

Training for Agility: Advice From an Expert

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For this month's column I have asked Lorraine "Rainee" Johnson, DVM, to contribute advice on training Norwich to compete in agility. With her first agility trial and title in 1998, Dr. Johnson has titled seven Norwich Terriers. She is currently training three of her five Norwich: Savvy, Elton, and CeCe, the youngest. An English Springer Spaniel and a Clumber Spaniel round out the pack and are titled in agility as well.

Savvy (MACH 3 Breakaway's in the Know, RN, MXG, MJG, MXF, MFB, TQX, T2B) is Rainee's dream dog. "She is 5½ years old and homebred, raised, trained, and shown. Usually it takes one to one-and-a-half years of training before a dog is ready to show."

Rainee has been to the AKC Agility Invitational five times, competing with Savvy for the last three times. Savvy has made it to the finals the last two times, the only Norwich to do so. This is also the third year Savvy has been ranked the number-one Norwich agility dog. She is the number-one all-time Norwich in agility as well—no small honor. Hard work is the key to success. Following is Rainee's recipe for success in agility.

TRAINING FOR AGILITY: ADVICE FROM AN EXPERT

The first challenge is getting the dog with the drive and physical ability to not only perform in agility, but also to hold up to the training and showing. A balance of drive and energy along with self-control and interest in working for toy and food rewards is the best.

Not every dog has the ideal balance or physical abilities, but a healthy dog can achieve success and have fun with good training. A dog needs to be fit to do agility.

First, they need to be in correct weight. For each dog that ideal weight is determined by their frame size and bone size, as well as how much muscle they carry. You should be able to feel the dog's ribs and hip bones without "digging" for them. When dealing with a dog as small as a Norwich, the difference between too heavy and "just right" may involve as little as a half a pound.

Diet is important, and there are many choices available. I feed a high-quality commercial kibble along with a dehydrated meat-based product. I add salmon oil and a glucosamine/MSM and vitamin-mineral product. There are many supplements available; discuss with someone knowledgeable to find the correct products and diets for your dogs.

As far as activity and training for my dogs, I try to get them out every day for some type of activity that involves some sprinting and running—this could be either chasing a thrown toy, running through the woods, or anything else that involves some sprinting. My dogs in training get a session of five minutes or so of actual agility training usually incorporated into this time of our day. Usually we work on a specific skill daily and end with a loop that lets them extend and run at full speed.

My dogs have access to a large fenced yard, so they have some "selfexercising" that goes on daily, mostly because my Springer is busy and the Norwich can't resist seeing what she is up to in the yard. I also use a bike to exercise the dogs. I ride usually for 10 minutes, keeping the Norwich at an extended

trot with intervals of sprinting. I try to do this three to four days a week, depending on the weather. Fortunately I live on acreage, so I have a safe area to play, train and ride.

We train in a class once weekly. When not showing on the weekend, I try and get in a longer training session on one day with the dogs, and often a hike. I also use balance-ball sessions to work core strength.

As for me personally, I try and keep up with the dogs, which keeps me moving and in shape (though I could do more). Daily exercise seems to be the key, as we all know, for both the dogs and ourselves. Mostly I try to make agility a sport that I enjoy and my dogs enjoy while helping to keep us both in shape.

Face it: With Norwich we are not necessarily starting with the most athletic conformation for jumping. I think a little longer leg gives you a lot for jumping. You can still get a cobby dog with a slightly longer leg, and you may have a better jumper. A good front with some reach helps, and a good rear for driving and lifting. Six of my Norwich Terriers with agility titles also have breed championships; five are dogs I bred.

Not every Norwich can do agility, but most can at some level. I find it a great sport for my dogs and me.

—R.J.

Thanks so much, Rainee.

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