

THE MUST HAVE BOOK..... REVIEWED



About me ~ I have been competing in agility for approximately 15 years and currently compete with Keefer, my large grade 7 dog, and so far we have won one Championship Ticket. I am an agility trainer at Wilmslow DTC and also a member of our club team which has just recently qualified for Crufts 2010 - the second time in the last three years. My wife, Christine, and I have seven dogs between us, including various collies, an ancient Beardie/Border Collie cross and a small but famous terrier called Mr Boo. We live in Stockport in the North West of England and compete mainly in the North, Midlands and of course Christine's homeland, Scotland.

Now on to Dawn's book ~ I am sure many of you, as I have, will have watched Dawn running her large and small dogs successfully at many of the major agility finals. I have always been impressed by the fluent way Dawn tackles courses and, having never been on one of her training courses, am keen to understand and learn some of the techniques and strategies she uses in training and running her dogs in competition. I was therefore pleased to be given the opportunity to have an early look at her new book "Knowledge Equals Speed".

First impressions, when flicking through the pages of the book, are that it's packed with information, photographs

and diagrams, all presented in a professional and easily understandable way. The book begins with a very clear rationale and explains how Dawn's handling system puts the emphasis on giving the dog clear, early and reliable information so that he always knows what's coming next and has the confidence to run at top speed, hence the Knowledge Equals Speed title. She explains the importance of making agility a great fun game for the dog and how she uses rewards as a way of harnessing its own natural enthusiasm, power and speed.

There are chapters on every aspect imaginable in respect of training and handling your dog: motivation and how to make your dog an agility addict, waits and recall starts, directional commands and cues, rear, front and blind crosses – which to use and why, contacts and weave poles, see-saws and tunnels, wraps around wings, false turns, obstacle discrimination, boxes, snakes and stars, layering, pre-curving, distance work, knocking poles, and finally some useful tips and ideas to use when training and competing.

The explanations for all of the chapters are very clear, detailed and illustrated by lots of diagrams and photographs to explain the handler position and body language in relation to position of the dog during different parts of the sequence. There's even a section explaining what some of the agility terms you hear being mentioned when walking courses mean if, like me, you thought layering was about cake or hair dressing, scooping was something to do with ice cream and pre-curving was some kind of male medical condition!

I must admit to finding the section on directional commands and cues particularly interesting as this is something I know I need to practise and improve.

loads of ideas about how, when and what directional commands to use and how to use your arms, shoulders and position to cue and direct the dog to turn correctly. I also advised Christine to read the section on waits and recall starts and particularly the troubleshooting guide! Incidentally the 3,2,1 wait that Dawn currently trains her youngest dogs seems a system that would be definitely worth trying if you are beginning to teach a wait to your dog.

From reading this book you get the impression that Dawn has held nothing back and the book is absolutely packed with advice, help and tips, not just for the large dog handler/trainer, but also for the small, medium and ABC dog. It is all about trying to get the best out of your dog regardless of breed type and size, and build a successful handler and dog combination. There is such a lot of information in this book, all written and presented in a way that makes easy and interesting reading, and I will definitely find it a really useful resource to refer to. There are some interesting sequences and ways to approach them that I am sure we will be trying out in training.

We may not all be able to be Olympia or Crufts Champions but maybe we can get that bit closer to realising our dog's true potential by following some of Dawn's ideas. I would recommend this book as a "must have" for beginners and top handlers alike and a useful guide for all trainers who wish to understand some of the current thinking and training practices.

Fantastic advice and plenty of food for thought - all I have to do now is put some of it into practice!

Would I buy this? Yes, Yes, Yes

Nick Robson

Knowledge Equals Speed

by **Nic Robson**

A SHORT EXTRACT FROM THE BOOK

"Your reaction in the ring when things go wrong"



I have seen handlers in the ring, when the dog is approaching the wrong obstacle, suddenly start screaming at them as if their very life depended on not getting eliminated. Some of these dogs are already pretty slow. I wonder why! I would rather my dog went over the wrong jump than shout at him. He is my best friend and we are there to run around and have fun together. Then he will run like the wind with complete confidence, knowing that nothing bad is going to happen. My dog would not blast around a course if I was in the habit of screaming at him or nagging him. If your dog is attempting a wrong obstacle, either you haven't called him off early enough or in training you haven't rewarded him for calling off, so don't shout and act as if it is the end of the world. All you will succeed in doing is to worry him and therefore slow him down.

I will deliberately let my dog take the wrong course if I haven't called him away in time. I would rather he was happy in ignorance of any mistake on my part than have a clear round that has involved a lot of yelling at him. If there is a choice between elimination and your dog's happiness, which will you choose?"

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