

Run Fast, Run Clean

What's it like to run a Weimaraner in Agility? I'll tell you from personal experience that it's a wonderful combination of teamwork, speed, excitement and athletic accomplishment. But doing Agility with a Weimaraner is a lot more than that. Rarely do we get to do training and competing that is just simple, plain old fun. Both dogs and people have a wonderful time at this sport.

For those of you who haven't had the good fortune to attend an agility event, let me describe a phenomenon that I observe at every trial. There are scores of dogs walking around, wagging their tails, looking bright and happy. The dogs exude energy and their enthusiasm is contagious. I'd hazard to say that it's impossible to be gloomy at an agility trial because you are surrounded by so much canine glee.

Watching the videos of the agility competition at most recent WCA national, I was so impressed by the obvious joy and skill on the part of both dog and handler. To get the observations and opinions of others who have the privilege of running Weimaraners, I emailed some of these top agility competitors in our breed and asked them to share some thoughts about what it's like to compete with a Weimaraner. Here's what they had to say:

- Agility capitalizes on a Weimaraner's love of running and eagerness to work with their handler.
- The physical condition of your dog is important since they are athletes and require the correct muscle tone to successfully perform the obstacles. If they are overweight, it adds stress on all the joints and muscles each time they land after jumping.
- Consistent practice is not just training, it is also creating muscle memory and providing the needed exercise to keep them performance ready.
- Every dog has a favorite obstacle that whispers in the dog's ear, "Forget the course, come over here and give me a try." Positive reinforcement and attention training are key to keeping their minds on the course and preventing them from going off to do their own thing.
- There's a balance between controlling the dog and training the speed and drive out of them. When training a Weimaraner, it's important to know that repetitive drilling does not work. A Weim gets bored easily and will shut down. Keep practice sessions short; it will keep them engaged and motivated.

- There are personality differences among Weimaraners, it's typical that they have the desire to work with their handler. Having the dog and handler in sync is key to a successful team.
- Doing agility makes you aware of how much a dog reads your body language. An amazing exercise we do in class is to run our dogs without saying a word. They read the handler's body language and can successfully complete the course.
- There is great camaraderie and friendly competition among agility enthusiasts. People are very supportive of other's efforts. The only enemies are the clock and accuracy completing the course.

Are you tempted to give agility a try? One warning: It's addictive. Both you and your dog will love the activity. Whether you compete or just try out the exercises at a class, I guarantee you'll come away saying, "That was so much fun!"

Carole Lee Richards

ymar_column@yahoo.com