

Pawsatively Cavaletti Training

Odebt Massey

This is a continuation of two previous posts on the use of Cavaletti training for dogs. There are many more patterns and uses for Cavalettis for horses involved in their gait training that we don't need for dogs, we are concerned here with only improving gait and conditioning for the show ring. If you have not read the previous articles, please do so before starting any Cavaletti work with your dog. Also be sure your dog is fit enough to do these exercises. Cavaletti work is not a race to see how many patterns they can do. It is a regular exercise that should be done consistently and patiently with reasonable goals in mind. The next training patterns are only used once your dog and you have mastered the normal straight Cavaletti pattern with rhythm, grace and ease, in both directions. They can be used for additional improvement, a mental challenge and to keep things interesting.

Exercise pattern: Straight with a Jump at the end.

This exercise will work to teach a dog to raise his head and shoulders as he trots through the poles, and help keep his head and neck in a steady position. Set the poles as normal but then add a jump pole at the end about 3 feet away from the last pole (depending on the size of the dog this will have to be adjusted. You want them to be able to see the jump coming but it should be a couple of steps out of the ground poles). It should not be a big jump, just enough of a jump to make sure they see it is higher and they have to watch and prepare for it. The jump pole will also help him use his back muscles, stretch him through his back and make him more elastic and agile. Approach the poles at a show ring trot and continue through the pattern. If your dog hesitates as he sees the jump, keep encouraging him verbally and keep moving steadily yourself to help him keep his rhythm and confidence.

Exercise pattern: Fan shape – for turns.

Set 6 or 7 poles in a fan shape to practice smooth turns while keeping extension. Be sure to go both directions so as to keep balance of muscle use even and to keep your dog's attention and help build that team-work between you and your dog. Be sure the measurement is correct for your dog in approximately the center area of the poles. This is another way to use that measuring string you have marked already (explained in the last Cavaletti post). Lay the string in an arch and use the markings to place the poles, keeping the distance marks in the center of the fan shape. You should work this pattern from both sides of the poles too, first move on the side where the ends of the poles are closer and you have fewer steps and then on the side where you will be learning what speed you should be moving to help your dog keep moving smoothly as you move around a show ring corner.

Exercise pattern: Inverted U shape - for the down and back.

This pattern requires more poles set at the end turn for the path you would use on a down and back. Take your dog toward the pattern of poles as you would expect to do on a down and back pattern. This is a good pattern to help the handler on their positioning at the end of the down and back too. I prefer to pivot with my dogs and lead them around the turn rather than turn into them,

forcing the turn. Pivoting helps make it a smooth turn and transition in which you won't have to break the dogs stride. I set my poles up so that I can go right into the center of the inverted U all the while leading my dog through the pattern as I pivot. Then as the dog comes out of the turn we proceed back toward the judge in a straight line, which we have perfected with the regular Cavaletti pattern. Be patient and be sure to give your dog a command as they turn. I personally like to say, "Come back" as they do the turn.

Exercise pattern: Alternating ends – for a mental challenge & to keep the dog centered

For this pattern you raise one end of every other pole, leaving the opposite end on the ground, then raise the other end of each other pole, so you are alternating the raised ends. You only raise the lifted end slightly, maybe an inch or two depending on the size of your dog. This is intended to be a visual challenge and a simple change up to keep your dog thinking. The distance between poles is still measured the same as the ideal that you have previously determined is right for your dog. So, Your dog now moves down the center where all the poles are as close to equal as they are going to be in this pattern. Again, this one is more of a visual and mental challenge than a physical one, it keeps them thinking and paying attention.

As a challenge and to see how well your dog has learned his stride, set up eleven of your normal Cavaletti poles at the optimal distance for your dogs stride. Then remove the 4th, and 5th poles and the 7th and 8th poles. That will leave poles 1, 2, 3 & 6 & 9, 10 and 11. What this exercise will do is help your dog learn to maintain his rhythm between the sets and out of the Cavaletti. If he gets off on his stride where the poles are removed he will have to gather himself and correct for the remaining poles. This will challenge him mentally as well as physically. Remember to keep your speed with him consistent too so that you do not interfere with his forward motion or his thinking and so you won't miss cue him.

So now your dog has the rhythm, reach, drive and balance and is using the Cavaletti poles on a regular basis. You have been regular in his practice and you have made sure to train in both directions. You and he are working and moving as a team and you have both improved and perfected your timing, your smoothness of gait and you are handling your lead with ease and able to switch lead hands gracefully without upsetting your dog or his motion. He is moving out with confidence, showing his optimal extension and correct speed. It's time to put it all to work in the show ring. If you have truly devoted yourself to this training I know you will be pleased with the results and your dog will be more of the show ring athlete he should be. Good luck and have fun!

Remember, I am always willing to answer any questions you might have, just ask!

Odebt

January 17, 2012

<http://www.pawsativelyhandling.com/>