortable with this, start increasing the time between the release and the catch. You will need to start putting a little spin on the disc to increase hang time, since the object here is to release the disc well before the dog catches it, yet have the disc stay aloft.

Once you have increased the distance approximately three feet, start to toss the disc with a little more spin in front of the dog. You will now need to start actually tossing the disc further and further out in front of your dog for them to catch. Before long the dog will start to catch at what ever distance you throw. The rate in which you increase your distance is solely dependant on your individual dog's disc skill. Do not try and move too fast. You want to build your dogs confidence as well as avoid bad habits such as your dog learning to wait for the disc to land on the ground before they pick it up. Remember to give them lots of praise upon successful completion of the catch.

While training your dog, especially when just starting out, you may need to use a training lead. These can be purchased or made from materials from a local hardware store. It is a twenty to thirty foot piece of rope or webbing material with a clasp at one end. You use this the same way as you would a regular lead. It enables you to train your dog without losing control of them and not choking them in the mean time. Hold the lead in your left hand as you throw with the right. If your dog tends to want to run off, use the lead to stop them. Don't pull them back to you; let them come back on their own. If they want to wander, apply a small amount of pressure to the lead and give the "come" command. If they fail to come back apply a little more pressure. As soon as they start to move toward you, let off the pressure. Keep this up until they return all the

way back to you. Once they do, give them a lot of praise and let them know they have done what you wanted. If they start to fail to catch or return the disc, back off on the distance until an expectable catch / return rate has been achieved, then continue to extend the distance.

Another problem that some people encounter is their dog jumping up on them before they can throw the disc. Do not allow this behavior to persist. If your dog starts to do this out of excitement, take a step back from them as they start to jump up and say in a stern voice "NO!". Do not try and get the throw off just to stop the dog from jumping on you. This will only reinforce the behavior. Another trick is to get the dog to circle around you as you start your throw. This will often start the dog off in a wider outrun which will enable them to track the disc a little easier. I will usually train this by associating the command "Round" to it. Another thing you can do is train the dog to drop the disc at your side as they come around making it easier to pick up. This will stop you from getting into a tug of war with your dog for the disc. This will also cut down on the chance of your dog bringing the disc to within five feet of you and dropping it and running back into the field for the next throw. The dog needs to learn to bring the disc all the way back to you.

Next month I will discuss how to differ your throws in order to vary your routine. Sometimes just the simplest little thing can make a big overall difference in a performance.

Next month—Throwing Techniques

## Mastering the Art of Disc Throwing

In this issue I am going to cover an assortment of throwing techniques. Due to lack of space, I will not be able to go into full detail of every throw but will do my best to be as descriptive as possible. It might be easier to visualize some of these throws if you have a disc in hand while reading this article. To start we will look at the standard backhand throw. This throw is used most of the time, but quite often it is done improperly. To dispel a myth, throwing long and straight is based on technique, not strength. To start out, stand with the side of your throwing arm facing towards the target. Your feet should be about shoulder length apart and you should be balanced throughout the throw.

There are three main grips used when throwing. These are the Standard grip, Power grip, and the Modified Power grip. I will give a brief description of each (reference for right handed throwers, lefties reverse). The Standard grip is done by holding your hand straight out in front of your chest, palm out, as though to motion stop. Now bring the disc up with the other hand and rest the top of the disc flat against the palm, facing away from you. Wrap your fingers down across the disc and resting flat against the bottom of the disc. Now rotate the disc clockwise one quarter turn and slide your thumb back and onto the top of the disc, letting the rim of the disc rest in the crook or pocket of your palm.

The Power grip is similar to the standard grip except you curl your finger tips around and let them wrest against the inside of the rim. This grip will aid in giving you a harder/longer throw but at the cost of control. As with all of these throws practice will be your best asset.

The Modified Power grip performed by resting the top of the pointer finger (approximately at the first knuckle) along the bottom (not side) edge of the rim, pointing it forward. The other four finger tips will rest against the inner edge of the rim. The grip will give a little more distance without sacrificing as much control.

When throwing the disc the main thing to remember is balance. Keep your weight evenly distributed between your front and back feet. Start by holding the disc straight out in front of your right side (right handed thrower), pointing the disc directly at your intended target. Bring your throwing arm back and across the front of your body. In a snapping motion move your arm directly towards your intended target. Release the disc at the end of the snap. If the disc flies flat and level, but to the right, you released the disc too late, and if the disc flies to the left you released too soon.

To keep the disc level during the throw, tilt the side opposite your hand towards the ground as you come across your body. The rotation of the disc will cause it to flatten out as it flies through the air. One way to spiff up a routine is to add some variation to your throwing. A nice easy throw is the Over hand throw. Hold your hand in front of you and place your pointer and middle finger straight out with your thumb up. Bend your little and ring finger to your palm. This should look like you are making a gun. Now place the disc between your thumb and palm resting the disc on top of your bent ring finger. Put pressure between your thumb and middle finger to hold the disc. Bend your arm back to your ear and snap your arm forward releasing the disc toward the air. The disc will actually fly upside down. Practice on the release to get the height and distance you want to achieve.

The next throw you can try is the Flip. First, hold your hand out at arms length, with your palm facing you. Place the disc, top facing away from you, in your palm between your thumb and fingers. Face the intended target. Bend your arm at the elbow and wrist. Flip the top of the disc away from you while pulling the bottom of the disc towards you. This should be done in a fast, smooth snapping motion. The disc should flip end over end directly towards the target.

The last throw that I will cover is the Under Hand Throw: Hold your hand out as if to shake. Place the inside edge of the front (farthest away from you) rim of the disc against your thumb. Wrap your fingers around the front of the disc. Turn your wrist clockwise on a quarter turn. Stand facing your target. Bend your arm backwards, perpendicular to your body. As you snap your arm and wrist forward towards your target push with your thumb and release the disc. Remember to tilt the bottom (the side opposite your hand) down towards the ground. There are a lot more variations of throws you can try, but these are just a few to get you started. For a better explanation, and a hands on demonstration see Kevin or myself at the next event or come to the clinics on October 18th and 19th.

## Training the Over

Now that you have a repertoire of throws and your dog is catching the disc, it is time to start adding in some new tricks.

Before attempting any of these tricks you should always have your dog checked out by a certified veterinarian. Disc play can be extremely dangerous if done wrong. It is up to you to

decide what tricks can be safely attempted with your particular dog. Some guidelines to go by when making this decision would be:

1. Never attempt having a dog that weighs over 55-60 pounds jump higher than its natural ability. We discourage most dogs over this weight from attempting "vaulting" (using the thrower's body to launch off).
2. Do not encourage a dog under the age of fifteen months to jump or even leap off of a porch or out of a truck. A dog's bones and ligaments have not matured at this age (maturity time is dependent on breed). Excessive shock can cause bone problems for a young pup or can even cause health problems that may not manifest themselves for several years.
3. Start slow and build up to harder tricks. Do not start off trying to train your dog to do back flips. Let your dog get comfortable with easier tricks before advancing on to harder ones. Your dog may get into an uncomfortable situation and panic. This can very easily lead to injury.
4. Certain dogs do not like to do certain tricks. If your dog rejects a trick don't feel they are that they are doing this out of spite. It may be because of the way you are approaching your training. While it is true that you do not want your dog to dictate which tricks it will or will not perform, a dog that is uncomfortable with a trick (as opposed to just not wanting to do it) is more likely to be injured. As a litmus test, if the dog is reluctant to perform a trick, but seems comfortable doing it, they are just being stubborn. If, on the other hand, they seem to accomplish the trick but appear awkward, they may need special work to get them over the fear before the trick can be performed safely.
5. Do not let your intensity of training affect the relationship you have with your dog. If during your training session you start to get frustrated, stop and come back later. Putting too much pressure on a dog can cause them to fold and not respond the way you would like. Excessive pressure can even turn them off completely to the disc. Remember, this is supposed to be fun for both of you.

We will start off with the "Over". The object here is to have the dog jump over a portion of your body while catching the disc. Place the dog about five feet away and perpendicular to your left side. Sit down on the ground with your legs straight out in front of you. Now hold the disc above and to the right of your legs. Lefties, please reverse the sides and directions. The height should be a little above your dog's head level, so that they will have to jump for it. Now give your dog the "Take" command and have them jump over your legs while taking the disc out of your hand. Practice this until your dog is comfortable jumping over you from both directions. You can practice this in front of the TV or in the living room.

Once the dog is accomplishing this trick smoothly you can start to give the disc a little spin and release it just before the dog jumps over your legs. This is where you start to develop your timing. You want to practice this until it is perfectly smooth. Your release should be such that you have plenty of time to get your hand out of the way as your dog comes across.

After you get your timing down and your dog is comfortable with the take, you can start to add some height to the trick. Start with raising your lead leg slightly (4-5 inches) off the ground. The lead leg is always the leg closest to the dog. Let the dog jump over the new height until they are comfortable. Once again you can start to add in the disc take, and eventually the toss.

Once you get to about six inches or so you will need to start to pivot your body so your weight is resting more on your trailing (side farthest from the dog) hip. You then can start to raise your lead leg higher and higher so that the dog is jumping over the side of the leg. This will get you up to about twelve to fifteen inches of height. After this height you can reposition your body so that you are in a kneeling position rather than sitting. Keep your trailing leg bent while you keep your lead leg straight. Have the dog jump over this lead leg following the same procedure as before.

Build up your height until you are able to stand up and have the dog jump over your leg as you hold it out in front of you. After each height change, let your dog get used to the new height before introducing the disc take and eventually the toss. As your height increases, have the dog's starting distance away from you increase as well. This will give them ample distance to build up enough speed to clear your leg. Remember to build slowly as to not spook the dog. Proper training of this trick is important. We will build on this trick next time to evolve into the "Vault".

## The Vault

by William Linne

We left off last time with you having the dog jump over your leg. This is known as an "Over." If you have been practicing this, by now you should have a reliable over the leg jump. Remember, when performing an Over your dog should clear your body. Please review the warnings about vaulting your dog stated in the first article on this topic.

Before we move to the "Vault," we are going to work on getting your dog more comfortable with jumping over other parts of your body. This has two benefits. The first is that it adds more tricks to your repertoire. Secondly, it gets your dog used to working around your body. A lot of dogs perceive coming too close to their owner a violation-- almost as though they are challenging for the role of Alpha. This can be very confusing to your pup. All their lives they have been taught not to jump up on you and now you are influencing them to do so. You need to make the dog realize that it is okay to come in contact with you, when you say so. The dog **MUST** be comfortable with this or they will get hurt. This can be equated to a down hill skier. Skiers are trained to never think about how fast they are really going, because if they do it can cause them to panic and crash. The same goes for your dog. They must never think they are going to get in trouble for jumping on or over you.

Once your dog is doing Leg Overs with consistency it is time to introduce them to a new version of this trick. Start by kneeling down and holding your left arm directly out from your side, about two feet or so, parallel to the ground. Hold the disc flat with your right hand. Position the disc a little higher than your left arm so the dog can see it. Your arm should be at a height high enough to challenge the dog to jump over it. If your dog tries to run under your arm, kneel on your right knee and position your left leg out directly under your left arm. Do not let the dog run around your arm to get to the disc. If this happens reposition the dog and try again.

Another variation of this is to do a chest over. Start off in a sitting position facing your dog. The dog should start seven to ten feet away. Spread your legs apart, place your left arm behind you for support. Raise your body up with your left arm while holding the disc with your right hand. You want to slightly bend your knees. You should be in a "crab" position. Take care to protect sensitive areas. Hold the disc at the height you want the dog to jump. It should be located

between your right hip and right shoulder. Have the dog run up to you and then jump from between your legs, over your chest and land behind you while taking the disc out of your hand. This is a great trick to help with getting the dog in the proper position for overs. You may want to consider wearing safety glasses to avoid injury and the human tendency to cringe when something comes toward the face.

Before you begin, have the dog approach you and stand at your left. Bend your left knee and place your left foot next to your right knee. You should be balancing on your right leg. Hold the disc in your right hand. When starting out you may want to have someone else help you keep your balance. Have your dog stand up on their back legs and rest their front legs on your left thigh. Once they do this give the dog the disc as their reward. Continue doing this until they will stand up with front paws on your leg every time. If the dog tries to go around have someone else stand across from you at your left knee. This will help stop them from running around to your right side. If this happens reposition the dog and start over. The idea here is to get the dog comfortable with contacting your body.

When you feel your dog is ready to move to the next step, position the dog ten feet away to your left. Get into the same position you were just in (leg bent). Hold the disc flat at an arms length with your right hand, a little higher than what you were holding for the over. Position it a little to the right of your bent left knee. Now send the dog. As the dog passes over let them take the disc. Continue to adjust the disc's height and distance from your leg, until the dog is forced to use your knee to get enough height to reach it. The moment they use your knee to launch and take the disc give them LOTS and LOTS of praise. You want to let them know that it was okay for them to jump off of you. Continue with this simple exercise until the dog becomes very comfortable with this maneuver. You may need to kneel with the left thigh parallel to the ground if your dog is small or does not seem comfortable with the height of your thigh when you are standing. Be careful--make sure your dog is comfortable with this maneuver, and make sure they are landing properly after they get the disc. The dog should arc just as if they jumped a hurdle or fence.

Good luck! In the next issue, I will cover more variations of the vault.

## More on Vaults

*by William Linné*

If your dog is now doing a knee vault with consistency it is time to move on to varying the vault into some other types of moves. In this article I will cover some ways to vary the vault and incorporate these moves into a pleasing routine. I will fully cover routine development in a future article, but for now we will just look at trick transition.

Once your dog is comfortable performing the knee vault you can start the transition to other forms of the vault. The first and easiest transition is to shift from the knee vault to a hip vault. Until now you have had your left thigh parallel to the ground with your knee bent, and bracing your left foot against your right knee. Now you need to start holding your leg straight out in front of your body while balancing on your right leg. This should look much like a left-footed football kicker. The object here is to have the dog replicate the knee vault but over the whole leg. Once your dog becomes comfortable with this you can rotate your body clockwise so that now your left hip and leg are parallel to the ground. Much like if you were bending over to pick something

up and keep your left leg straight. You will still be throwing the disc with your right hand. With a light spin, toss the disc slightly out in front of you, just a little higher than you want your dog to be.

Another progression you can make is from having the dog doing the “front over” to a chest vault. Start out in the crab position discussed in the previous article. Once your dog is consistently jumping over you, start to position your body higher up. Do this by raising your chest up and supporting yourself with your left arm. You will still be throwing the disc with the right hand. (I find throwing the disc upside down from this position a little easier to manage.) The dog should still approach from between your legs but now start to step onto your hip or chest to push off for the disc. You will want to position your throw a little higher than before, and a little farther out behind you.

The hardest part in performing vaults is timing. You need to release the disc right before the dog starts to jump up onto you. This gives them the opportunity to make small corrections in their approach. The best way to improve your timing is consistency. Try to time your setup, approach, turn, and throw so that they are the same no matter what type of vault you are doing. Start this by pacing your dog to approach you at the same speed every time. The dog should not build up too much speed on the approach. This will rush you in your delivery and cut down on the dog’s compensation time. When you start out training your “overs” and vaults, you can slow down fast approaching dog by using hand signals (the slow down or stop sign). Use your voice to “slow” or “steady” them up as they start to approach. If your dog is not getting up enough speed you may need to encourage them by calling them. Another trick is to not have the dog start out too far from you—have them start out at about 7 to 10 feet away. Don’t give them the distance to build up speed.

This will come more into play as you start to put these vaults together into a routine. As you start to assemble your routine, you will need to plot out where your dog will be as you set up for each trick. If your dog has a problem building up too much speed when approaching from farther away, you will want to plan this into your routine. You may want to start out with some short throws or flips then toss a throw about 15 feet away. Immediately set up for the vault. Remember, **DO NOT** just stand there and watch your dog catch the disc. This eats up time, looks rough, doesn’t change the result, and defeats the purpose of setting the dog up for the next trick. After every throw you should be in motion setting up for the next trick and evaluating your strategy for the other tricks to follow. You will often need to readjust during a show, so don’t let it throw you off.

--Next time we will cover routine design and development.

## Building a Routine

*by William Linné*

It is often believed that the most mystical thing to do in disc dogging is putting together a good routine. I hope to dispel this myth in this article. The key to a good routine is preparation. To start off you need to be realistic. Sit down with a pen and paper and write out every trick you know that you and your dog can do. Don't be concerned with hit percentages and smoothness at

this time, which will come later. Right now all we want is the tricks you currently know or are working on. Once you complete this list you are going to organize these items on another list.

This list will be comprised of three groups. The first group is "tricks you complete 90% of the time." This can be a simple throw to a monster back vault. The second list will be "Tricks you hit 50%-90% of the time." The last list will be "tricks that you complete less than 50% of the time." You can also list tricks that you have just started working on or new tricks that you would like to learn in this section.

Once these lists are complete you will want to go back and put them into a logical order, arranging them from best to worst trick. This procedure is often made a lot easier if it is done on a computer. Once you have your lists you can start to put them into an order. Keep in mind the following guidelines:

- Make your first trick one that you hit 100 % of the time (always start off on a high note).
- Mix up the complexity of your tricks. Don't do all your hard tricks at one time.
- You want to plan out where all your discs will be during your show.
- You want to end with a finale.

Start out by deciding what tricks you want to go together. Write them down on flash cards, a white board or on a computer. Lay out the whole routine in a logical order. Now play your music and go over the routine in your head. Be very realistic as to how long it takes to complete each trick. Continue going over the routine until it seems to flow nicely and you are not rushed at any time. Now stand up and with the music playing, physically go through the routine without your dog (air disc dogging).

Once you have the tricks in an order you like, go outside with your dog and go through the routine very slowly. Look for things such as: Are you in the right location? Are you managing your discs properly? Does the grouping flow as well as you thought? Make any final changes. Now go through and group your tricks together in sets of 4-5. Practice one set at a time and then put your sets together to make up the whole routine. It is easier to remember segments of a routine than it is to try and remember a whole routine as one unit. If during a show you forget a section you can just start on a new set and come back to the original one later. Once you have all your sets down, start practicing with the music playing. As you perform, time your throws and motion to the music. Use the beat to guide you. As you practice and perform try not to feel rushed or get frustrated. If you feel this happening, re-evaluate your routine and make adjustments accordingly. Constantly go over your routine in your head to avoid forgetting anything when you become nervous.

Now that you have all of your tricks cataloged and choreographed I want to talk a little about performing. You want your show to be smooth and flowing. A miss here and there is fine, but the worst thing to happen in a performance is to have a lot of misses in a row. You can not expect to perform every time and not have misses. There are a number of causes for misses, some of which you can control and some you can't. The key is to focus on the ones that you can control. Start by removing outside influences that can disrupt a routine. Make sure that you and your dog have had an opportunity to take a nature break. If it is a big show you and your dog may be struck with what we will call the "nervous pees". This usually seems to happen right before you go on. Plan ahead and go a few minutes before you are scheduled to go on.

The positive side is these usually go away once you start your show. Another thing to do is stay away from any distractions before you go on. Take a moment to review in your head what it is you are going to perform. This is usually easier done alone without everyone talking to you. Remember no matter what happens, ALWAYS act like a professional. NEVER lose your cool. If a show doesn't go as planned, shake it off and focus on the next one. You can lose a lot of professional creditability in a matter of seconds.

Another reason for misses is your timing and throws. The best way to improve this is to practice. You want to practice in all different conditions (calm, windy, hectic, distracting etc.). Always know which way the wind is blowing. This will not only affect the disc's performance, but will also influence which direction you face to complete certain tricks. Learn to adapt to the wind by once again practicing in different wind conditions. If it is too windy you may need to adapt your routine. This can be done by shorting your throws and trick distances. Believe it or not, most performances go a lot better than one thinks. We are often our worst critic. Don't forget that most people seeing you often have never seen the action of a disc dog before.

Public performing and competition are no different. Every time you perform, the main purpose is to entertain. This is important to remember. People often get very caught up into how many points they got and if they won a prize. The better question to ask, is did I make others smile and did they enjoy my show? A good show consists of a couple of different factors. You want variety in your tricks, a steady flow between them and a smile on your face. Accentuate each trick. Whether it is completed or not makes look like that was the best that trick has ever been done. Take cues from performances like the circus and magic shows. Watch how everything is presented. That is the difference between an OK show and a great show. A major part of your presentation is based on your appearance. Little things like, having your hair brushed, shirt tucked in, wearing clean attire (including shoes), using clean discs, all make an impression. You and your dog(s) are a team, so a matching costume would be appropriate. I always coordinate my outfit with my dogs. This gives a sense of unity to the show and it looks a whole lot more professional.

Here are a few more hints to help you out when performing:

- Use upbeat music that is not too far off-center. (Remember the music should complement your show, not be making some kind of political statement). People like songs they can tap their feet to.
- Face the crowd, wave and smile. Always look like you are having fun. Involve the crowd in your show. Make it memorable by involving them by having them clap or wave.

After throwing the disc don't just stand there and watch to see if your dog catches it. Start setting up for the next trick. This emphasizes confidence (you should know the catch WILL be made).