

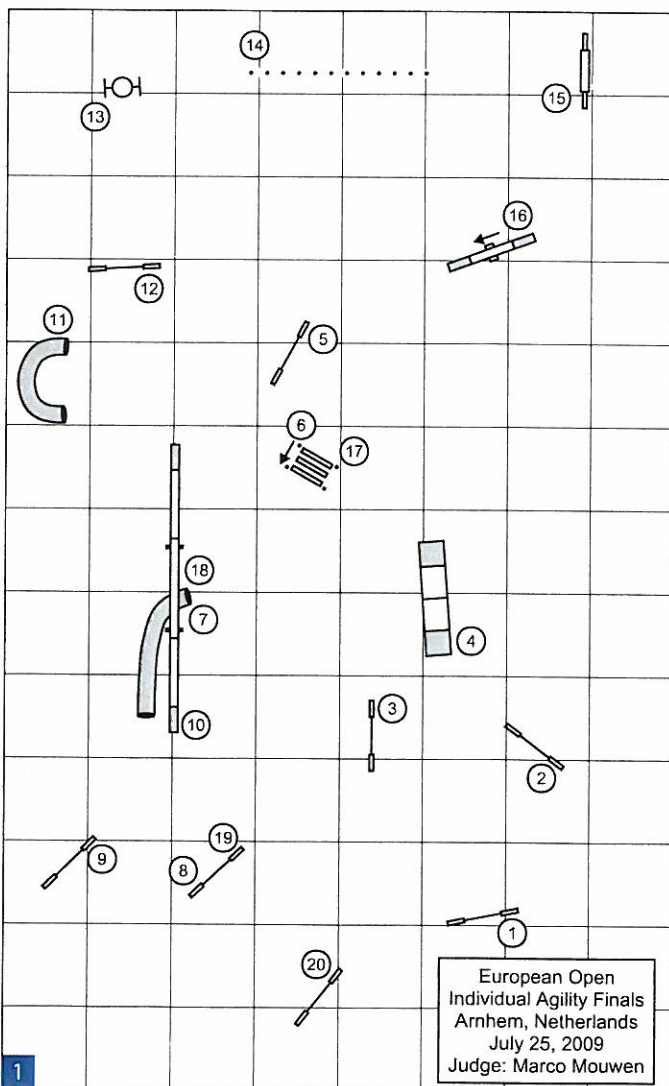


CAN YOU HANDLE IT?

By Marquand Cheek

Ann Croft and I have alternated presentations of key course segments from some of the biggest events held in the past year, with 60' x 80' practice derivatives. We culminate a year of this series with a look at the Individual Finals course from

the 2009 European Open (EO). The EO was held in Arnhem, Netherlands, in July and drew almost 700 competitors from 27 countries. Agility Vision produced a DVD of the Individual finals course for all three FCI heights (available at the Clean Run or Agility Vision store).

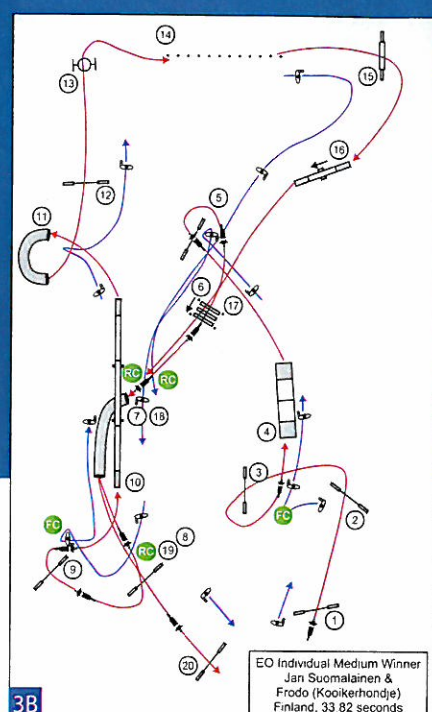
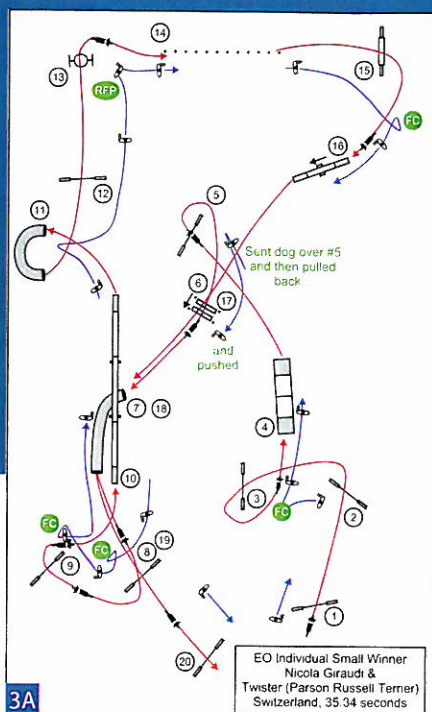
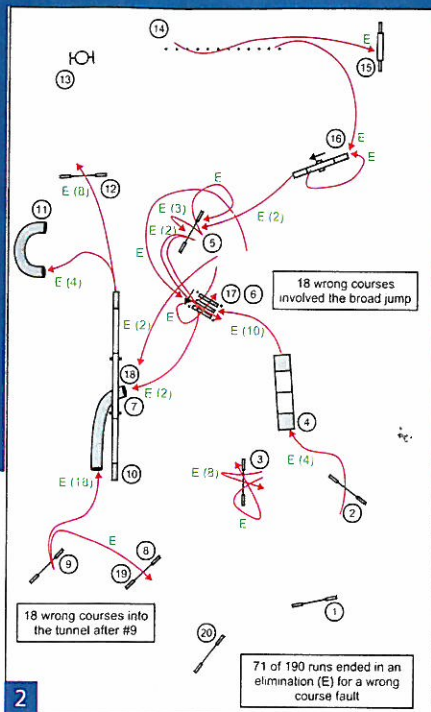


The finals course presented in **Figure 1** was designed and judged by Marco Mouwen of Switzerland. Marco is an expert handler, instructor, and agility judge and is also a former dual FCI Agility World Championships Gold Medalist in Individual and Team in 1997 with his BC Amazing Maid.

Before peeking at the elimination faults in **Figure 2** and the winning paths for each height shown in **Figure 3**, decide how you would attack this tricky course. What would ensure the best chance at a quick and successful path with your canine partner? It's important to know where dogs went awry and, conversely, how the best ran cleanly with the fastest times. The winning paths demonstrate the shortest path is not necessarily the most efficient or fastest route. Maintaining a dog's momentum is paramount. Handlers should avoid a shorter, choppy path that presents ugly approaches to contacts and broad jumps. Judge Mouwen enticed handlers with options that were indeed shorter, but most often proved less successful in maintaining speed and staying on course. There were 71 wrong courses out of 190 runs.

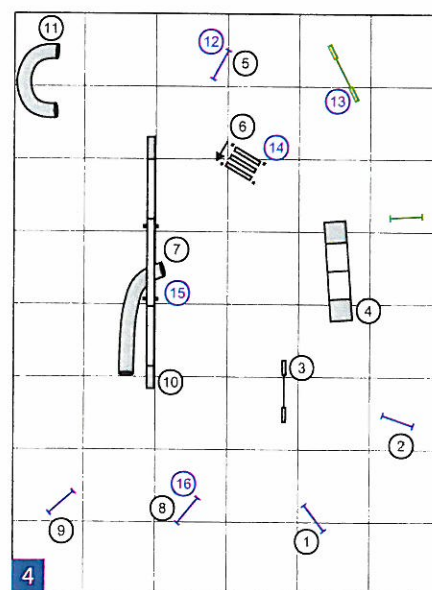
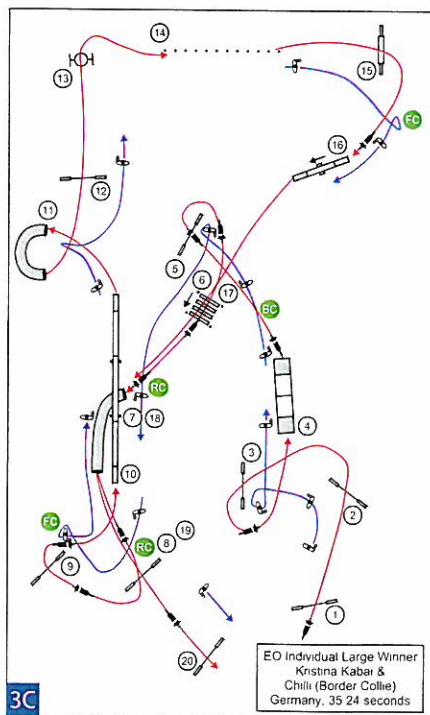
Initially, handlers needed to be mindful of the A-frame near jumps #2 and #3. In this case it proved worth the risk for most handlers to turn dogs left after #2 and bypass the A-frame. To avoid a backjump of #3, handlers needed to step past the left wing to ensure the dog did not become confused and jump back toward them. Any handlers who elected to turn their dog right after #3 presented the dog with a hideous, momentum-halting approach to the A-frame.

Getting by the broad jump to take #5 properly and then getting back to engage the first broad jump performance at #6 proved to be especially difficult. Handlers needed to be aware that a tight front cross or push after the A-frame would incorrectly present a sideways approach to the broad



jump. Wrapping jump #5 to the left, although shorter, caused many odd approach angles to the broad jump and missed attempts. Nicola Giraudi of Switzerland sent his dog over #5 and then pulled back and pushed after the broad jump (Figure 3a). He is tall with a small dog. The preferred choice was employed by Medium division winner, Jari Suomalainen of Finland (Figure 3b) and Large division winner, Kristina Kabai of Germany (Figure 3c). These handlers chose to stay on the right side of the broad jump and do a rear cross at the #7 tunnel.

The dogwalk approach was tough after jump #9 and took dogs away from any kind of smooth access. Furthermore, a very inviting tunnel was quick to draw in any dog not well-guided to the dogwalk entrance. Handlers who tried to create a diagonal approach either sent their dogs into the off-course tunnel or created an awkward approach that slowed the dog's momentum for the entire dogwalk performance. Nicola, Jari, Kristina, and USA 3rd place Large division handler Nancy Gyes all made a special effort to put in a tight front cross immediately at the right wing of #9 and to step



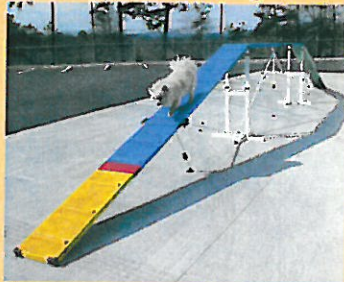
laterally forward with the dog before turning 90° to the contact for a fast approach and quick dogwalk performance.

The rest of the course was generally straightforward with the best handlers using deceleration cues at the tire and/or a false turn (RFP) to draw dogs quickly to the weave poles. It finished fast with one discrimination challenge after the seesaw.

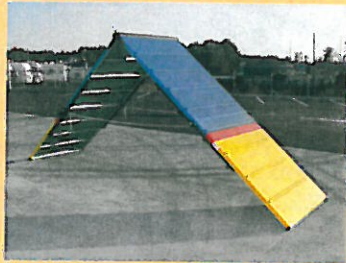
Figure 4 presents a majority of the obstacles used on the original course with some slight variations to fit into a 60' x 80' practice configuration. (The green obstacles indicate equipment substitutions and blue indicates where the course differs from the original.)

DOG Agility USA

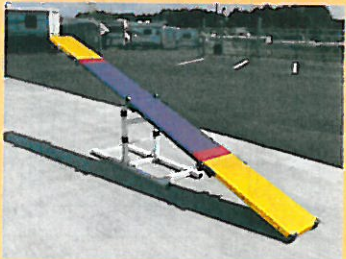
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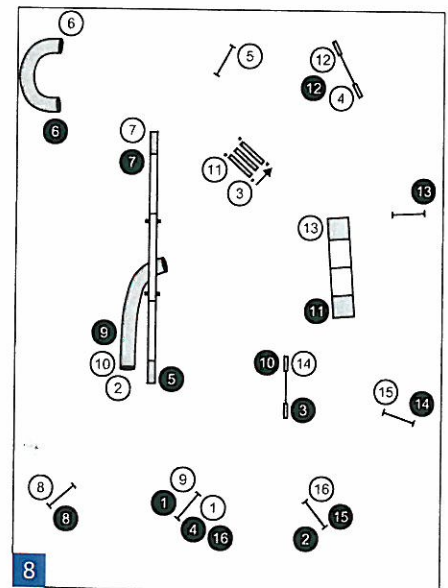
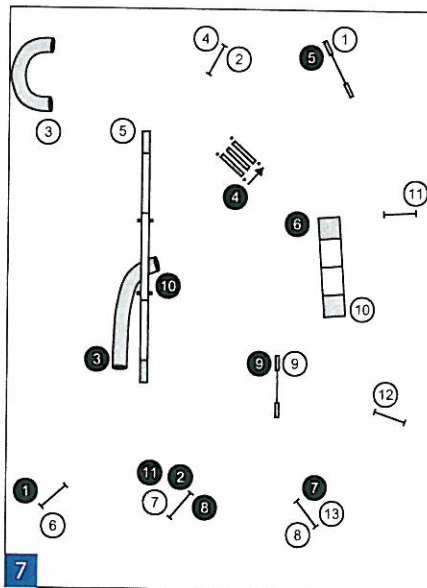
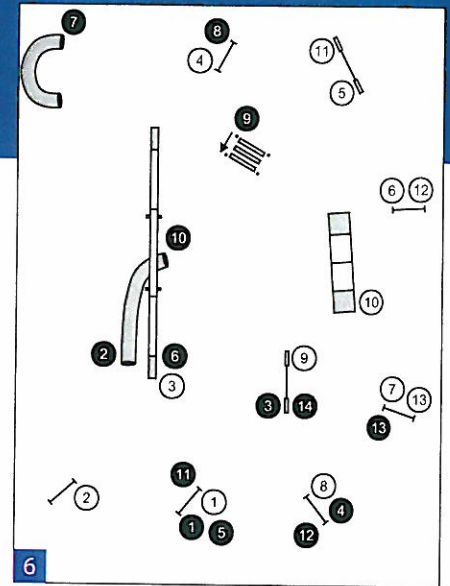
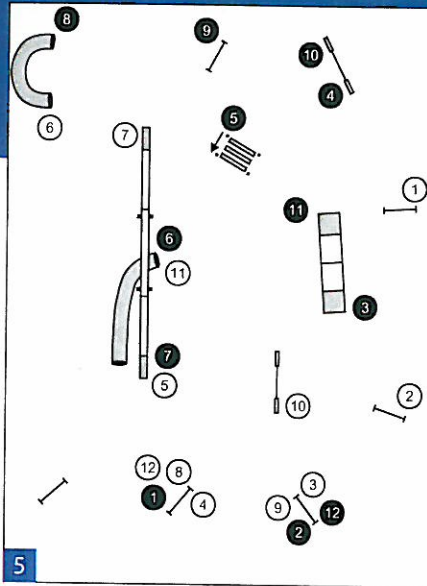
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What ensures the best chance at a quick and successful path with your canine partner? Maintaining a dog's momentum is paramount. Handlers should avoid a shorter, choppy path that presents ugly approaches to contacts and broad jumps.



In **Figures 5 through 8**, a number of tough European-style options are included for you to evaluate and run with your partner. Walk and run various paths within each to discover which choices maintain momentum and keep you both on course. Happy holidays and happy training to you and your dogs. 🐾

Marq has been active in the sport since 1994 and is a dedicated student of the game. He and his wife Rebecca compete in USDA and AKC events with Shelties. His dual champion Wyatt is retired and turned 14 in May 2009. His younger dog Lucas is four and enjoying the sport.