

Condition Your Dog to Compete (Part 2)

Maximize your dog's performance with these conditioning tips.

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McCauley is well aware of the dearth of veterinary sports medicine expertise in many areas of the country: "American Canine Sports Medicine Association ... is small compared to some of the other veterinary associations, but it is a start. They have meetings in association with the American Veterinary Medical Association meeting each year, and a quarterly newsletter. Their website is www.acsma.org. And Dr. Chris Zink, along with myself, Dr. Jan VanDyke, and Laurie Edge-Hughes, PT, teach veterinarians, vet techs, and physical therapists what to look for and how to treat these dogs through the Animal Rehab Institute in Florida."

What can the average agility handler do in the meantime? Research - before you ever need the services - what canine sports medicine expertise is available in your locale. Go to the ACSMA website, and contact the people listed. Talk to other competitors about who is good in your area, and go to seminars presented by people with expertise in gait analysis, structure, and conditioning.

McCauley stresses that handlers should become more aware of normal and abnormal gait in their dogs. "I was recently at an agility competition," she said, "and noticed at least two lame dogs. I think some of these dogs may go back to competition whether they should or not. Not because the owners want to hurt them, but because they don't see the lameness. I also see the dogs that started agility too early having problems at 2 to 6 years old, compared to the dogs that waited until they were 18 to 24 months to start jumping, competing into the double-digit years. I also think the more veterinarians who participate in and pay attention to the demands of the sports, the faster the canine sports medicine community will grow." If the phenomenal growth of canine performance sports is any indication, it will only be a matter of time before that happens.