

Thoughts on Getting Ready to Compete

Posted by Nancy Ballerstedt, Rally-FrEe Champion

This Thursday is the course preview date for the very first Rally-FrEe live titling event, Top Hats and Tails, in Corvallis, Oregon on March 17th (2012). As folks prepare for this event I thought I'd pass along some ideas from Julie Flanery's Rally-FrEe "Ready, Set, Show" class and some ideas of my own that I've found helpful and that might be helpful to others.

Figure out an Affirmation, write it down and read/say it often. For example, I've been using "Conor works well with me and is very attentive". This gives you a positive mental image of you and your dog. Use this instead of worrying about "what might happen".

Study your course map and pick free choice behaviors that your dog really likes, that fit the flow of the course, and that will be easy for the judge to see (especially for a video competition). Write your free choice behaviors on 4" x 6" index cards. Place them on your practice course at the bottom corner of each free choice sign. This helps to keep track of what you are doing while still having the correct visual picture of approaching a free choice sign. Make sure that you can smoothly get back on the correct path after your free choice behavior, without cutting across the ring to do so. Make sure your dog is back on the correct side before you proceed to the next sign.

Practice the full course without your dog. Pretend you have your dog with you and say your cues out loud. If you don't have practice space big enough to set up the full course you can still visualize it and practice your part, and say your cues out loud.

Practice entering ring gates, setting up with attention and then playing! Make being inside ring gates fun. Work your way up to setting up and doing one sign then playing, and setting up and doing two signs and then playing. Practice entering, setting up, removing the leash and then taking a couple steps of heeling with attention, before playing/rewarding.

Back-chain sequences of three or four behaviors. Always practice them in the order you'll find them on the course. Anticipation can be your friend in Rally-FrEe. Change the sequences you work on so that you're not always using the same behavior as the last one that gets rewarded. This will help your dog learn the order of the behaviors and the fact that any one of them might be rewarded.

Occasionally work the full course with the dog and lots of treats, performing all of the signs. Have someone video you while running the full course with treats, or set the camera up with a wide shot to run by itself while you do the course. Recording the run creates a "show like" atmosphere with more stress than your usual practice time. Make sure to reward often so that your dog learns that stressful situations mean more treats!

Practice the full course, with dog and treats, but only do the signs where you change direction or change sides (heel past all the other ones). This is great to practice duration on your

attention heeling and also helps you learn the path of the course and to move briskly and with confidence.

Practice the end of the course. Heel with attention, stop and stand, bow, stand, heel a few more steps with attention, put your leash back on and then HAVE A BIG PARTY.

If you are going to show in a decorative collar don't forget to practice in the decorative collar.

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