

How to Train for Puissance Jumping

Puissance Jumping is a very athletic sport. It is featured in such performance events as “Rock n Roll K9’s,” “Purina Incredible Dog Challenge” and “Classic Canines” events. The name is taken from the Equestrian event where the horses jump “wall” jumps with another “block” being added until only one finalist can jump the highest successfully.



Before you start training for this event, you should make sure that your dog is in good condition and proper health, as this is a rigorous activity. It should not be undertaken by dogs under 2 years of age, if the owner is concerned about growth plate issues. This is a high-impact sport. Most dogs that excel at this sport are the very athletic and agile “high-energy” dogs, or the slender and light dogs. In 2003, a 60 pound Greyhound named Cindy set the world record high jump for dogs at 5’ 8.”



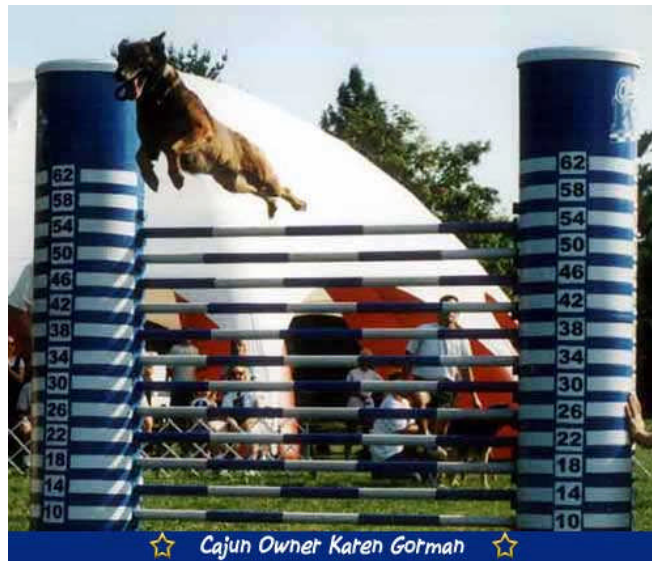
For the DSA badge, the dog will eventually have to jump twice his or her shoulder height, but you start out with just one or two bars at a very low height and work your way up, one bar at a time. Practice several jumps at each height to be sure the dog is comfortable with his/her jumping style and take-off point before adding height.

Technique is important and you shouldn’t rush. High jumping is a different kind of jumping than Flyball, for example, where the dogs are stretched out and airborne for 10 or so feet to clear a jump that is no more than 16” tall. Jumping agility competition height jumps vs. the puissance jump can also be very different for dogs. With Puissance

jumping, the dog may take off relatively close to the jump, but bounce upwards almost vertically.

Some dogs take a running jump (but not from too far back) and others jump from almost a standstill. Most prefer to take a few strides to collect themselves before going over. There is no point in the dog starting 60 feet back and running full force toward the jump, as they have to change all of that horizontal thrust to vertical movement, and they'd have to put on the brakes right before take-off anyway. It is best to have the dog get a feel for where he/she is most comfortable taking off, and then take note of his or her "favorite" take-off spot, and keep that in mind for your training.

Some dogs come close to clearing the designated height, only to knock the bar off with the tucked rear legs. Some trainers that take their sport seriously will teach their dogs to kick out their hind legs when going over the jump. However, dogs will develop their own styles. If they know the reward will not be earned if the bar comes down, they will do what they can to jump just a bit higher to keep the bar up.



My personal opinion is that there are dogs *meant* for this sport and others that will never be candidates. Some dogs should NOT be asked to perform this type of jump. Heavy dogs, giant breeds, and breeds that tend to have bone and joint problems should not attempt this sport. Some of the smaller breeds can easily spring over a bar set at twice their shoulder height. Dogs that do quite well in competition are sight hounds, Malinois, Border Collies and Shelties. If you go to the Rock-n-Roll K-9's web site http://www.rocknrollk9s.com/Rock_N_Roll_K9s/Pro_Gallery/Pages/High_Jump.html you will see pictures of various breeds using various techniques to clear the jumps.

When your dog has the idea of proper jumping, you can start raising the bars, one at a time. Use a reward toy or target object for your dog to chase over the jump. Always keep the reward toy up high in the air, where you want the dog to focus, and in the center of the jump. Most dogs do better with someone designated as the dog holder and the

other person being the one to call and urge the dog over the jump. Some people prefer to stand on the landing side of the jump, some stand on the start side of the jump, and some stand next to the jump. Use what works best for you. I tend to stand beside and a little beyond the jump, holding the toy up high on the other side for the dog to see. You can also “toss” the toy up as the dog jumps, so that he can “chase it” through the air, like with dock diving. Just be sure that you are not standing or holding a toy where it will block the dog’s “flight” over the jump, or his landing.



The dog must be taught to jump without touching the bars. The bars on the jump must be displaceable (they have to fall off if the dog hits them). This is for the dog’s safety. If the bars were fixed, then hitting the top bar could flip the dog or bring the entire jump down onto him. The impact with a fixed bar could also cause an injury. Dogs don’t usually knock down the bars deliberately, but sometimes a dog will crash right through the jump, displacing many bars at once in the process.

The landing area for the dogs should be something with “give,” so they don’t jar their front legs too much upon landing. This could be foam padding like firm tumbling mats, soft sand (not too deep), or other material that has a cushioning effect. The landing should take some of the impact without bogging down or “grabbing” the dog’s feet.

The “take-off” area should NOT have cushioning. The dog needs to know that when he kicks off, he is not going to sink in several inches and lose that vertical height going over the bar. The take-off area should be made of a material from which the dog can get traction, like thin rubber matting or firm ground so the dog’s feet don’t slip on take-off.

This event is a real crowd-pleaser at fairs and demonstrations. You can feel the whole audience “willing” each dog over the jump, as it gets higher and higher. Like a “reverse Limbo” the bar goes higher and higher, until only the best dog can clear it. Of course, we had to make it so little dogs could compete in this activity, too, so DSA’s requirement is not that you beat any other dogs or jump as high as Cindy the greyhound... You just have to have your dog jump twice his or her height at the shoulder. This is not much more than dogs used to be required to jump for standard obedience competition. But, it’s not a cake walk. You will have to work to earn this badge!