

Dock Diving

by Sheila Cook

Given the Weimaraner's innate athletic ability, its streamlined physique and their love of water, it is easy to see why Dock Diving could come very naturally to this breed. With that in mind, I decided to venture into this sport last year. Our local Kentucky Dock Dogs were having a Fun Day at local lake, so off we headed. Arran, after watching the first few dogs, could not contain himself, foaming at the mouth, barking, pulling to get in. His first ever jump was over 18ft and we were "hooked" I was told he had natural ability and talent, but more importantly, HE loved it.

There are a number of different clubs: Dock Dogs (<http://www.dockdogs.com/>), Ultimate Air (<http://www.ultimateairdogs.com/>) the United Kennel Club (<http://www.ukcdogs.com>) and Splash Dogs <http://www.splashdogs.com/>).

I decided to enter a Dock Dogs competition, since it was offered at the AKC Invitational last year and it would give Arran something to do (he earned a 3rd placement in the Senior Division), so therefore I will only focus on this organization.

Dogs must be at least 6 months of age and it is open to any breed or mixed breeds – as they say “no discrimination – “any size, any color” and handlers must be at least 7yrs of age. There is absolutely NO pushing your dog into the water, but tapping your dog and verbal encouragement from both handler and the crowd is allowed.

The dock is 40ft in length and 8ft wide while the pool is a minimum 20' wide and 40' long. Only flat buckled or martingale collars are allowed on the dock, though choke, prong, electronic are permitted but have to be removed prior to stepping onto the dock. Leashes must be 4ft or shorter, no Flexi leashes are allowed anywhere on the grounds. For safety, the rule is a 4ft leash and an 8ft radius

between dogs. Dogs go completely crazy while waiting for their turn, lunging, barking; their adrenalin is overflowing, and they are super-hyped!

Before the competition begins, there is an open Practice, where you can “get your dog wet” Teams are usually allowed up to 2min or 2 jumps. Competitions are broken down into Waves, each consisting of up to 12 teams and there may be three or four waves per day. Like agility, there is a judge’s briefing that ALL handlers MUST attend. A roll call is taken and the teams are told which group they are in.

Dock Dogs only allows one handler on the dock, any cues to the dog from another person results in disqualification. Teams line up in their jumping order. A list is usually posted near the steps leading up to the dock, but unlike agility, there is NO gate steward, so it is up to you to know what dog you are following – hard to do when there are three black labs in front of you! Plus it is VERY loud!

Handling styles vary. The most common technique I saw is for the handler to sit their dog at the far end of the dock, walk up to the edge, indicate the bumper/toy to the dog, release the dog and throw it just as the dog is about to take off. Verbal encouragement in the form of the handler screaming, yelling is very common. You have a maximum of 60seconds on the dock, some handlers use almost all of the time, others, like me, do not. Some dogs will actually catch their bumper in mid-air as they “pop” off the dock. This also gives the dog height and usually results in them hitting the water “tail first”.

The distance the dog jumps is calculated by where the base of the tail hits the water (where the tail meets the body). This is achieved by using a camera which takes photos (around 90 frames/sec) and is listed to two decimal points. Within your group, you are allowed 2 jumps and whichever is the longest; that is the one recorded. The jumps are not taken “back to back” but in the same running order. Since I knew that Arran would certainly NOT have a “stay”, I adopted an

alternative technique. He pulled me up onto the dock; I proceeded to restrain him as we walked to the edge, threw the bumper and got him to “mark it”. We then ran back to the 40ft line, turned him around, took off his leash and “let rip”. Once the dog hits the water and retrieves the bumper, he swims back to a ramp where you attach his leash and head down the exit stairs, while the next dog in line head up onto the dock. If a team runs out of time, or the dog does not jump, then it is scored as “timed out”.

Within Dock Dogs, there are 6 “Divisions” based on the jump distance.

Novice	0'1"-9'11"
Junior	10' 0"-14'11"
Senior	15'0"-19'11"
Master	20'0"-22'11"
Elite	23'0"-24'11"
Super Elite	25'0" and above.

Dogs are also ranked based on their age. Veteran: 8-10yrs; Legend: Over 10yrs. These dogs are scored with the regular dogs, but earn either Veteran or Legend National rankings.

Titles can be obtained by achieving five qualifying scores in one of the divisions. Arran initially was jumping in the Senior division and had two qualifying scores towards that title, but as soon as he jumped 20'7" that now meant he was competing at the Master level and now in order to get a title, he had to complete 5 Master level jumps. Hence the often heard phrase – “he just jumped out of his Division” Once a dog completes a jump at a certain distance, for example 21" 7", then if he or she subsequently only jumps 19' 8", he would only earn a “participant ribbon”, not an actual placement ribbon; this makes it fair for dogs that consistently jump at the lower height. Once you earn a title, you cannot earn lower division titles, unless you petition Dock Dogs. Strategy can play a role in

dock diving. For example, Arran in his last Wave of a local National Dock Dogs competition jumped 21'7" on his first jump. Since he routinely had been jumping longer on his 2nd jump, I did not want him to "jump out of his division"; I deliberately threw the bumper short and did not start him back at the 40ft line. Consequently, his 2nd jump was only 20'3" thus keeping him in within the Master division.

In our local competition here in Lexington KY, Arran earned his Master title, plus unbelievably, we ended up placing 4th overall three days of competition in the Master Division. This qualified us for the Big Air Finals and since it was a National competition, it was a three tier finals:

Amateur:	up to 6 teams with a top score of up to 17'11" from all the waves
Semi Pro:	up to 6 teams with a top score between 18'0" and 21'11"
Pro:	up to 6 teams with a top score of over 22'

In club events, there would be finals for each of the six divisions listed above. Finals are run in reverse order; the team with the shortest jump goes first within each of the divisions. Each team is allowed two jumps, the longest one is scored. I was thrilled that we made a National Finals, and Arran was pretty excited too! He was frantic to get up there and jump as he watched the Amateur dogs compete. Our turn came and his first jump was a disappointing 18'90". I thought perhaps he was tired - he had already jumped four times that day, it was hot and getting late – 5.30pm; or maybe I under threw his bumper?? He was even more fired up and enthusiastic as we climbed the stairs for our 2nd jump (I was afraid he would drag me up there). I threw the bumper a little longer, he marked it, we ran back and I let rip! He raced down the dock, got a nice 'pop" off the end and soared for a 21'60", propelling him into 2nd place, only 4" short of the "seasoned" lab that earned 1st place. I can honestly say that I have never seen my boy so enthusiastic, so wild, and so crazy. As we watched the Pro Finals, he was still lunging, barking, foaming at the mouth, wanting to get back up there and show everyone what a

Veteran dog (since he is 8yrs) can do. We were the only Weimaraner competing, but he earned compliments from longtime competitors and from the judges.

What started as a “wonder if he will like this” has now ended up, as far as Arran is concerned, THE BEST thing EVER. The people are very friendly, and the atmosphere, relaxed – EZ-Ups with grills, beer; everyone cheering on all the dogs, especially those that were not quite so keen to enter the water. Upbeat music also blares in the background and an announcer gives fun facts about your dog. All the dogs, even those that do not jump as big have fun. Strider does not have the same insane drive when it comes to launching into the water that Arran has, but I entered him in one wave and although he only jumped 9'8", he had a blast! As a bonus, he actually came away with a blue ribbon in the Novice Division! The two days were SO much fun both me and my boys.

Dock Dogs also offer two other classes: Speed Retrieve and Extreme Vertical. In the Speed Retrieve a bumper is held by magnets at the far end of the pool, 2" above the water, the dog is placed in a marked 2ft by 2ft box at the 20ft line on the dock. As soon as the handler sees a yellow light at the end of the pool turn to green he releases the dog and the time starts. It ends when the dog removes the bumper (total distance 58'). Again, you have two attempts. In Extreme Vertical a black and white bumper is suspended over the pool 8ft from the dock. The height is measured from the dock to the bottom of the object. Teams state their “start height” at the briefing (minimum is 4'6") and dogs start anywhere forward of the 20' line on the dock and again allowed two attempts. Two misses disqualifies the team from further jumps. Increments are 2" and you keep jumping until you disqualify yourself. The highest jump wins. If you compete in all three levels of competition then you are an “Iron Dog team”. Both of these competitions have 3 divisions.

Speed Retrieve

Sonic: <5.999sec
Turbo: 6.000-7.999sec
Express: >8.000sec

Extreme Vertical

Cadet Up to 5'11"
Top Gun 6'0" to 6"11'
High Flyer 7'0" and above

Current World Records

Big Air: 31'.00
Extreme Vertical: 8'5"
Speed Retrieve 4.751sec

So, if there is ever a local competition I urge you to go and watch it. If your dog starts to foam at the mouth, act like a demented maniac, who looks as if he has never done any obedience in his life, then dock diving may be just what he is looking for!