Dog Scouts of America

Scent Hurdle Racing
Training Instructions

These instructions are very basic guidelines to help you achieve the objectives on your merit badge check-off sheet.

Scent Hurdle Racing is an event which combines speed and accuracy. You can have all of the speed in the world but if you don't have the accuracy you will still lose the race. Scent Hurdle started before Flyball Racing came on the scene, but has not caught on as well as Flyball. It's not as fast of a sport as Flyball, but if the scent work is fast a team can really make good time. easy.

This video example provides a solid visual understanding of the sport:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUSQp5Zz2AU . Please watch as part of preparing you and your dog for this badge.

There are multiple components to this badge that might require separate sessions to work on them. First is scent discrimination- The dog needs to know how to locate YOUR scent on a dumbbell when it is placed with 3 other dumbbells you haven't touched (or that have only been touched by other people). Second is a retrieve. Some dogs like dumbbells, others act like they are a form of dog torture. So you might need to teach your dog to pick-up and carry a dumbbell (see the "Reliable Retrieve" info). Third is the jumps. The dog needs to learn that he's not supposed to skip any, even if he gets off track and has a misaligned approach.

TEACHING A RETRIEVE
If your dog has not learned to fetch a dumbbell, it is recommended that you start with the retrieve. The dog needs to love the dumbbell and understand that it can be picked up, that it should be picked up by the horizontal bar (not the end which risks a drop and could interfere with other training if you want to do formal obedience) and that he can move (& jump over hurdles) while carrying the dumbbell. If your dog has not yet mastered any of these things, start your training here. The Reliable Retrieve information will get you on track. Also see the "Retrieve" badge info.

SCENT DISCRIMINATION
Unlike the scent discrimination badge, you DO want your dog to retrieve the scented article. There are many ways to teach the dog how to pick the correct object based on its scent. If you start by teaching the Scent Discrimination badge, you can learn valuable skills (as will the dog) that can be applied to this training. The dog will learn the concept of scent discrimination as well. Then all you need to do is teach a new "indication" behavior, which would be the retrieve. Dogs can certainly discriminate and realize that when the object is a dumbbell with the owner's scent, they do a retrieve. Other non-dumbbell objects with other scents should cue a different indicator behavior (sit, down, bark, scratch, etc.).

But the training of the indication behavior can be the same as for the Scent Discrimination badge. In very basic terms, it would progress something like this:

1. Have the dog take the item with your scent from your hand
2. Have the dog take the item with your scent from the floor at your feet
3. Have the dog take the item with your scent when it's placed with one other un-scented dumbbells at your feet (ignore a retrieve of the wrong dumbbell and only reward a correct choice)
4. Have the dog take the item with your scent when it's placed with multiple other non-scented dumbbells at your feet
5. Gradually increase the distance the dog has to go from you to get the dumbbell (& return with it)
6. Add a jump between you and the dumbbells that the dog needs to go over on the way out and on the return.

Tips:
o Don't go overboard by rubbing or rolling the dumbbell in your hand. Holding the bar in your hand for about 15-20 seconds is all the scenting that the dog needs, especially if your hand is the least bit sweaty. If there is too much scent (which is actually skin cells and skin oils) it can cause the scent to waft over the other dumbbells and if the dog is in a hurry it can result in an incorrect selection.
o Only handle the bar part of the dumbbell. This is where you want the dog to focus.
o Mark one dumbbell as the target and only handle that one. Use tongs or gloves to handle and place the

others to reduce the chances of confusing the dog. You should also have someone else handle and place the non-target dumbbells because the dog will need to select yours from 3 that are handled by the other competitors or the "box loader". It can take days for your scent on the dumbbell to dissipate, so that's why you want to re-use only 1 dumbbell in the set as the target. But you can and should move its location in relation to the others during practice.

BACKWARD CHAINING

So now you have a dog that is excited to retrieve a dumbbell and can locate the one with your scent among others that have the scent of other people and will go over a jump or two while holding a dumbbell. Now it's time to put it all together!

Backward behavior chaining is a term used to describe a type of training in which the last behavior in a set series of behaviors is taught first. Scent Hurdle Racing, like Flyball, is not one behavior. It is a series of many behaviors completed together, in a chain. The easiest way for the dog to learn a chained behavior such as scent hurdles, flyball, or obedience is to start at the end and work your way to the beginning. This accomplishes two very important things:

1. As you add each new part of the behavior chain the task becomes easier for the dog instead of more difficult. Why? Because you're not adding anything new on the end. The dog always finishes up with something he already knows how to do well, and can feel successful after completing each sequence.

2. As the dog learns the pattern, each behavior becomes a "cue" for the behavior which follows it. For example, jumping the fourth jump is the cue to search the article board; picking up the correct dumbbell is the cue to turn and go over jump #4, etc.

REWARD (Focus)

The reward for the dog is **always** at the end of the chain. This can be when the dumbbell goes in your hand or when the dog has crossed the finish line with the dumbbell or any point between the two that you choose. Whatever gets a faster run without the dog dropping the dumbbell early. If you plan to do competition obedience, you might want to stick with the dog bringing it to you instead of dropping it in anticipation of the toy, or simply be aware of your body language as the dog is returning so it is different enough from the obedience training that the dog won't accidently get confused. What you use as the reward should be the dog's most favorite thing. If it's a toy, you may get a faster run if you can throw it after the dog crosses the finish line. If it's a favorite food, you might do well having an excited "cookie party" (one tiny treat after another for an extended amount of time) after each run.

He is doing this for a **reason,** for his **reward** (your excitement helps too!) The reward must be his **goal,** his **focus.** The focus can be the ball you will give him at the end. Or, it could be a favorite toy, a cookie party, a game of tug of war, or a wrestling match. Whatever it is, **IT MUST BE THERE** EACH AND EVERY TIME for the dog when he correctly completes the task. If you train without a focus point your dog will run without purpose or drive/speed. He may wander into the other lane, or he may chase another dog. The dog must be absolutely RIVETED ON THE JOB OF GETTING HIS REWARD (which means completing all the tasks that bring him to the reward point).

| Finish Line | Jump 1 | Jump 2 | Jump 3 | Jump 4 | Board |
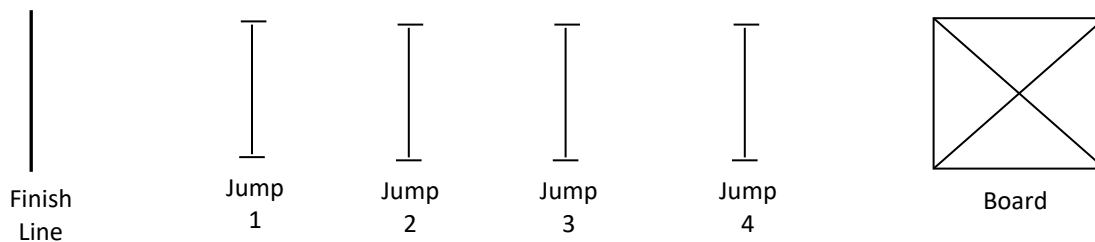
FINISH LINE + REWARD

Have a helper hold your dog and call him to you over and past the finish line. Show him his reward, you can even run away. When he gets to you, give him his favorite reward. You want to be back from the finish line far enough so that your dog has enough room to be at top speed when crossing the finish line. Top speed with precision is the goal in this and all the other steps.

NOTE: We don't have the dumbbell in the picture right now. We first want to teach the dog the jump sequence. Once the dog is jumping all 4 jumps to get to you at top speed, you'll repeat this process with the dog holding and delivering the dumbbell. If the dog drops the dumbbell before crossing the finish line, have him try again. If it happens repeatedly, you might want to do some practice with him bringing it to you to help him understand he needs to hold it. It may help some dogs if you start the training with the dog delivering it to you and gradually reward earlier as the dog develops a solid hold till after the finish line. Your excitement level and movement can still help the dog return with speed.

JUMP #1 + FINISH LINE + REWARD

Have the helper hold your dog behind jump 1. Show him the reward. Call him. Get excited. Run away if needed. The helper lets go and aims the dog toward the jump. If the dog fails to jump, he does **not** get the reward. Have him try again (start closer to the jump). When he is doing this correctly for several tries in a row you can go on to the next step.

NOTE: These steps might seem simple and you might be tempted to not repeat them very many times, but you are building a foundation that has to be strong and rewarding to the dog. Otherwise the rest of the training (or during the race when things get more difficult and speed is increased) will fall apart. So don't skimp or rush these steps just because the dog is doing well (especially when the dumbbell is added). It never hurts to practice correct behaviors!

JUMP #2 + JUMP #1 + FINISH LINE + REWARD

Same as above. Don't be surprised if the dog only jumps ONE of the two jumps. After all, that is what he knows so far! Be sure you are in the center of the line of travel and not "pulling" the dog's path off to one side. If he repeatedly skips jump 1, go back to the previous step. If he is trying to skip jump 2, start him closer to that jump and gradually move him back closer and closer to jump 3. Don't reward him until he does both jumps and comes directly to you. Using barriers beside the jumps to create a "chute" or "tunnel" is not recommended as they do the thinking for the dog. Once the barriers are removed, the dog may still try to go around, especially if he gets a bit off course after picking up the dumbbell. Let the dog figure out that what gets the reward is going over the jumps and the learning will be more deeply ingrained. When he is repeatedly doing well with both jumps go to the next step.

JUMP #3 + JUMP #2 + JUMP #1 + FINISH LINE + REWARD

Same idea as last time. If you are progressing slowly enough, and your dog is focused on the reward, he should have no trouble adding the 3rd jump. When he is doing well repeatedly go on.

JUMP #4 + JUMP #3 + JUMP #2 + JUMP #1 + FINISH LINE + REWARD

Just like before. When he is doing well repeatedly go on. Make sure you are rewarding him well past the finish line. You want him to continue running fast well beyond the finish.

WITH THE DUMBBELL: Now have him repeat the above sequences carrying the dumbbell over the jumps. You'll click when the dumbbell gets in your hand and then deliver the reward. Again, don't rush through the sequences! Do multiple practices at each step.

SCENT DISCRIMINATION: When the dog can do all 4 jumps and cross the finish line at top speed with the dumbbell you are ready to add in the scent discrimination piece.

Stand at the finish line and place your scented dumbbell on a clip board or have a helper wear gloves to walk the dumbbell and your dog (not doing any jumps) to the article board. Have the helper place your dumbbell on the board and let the dog pick it up and take it back to you over the jumps. Repeat this a few times and then add another dumbbell with the dog seeing the correct one get placed. Then have the helper place the dumbbells before bringing the dog to the board so the dog has to use his nose to find the right one. If the dog is making mistakes with this, go back to practice the scent discrimination piece by itself a few times. If the dog picks up the wrong dumbbell, you can use a no reward mark (if you choose to use one) or simply ignore it and wait for the dog to drop it. Then re-try that session. Mistakes are part of learning and help clarify what is correct. But we want to set the dog up to succeed as much as possible because non-rewarded attempts are also disappointing to the dog.

Once the dog is reliably getting the right dumbbell out of 4 on the board, you can go to the next step of adding the jumps on the way TO the article board.

JUMP #4 + Board +4+3+2+1+F+R

Start between jumps 4 and 3. Let dog go over Jump #4 run to the scent board, select the right dumbbell and run back over all jumps to the finish. The following three steps are very important. Do not skip ahead because you know by now that your dog will do this. Back up **one jump at a time,** and do each one until your dog is doing it well.

JUMP #3 +4+B+4+3+2+1+F+R

Back up to between jumps 3 and 2. Same as before.

JUMP #2+3+4+B+4+3+2+1+F+R

Back up to between jumps 2 and 1 and do it again.

JUMP #1+2+3+4+B+4+3+2+1+F+R

Back up to the starting line to release the dog. The dog should go over all four jumps, select the correct dumbbell and return over all 4 jumps and the finish line. All at top speed!

The last step is to add other dogs to the mix. If your dog has high prey drive (likes to chase other dogs) then you'll want to be extra cautious with this. Start by playing the scent hurdle game while another dog fetches a toy or does a fast recall at a distance that allows your dog to pretty much ignore the other dog. Gradually move that other dog closer and closer till your dog is able to focus on the task at hand, even if the other dog is playing the same game in a row right next to yours. In competition, the Scent Hurdle race is run the same way as a Flyball race. The only exception is the item retrieved. Here's a good video example of a Flyball race: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7oezR3hbME&NR=1

The distance between the two lanes can vary, but as you can see in the video example, they could be quite close.

The other factor the dog would need to learn would be to pass another member of his team. You can clearly see the passes on the Flyball video above (when one dog is finishing and another is starting).