



## **Teaching You & Your Terrier JRT Racing**

*Article by Bob Franklin, CT*

I have often been asked, "What is the secret to developing good racing dogs?" I believe it is about half genetics and half training/conditioning. A good racer must possess a certain intensity that not all JRTs have. Many races are won in the last yard or so because one dog simply wants to get there first. The best racers are "good movers" too. If a dog has structural defects that prevent good movement, that dog usually cannot run well. Conditioning helps improve movement or at least allows good movement to be effectively mobilized. Finally, an overweight JRT seldom wins racing, so watch what and how much you feed your racers.

### **Awakening Chase Instinct**

The basic instincts for racing in JRTs are usually there, but these instincts must be awakened through training and experiences. Start training when pups are quite young. Use a lure or even an old sock and get weanling pups interested in chasing it. Most will respond, but some may not. Next, as pups grow older, use a stick about 6 feet long with a cord about the same length tied to end of the stick and attach your "lure" to that cord. Get pups to chase this lure around in circles during frequent 5 to 10 minute sessions as they grow up. Even let them catch the lure once in awhile so they can "worry" it and get more excited.

The next step is to use a fishing pole or retractable clothesline with lure attached to get pups to learn to chase the lure in a straight line. Have lure go through a hole made from three bales of hay or three cardboard boxes fastened together in such a way as to make an opening similar to a finish hole at the end of a JRT racetrack. A retractable clothesline can be fastened to a post or a tree and the barrier placed 6 feet or more away from the clothesline reel. This way one person alone can even practice with a single puppy by holding the lure in front of the puppy and after "baiting" the puppy, release the lure and let lure puller do the work of moving the lure. Sometimes with very young puppies, clothesline lure puller will go too fast so you must somehow slow the lure enough by creating friction on the rope. Usually the fishing pole technique is better but this requires two people.

These same techniques will usually work with older, inexperienced terriers to get them started racing. Terriers must have their "chase instincts" awakened before they will race at all. Sometimes, if you have more than one terrier in training, the less aggressive ones will follow others just for the fun of it for awhile, but eventually most will catch on that the lure is the "name of the game" instead.

I am indebted to Didi Gough, California, who developed some of the above training techniques. Other training ideas evolved over time at the many racing fun days Farmcliff has held over the years.

## **Introduction to Race Track**

The next step is to either construct your own racetrack or find friends that have a racetrack. Ask you JRT friends if there are any local racing fun days that you and your terrier(s) can attend. The track should be fenced so pups or inexperienced terriers cannot escape.

To begin with, ignore the start box and have handlers, with only one pup per handler, hold the puppies with all four feet on the ground part way down the racetrack (usually three at a time and without muzzles). Someone else shakes the lure under the puppies noses to get them excited about the lure. Start the lure moving and handlers should let go of their terriers as soon as lure starts. Try to keep lure just in front of lead puppy's nose and let them run down the track and through the finish hole. Handlers then follow the puppies to shoo the laggards down the track. Catchers should use lure to try and entice all puppies through finish hole, but if any still refuse, gently push them through the finish hole so they can see that there isn't anything to be afraid of on the other side. Catchers must be gentle when picking up puppies so avoid frightening them.

At least one of the puppies will eventually get the message and he/she can usually be used to entice others to follow-the-leader down the track. Repeat two or three more times trying each time to keep lure as close in front of the leader as possible. If one puppy is clearly superior to others and gets quite far ahead, hold that pup longer and release it after the others are 10 to 15 feet ahead so it has to play "catch-up". Or, just take that superior puppy out and put it with a more advanced group so slower puppies can be closer to the lure. Do not over extend their attention span by running so many times that they begin to lose interest.

Of course, if you have a heckler in the group, pull that terrier out and only run it against clearly superior racers that will leave the "fighter" in their dust so it doesn't have a chance to heckle other terriers. If you are teaching older terriers to race, you have to be much more cautious about fighting and quickly take an aggressor out and work with it separately. Some may even need a muzzle from the beginning, but it is better to let the terriers get very excited before muzzles are introduced.

## **Introduction to Start Box**

Once the terriers are racing enthusiastically and are readily going through finish hole, the next step is to introduce puppies or novice racers to the start box. If you are working with your puppy or novice racer at home, use a plastic dog crate to simulate a start box. Place the terrier in the box with the front closed. Wave the lure in front of the terrier and when the lure starts, open the crate's door and release the terrier so it can chase the lure.

If you are at a fun day or have your own racing start-box, the teaching technique is similar. Don't work with too many terriers at once – 3 or 4 at the most. Again, it is best to not use muzzles when first introducing new racers to the start-box. Try to get fairly even competitors so all have a reasonable chance of seeing the lure as it moves down the track. If one or two terriers have proven clearly superior to others during hand held exercises or the first time out of the start box, hold them out and race them with others closer in speed. Carefully put terriers in start-box and have someone constantly waving lure right in front of the box to keep terriers headed toward the front. Start lure moving, open box and hopefully all terriers will follow the lure down the track. Skill of lure machine operator is very important since it is critical to keep lure just in front of lead terrier so they don't lose contact with the lure. Repeat this step a few times trying to keep dogs of equal ability together.

## **Introduction to Muzzles**

Once terriers are enthusiastically coming out of start-box and following the lure down the track, it is time to introduce muzzles. Hopefully the terrier's eyes are "revolving in their sockets" and they are screaming when you first put on muzzles just before putting them in start-box. Quickly start lure and

open start-box and terriers won't even realize they are muzzled. Have catchers remove muzzles immediately. Repeat a couple of times. If terriers start fussing with their muzzles, then back up and seek to get them excited again so muzzles can be re-introduced.

Eventually, most terriers will associate muzzles with racing and will almost stick their noses into the muzzle. Attaching a muzzle to a wriggling terrier is a two handed job and trying to hold a terrier under one arm and do it one handed is almost impossible. I long ago developed a simple technique, which I have since taught to many terrier handlers that works very effectively. Simply "park" the terrier between your thighs holding it in region just behind its ribs by exerting pressure on the terriers sides with your thighs. I suggest that you wear long pants when racing terriers because otherwise you will probably get your legs scratched when putting on their muzzles. Terriers usually settle after some initial wriggling and will place their front feet on your knees. This frees both hands and you can easily attach a muzzle to the terrier's nose. After that is done, just open your legs enough so terrier lightly drops to the ground. Put muzzles on only just before you enter racing heat staging area and after a catcher hands you your terrier, remove the muzzle immediately.

Once terriers have learned to accept a muzzle, it is only a matter of experience or mileage for them to really learn racing. Some terriers balk at hurdles the first time, but usually after a few races, they learn to jump hurdles with no hesitation. I suggest you keep and wear specific sweatshirts and tee shirts for racing only. Your shirt will always get muddy from terrier feet and often they will get ripped and torn because of struggling terrier feet. Your side and arms may also suffer scratches from these same terrier toenails. In my case, my eardrums often suffer from the screaming of some of my terriers who really, really can't wait to race.