

Improve Your
Handling Skills
at Home

Backyard Dogs

By Karen Holik



This month's exercises are based on the \$10,000 Dog Agility Steeplechase Semifinals course (shown on next page) from the USDA World Championships held in Scottsdale, Arizona in November. Unfortunately, we can't fit the whole course in the space allotted for "Backyard Dogs" exercises, but we can fit the section of the course that caused the most problems. **Figure 1** shows the section of the course that we're going to work on.

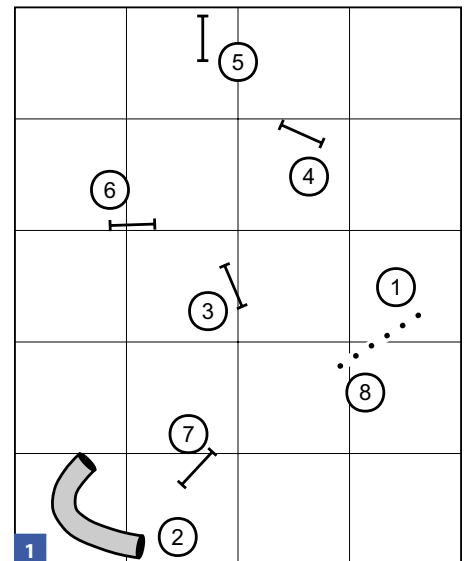
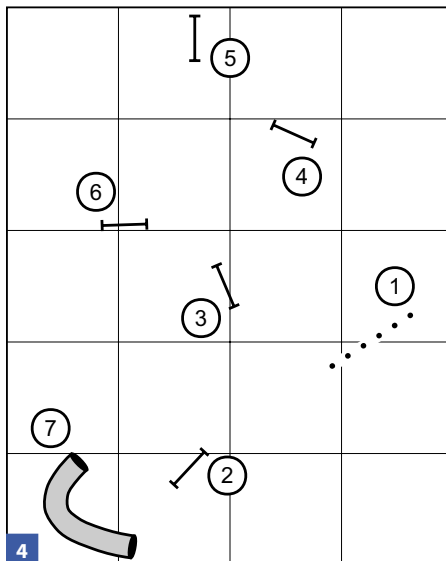
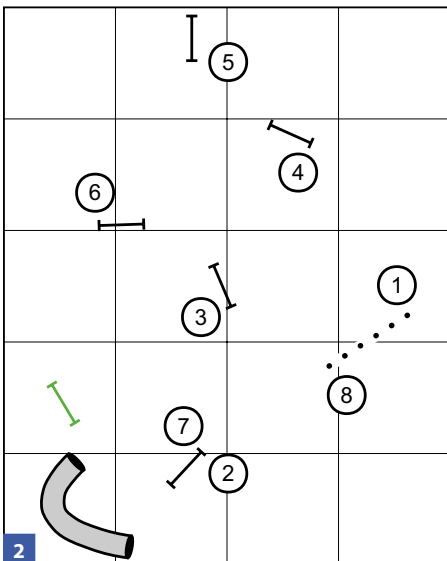
With hundreds of dogs competing for the top 16 positions, the handlers had to push their dogs throughout the course. In watching the course, it seemed that the widest turns and most off-courses occurred at the #2/#7 jump. The handlers either did a front cross on the landing side of #2 or sent the dog over #2 on the left and continued on to do a rear cross at #4. Both choices were very effective, but the result depended on how well they were executed.

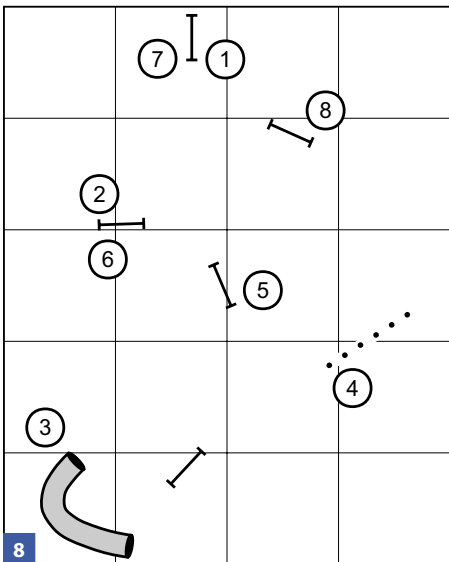
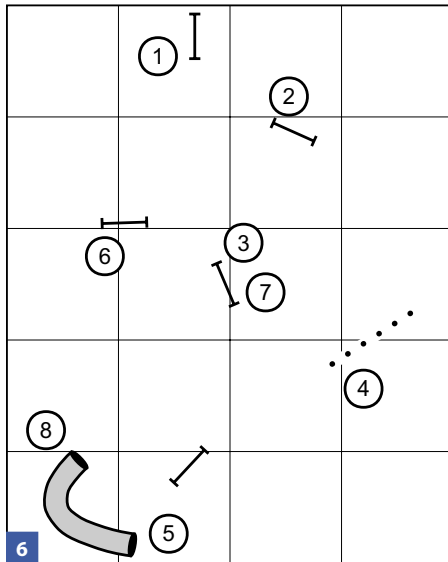
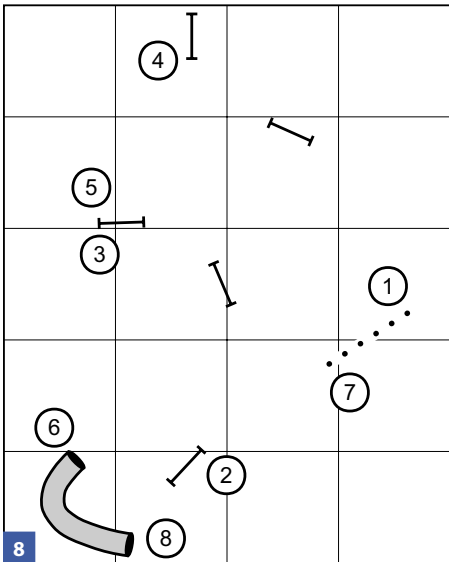
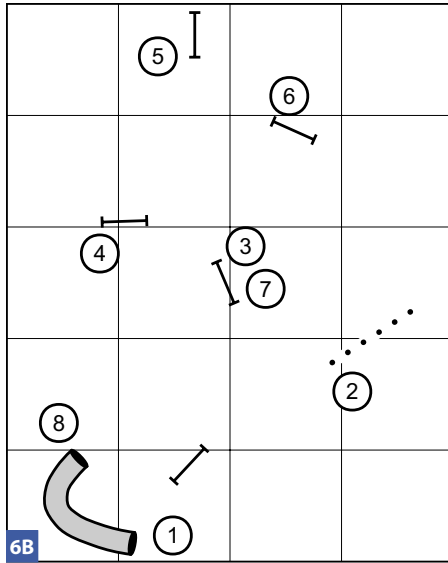
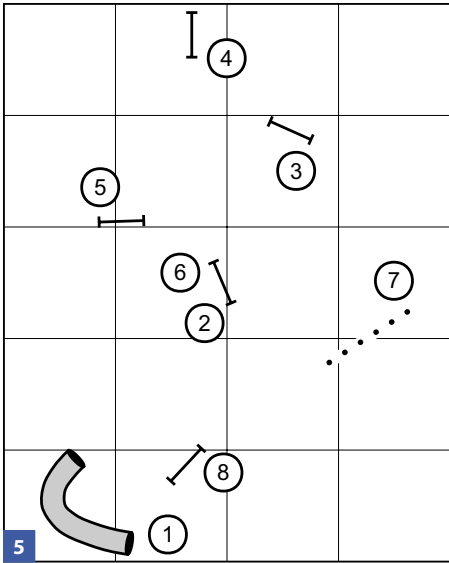
After sending their dog around the pinwheel (#4-#6), handlers either did a front cross on the landing side of #7 or sent the dog over #7 on their right and did a reverse flow pivot (RFP) to get the dog into the poles. This is where the off-course happened, over

the jump shown in green on the course. For the purposes of these exercises, we have substituted a tunnel for this jump. Because some handlers slowed down too soon and started their front cross too early or because they held back for the RFP before #7, some dogs inadvertently read these maneuvers to mean they should take the off-course jump.

Try the exercise in Figure 1 and see which handling choice works best for you. Try the sequence both ways at jumps #2 and #7. The qualifying times were often within hundredths of a second. How tight can you get your dog over jump #2? Also at #7, which handling choice is better for your dog? If you choose to stay on the takeoff side of #7 and call to the poles, does your dog look at the off-course tunnel? If you choose the front cross on the landing side of #7, can you get there in time to signal the cross and make this a tight turn?

The exercises in **Figures 2 through 10** are fast and sometimes flowing. Have fun and see how tight you can make those turns with your dog! 🐾





Karen Holik has been involved in agility for over 10 years as a competitor and also a USDAA and AKC judge. She has competed in the finals of the USDAA Grand Prix World Championships with all four of her dogs on six different occasions. Her youngest dog, MACH Triune's Feelin Hot Hot Hot (a.k.a. Sizzle) won the USDAA Steeplechase Finals in 2003. Karen and Sizzle were members of the AKC/USA World Team in 2003 and were chosen again to be part of the team in 2005. Karen offers private lessons and seminars and can be reached at oncourseagility@comcast.net