

DRAFT TRAINING, Part II: Fun for all!

(Karyn Beyer, BMDCA Draft Judge)

When you get ready to compete in any event, most handlers start escalating their training schedules and their expectations. This isn't always a good thing. Remember back in high school or college, right before the big exam, when you crammed in a semester's worth of work into that all night study session? Not only were you likely to forget most of it during the test, chances are you forgot the rest of it right afterwards. Training your dog for any event shouldn't be rushed. Odds are, you won't get the results you want, you will get frustrated and your dog won't be having any fun.

But hey, none of you are doing that, right? ☺

The match is a great practice session, and I encourage everyone to attend, regardless of your level, if you plan on entering the October test. If the October test is your ultimate goal, you still have plenty of time to get ready. If you've been out doing your draft work and practicing the fundamentals, then you may have encountered one of the common pitfalls of training – routine and monotony. Quite simply, perhaps you and your dog are getting a bit bored.

There are many ways to keep your training both fresh and effective. Below are some suggestions on keeping things interesting, and avoiding burnout for both your and your dog.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Chances are you have a particular spot or routine or area where you commonly train. Change it up! Draft is a functional activity, and should be done in many different locations. Consider shopping malls, main street, parks, youth baseball/soccer games – anywhere you are likely to run into people who want to visit with you and your dog, and where distractions are abundant. Be sure to load your cart up with the appropriate freight – TREATS! Having strangers greet and treat your dog when out working is great practice.

MAKE IT WORK

Tired of dragging around the bag of dog food as your practice weight? Give your dog a real job! Go to the local grocery store, and offer to help folks out with their groceries. There's your load, unload, stay, etc. Lots of good training, and the shoppers will love you for it – particularly older shoppers and folks with kids. Another great place is your local nursery. Many nurseries have wagons and four wheel carts to help shoppers with plants and supplies; take your dog and cart and let them pull the plants around. Again, you can work a multitude of commands in a very practical setting.

GO BACK TO SCHOOL

School yards and campuses are wonderful training grounds. Those hallways between classrooms always seem to have those nicely spaced poles, which are perfect for weaving. Out on the playground, you can usually find a variety of terrain – blacktop, grass, sand, and lots of obstacles for practicing turns and maneuvers. Keep an eye out of baseball dugouts – the benches are usually right along a fence line, which is a wonderful location for practicing narrows and back ups, since you have barriers on each side of you.

CHANGE WILL DO YOU GOOD

Its easy to get caught up in a routine. Change it up! Keep the work interesting for both you and your dog. You want to avoid burnout for both of you – this should be fun! Don't expect each outing to mimic a test; set simpler goals and work on limited skills in certain situations. Finally, don't be afraid to simply take a break from it all. Draft training does NOT have to be entirely in the cart. As you know from earlier articles, the majority of draft skills can be taught outside the cart. Work on those skills – the basic control exercises, stays, stops, slow, back up. As always, your mantra, regardless of the activity should be FUN, FUN, FUN!