

Congratulations to

Lex VanTighem & MACH Beau (MACH Arkeno's Black Tie Only RN MX MXB MXJ MJB AXP AJP OF NFP)

This past weekend, at an AKC Agility trial in Lolo Montana, Lex & Beau achieved the highest title a dog/handler can achieve, the Master Agility Championship title, MACH!

Many have commented that Lex & Beau work well as a team, are very consistent and pretty darn speedy. But, I'm here to tell the long story, about this amazing achievement by this dedicated team!

Lex met Beau at the Alberta Kennel Club show, I believe it was in November 2005. Beau was somewhat timid, and as he got older, his fear of almost everything grew and grew. Lex decided to forgo showing him in conformation; he didn't enjoy it and he was very fearful. She decided to pull him from obedience & agility classes, as he would just shut down from fear. Lex discussed his temperament problem with other trainers and they agreed the "right" thing to do was to return Beau to his breeder because her plans for competing with him didn't appear possible, as with many of us, she could only have a certain number of dogs so, the choice was fairly clear.

But, heck, Lex loved Beau and enjoyed having him around. Lex began to read and research, she learned more and more about a technique called "*counter conditioning*". Counter conditioning, is pairing something that produces an unpleasant response, with something pleasant. Lex was determined and took on the task to find what Beau considered to be the highest possible reward, his ball. (or in Lex-talk, his "ball-ball") She would take him as close as she could to an environment where he would normally become fearful, and get him to play ball with her.

As an example of this, (and I believe this took months to accomplish), Lex took Beau to a park where children would be playing on the swings. She put Beau as close as she could, where he would still play ball with her, and then very slowly would move closer to the children. Once she had him comfortable being close to the children, she'd pick another "fear", work another park, etc., it was an ongoing project.

At last Lex put Beau back in Agility classes, worked with him and still saw problems. She set a deadline and a goal, (sounds like Lex, right?) The goal was to enter Beau in an actual agility trial and see how he did, if he couldn't handle it, she would return him to his breeder, even though it would break her heart!



First Agility trial
First jump!

June 2007; off we go to Bozeman for the big test! Will Beau run at a trial, or will fear consume him? As I think about this now, I wonder, if the stress of this run was equal to the stress of the MACH run for Lex? On the drive to Bozeman, Lex, repeatedly mentioned kicking the bar off the first jump, just so she could get the NQ out of the way and focus on the run. [Note - that would have resulted in her being whistled off of the course & there would not have been a first run!]

Not only did Beau run at the trial, but he smiled the entire way, tail blowing high in the wind, as he quickly ran the course. By the 3rd jump, it was clear to me, the two of them were in it for the Q & qualify they did! After the run, we hopped in the car and drove back to Great Falls, it was one fun trip!



Now, I'd like to tell you that this was the end of the hardships they had, but it isn't!

Beau went on to run beautiful and fast for quite some time, and then all of the sudden, he would just walk the course, try as she might, Lex couldn't figure out the problem. Having had a Papillon that suffered from a back problem, she thought that it might be a bad back. She had all the tests done, but nothing was found.

Lex made the decision to pull Beau from agility. However, she forgot to check with Beau! In a short time she realized how much he missed it and at the urging of at least one person, moved Beau down to the preferred class (a lower jump height). As it turned out, Beau did not have a back issue, but had pulled a muscle in his groin!



After a year plus in Preferred, Lex moved Beau back up to his regular jump height.

With beautiful, consistent and true runs, this past Sunday, Beau jumped the last jump of a Jumpers with Weaves course at an agility trial in Lolo Montana, and with that jump, Lex and Beau achieved their MACH!

To achieve an AKC MACH the dog must have –

Novice, Open and Excellent titles in Jumpers with Weaves & also the Standard class

20 Double Qualifying scores in Masters Jumpers with Weaves & Masters Standard class

750 MACH points, MACH points are awarded when the dog has a qualifying run and runs the course under standard course time. For instance if the standard course time was 52 seconds and the dog ran it in 29.12 seconds, the dog would be awarded 22 MACH points.

A MACH on its own is quite a feat, with the limited number of trials within a reasonable distance to Great Falls, this is an amazing feat! So, hats off to Lex & Beau!

