



KiwiDogAgility

Favourite Agility Equipment

by Karen de Wit

I asked NZ agileers what piece of agility equipment they thought was their dog's most favourite, and what did they think their dog liked the least. I also asked them what evidence they had to support their answer.

The most favoured pieces of agility equipment was the Contact equipment:- A-frame, dog-walk/crossover and seesaw. This was followed by the weave and flexible tunnel. Many people thought their dogs just liked to jump, and some dogs sought out the long jump too! No-one mentioned the collapsible tunnel in their list of favourites!

A lot of dogs get excited when they see the weaves. One handler says she created a lot of value for the weaves, so much so that they are used as a reward for doing other obstacles! The tunnels can be rewarding due to the fact a toy is often thrown past the exit, so it's a good reason to run through them at great speed! If they have a favoured obstacle it will be the one they run towards and perform even if the handler is asking them to do something else, like a different obstacle or even just a wait. Many dogs like the contact equipment because they have a long time association with food rewards due to the ways they are taught.



QT weave
Photo by Carol Bremner



As far as the least liked equipment, scoring top points was the weave, followed by the seesaw and collapsible tunnel.

Many people said they hadn't made these obstacles valuable (rewarding) enough, or they had taught them poorly. Some dogs don't like to slow down so this may be why the weave and seesaw can be less-favoured obstacles. For others the immense concentration required to learn/performance the weave is too much for them to bear!

The collapsible tunnel can cause problems if a dog gets caught up in it. This applies to small and large dogs. A wet collapsible tunnel that sticks to itself is the worse!

The seesaw is disliked because it moves and many dogs find that frightening. Some dogs get a shock when the plank moves which means they find it difficult to differentiate between the dog-walk and the seesaw, and may crawl over the dog-walk thinking its going to drop out from under them at any moment. (Other dogs LOVE the feel of flying through the air!!) The angles up the ramp are similar, colours will often be similar. The only difference can be the slats on the dog-walk which are not on the seesaw. Foundation training needs to include a lot of wobbly plank-type activities to allow dogs to enjoy the movement.

Another reason dogs have an aversion to certain equipment is because they don't see it often. This especially relates to the seesaw and the spread jump. Dogs need to traverse equipment on a regular basis, especially when learning, to gain confidence.

A couple of dogs don't like narrow ramps (dog-walk and crossover) and some have fallen off them which makes them less tolerated. The brush jump is one that new dogs will often run past. This is because they cannot see what is on the other side. Often, once they have run around it a couple of times and checked that the world continues on the other side, they will jump it happily.



Brooke flies the long jump
Photo by Auckland Area Agility Photos



Photo by
Caitlin Frater

The most obvious way a dog expresses dislike is to run past the ‘dreaded’ obstacle and some dogs even stress out so much they empty their bowels!

Sometimes, a dog expressing dislike for an obstacle is a sign that the dog has an injury. For example the weave requires a lot of bending and dogs with a sore neck/back will find it causes pain. The long jump requires the dog to extend its back and hind legs so if the dog has a back/hip issues they will prefer not to do this action. Dogs which suddenly start dropping hurdle bars will also probably have a physical injury.

So overall, if you want your dog to like the equipment:

- Make sure you use a lot of food and toys/games when first teaching it
- Create confidence in your dog on narrow ramps and moving ramps
- Keep him fit and healthy

As one person commented, “She likes all the gear! Her least favourite is when it all ends and she has to go back into the car!”

The Results

40 responses, 100 dogs

Equipment	Most favoured	Least favoured
A frame	17	1
Dogwalk/xover	14	2
Seesaw	12	10
Weave	11	15
Flexi	11	1
Jumping	6	1
Longjump	1	1
Collapsible	0	7
Brush	0	2

