

# On Course with...

# Ann Croft

By Martha Faulk



## **MF: How did you get started in agility?**

**AC:** When I moved to San Diego and bought my first home, I looked through the AKC standards to see what breeds appealed to me. Since I wanted a small, short-haired companion dog, I decided on a Boston Terrier. They were described as a “lively and intelligent breed.” That was in 1992, when I bought Mystic and began to learn about dog training. While I was taking obedience classes in Balboa Park, I learned about a group doing agility training on Sundays. That sounded just perfect for my lively little dog, so Mystic and I joined the group.

## **MF: What kind of success did you have with Mystic and your other Boston, Chance?**

**AC:** I began agility competitions with Mystic, and the first time I took her to a match, she missed the A-frame contact three times. We did much better at our first USDAA trial with a clean run that won the class. In 1996, Mystic and her teammates won the Mini-dog three-dog relay at the USDAA Nationals. Mystic was also the first Boston Terrier to earn the MAD title.

Then I got another Boston, Chance, who was six months younger than Mystic. Chance has a real “go-getter” spirit that helped him win his very first agility event. Both Mystic and Chance were the first in their breed for many agility milestones, including first Boston Terrier MAD, MACH, MACH2, ADCH and many NADAC titles through the Elite level. Chance was also on the cover of an early *Clean Run*, hand drawn by Bud Houston (September 15, 1995).

Then, when the Bostons were about 4 or 5, I decided I wanted to train a larger dog and found my first Border Collie, Caper. I decided on a Border Collie because I like their quirky behavior and intelligence.

## **MF: What do you see as the difference in training Boston Terriers and Border Collies?**

**AC:** I think the training is much the same, except that Border Collies like repetition and Bostons not so much.

## **MF: How did you manage to go from not knowing anything about dog training to being very successful in competition and becoming a full-time agility trainer?**

**AC:** I have a college-level teaching and scientific background, and I’ve always had a love for dogs and other animals. I think I’m more self-taught in agility than anything else. My background in science has helped me to be able to analyze training situations and try experiments. I’ve taken private lessons and gone to seminars from many generous and talented trainers, especially Nancy Gyes. I also do a lot of reading, especially in *Clean Run*.

## **MF: How did you come up with the idea for your four-on-the-floor method of teaching contacts?**

**AC:** With my second Border Collie, Trigger, I had originally planned to teach running contacts. Running contacts were pretty new about five years ago. But then, I decided to teach Trigger to cross a computer mouse pad placed on the ground at the downside portion of the contact zone for both the dogwalk and A-frame. I planned to click as the dog ran across the mouse pad, but it was hard to tell if she was actually touching the pad or just running over it.

So, Nancy Gyes suggested that I move the mouse pad out a bit further from the end of the equipment and just ask the dog to stop and go down on the pad. That way, I would have a more definitive behavior from the dog. I ended up with a method that is very comfortable for the dog, doesn’t slow the dog on the descent, and one which has training criteria I can go back to when needed.

*Editors’ Note: For more information, see Croft’s article, “Four-on-the-Floor Contacts” in the December 2005 Clean Run, or her DVD, “4 on the Floor: Modified Running Contacts,” available through [www.cleanrun.com](http://www.cleanrun.com).)*

## **MF: Might it be more difficult to teach four-on-the-floor to dogs other than Border Collies since that breed seems to find the down position fairly natural?**

**AC:** It might not be as natural for some dogs to down if they are more upright in their shoulders. When people come to me for

help in retraining their dogs using this method, I may suggest the dog be encouraged to come to a stand on the ground at the bottom of the contact rather than a down. I've suggested and had success with this stand-at-the-bottom method for a Vizsla and a Rhodesian Ridgeback, for example.

**MF: Are you teaching four-on-the-floor to your novice students?**

**AC:** I work with the individual dogs and handlers to determine which contact behavior is best for them. I show students how to train both the nose touch to the target and the four-on-the-floor method.

I do some seminars on four-on-the-floor because it offers the benefits of speed, accuracy, comfort, and adaptability for many dogs. It's fast like a running contact and enables the dog to run the entire dogwalk or A-frame without slowing significantly on the descending ramp. I don't teach it on the teeter because of the motion at the end of the board, though.

**MF: What do you think is the hardest thing to teach?**

**AC:** Good contact performance is harder to maintain, but I believe it's harder to teach the weaves to the dog.

**MF: How do you teach the weaves?**

**AC:** I use the wide channel method to start young dogs, and I don't use guide wires. Then, I use the round-the-clock method to enable the dog to find the entrance from any angle. I don't advocate actual weaving until dogs are a year old because I want to make sure their growth plates have closed. I also like to start dogs on slanted poles, even little dogs. I think the slanted poles teach dogs to single step and find their entrances more readily.

**MF: Do you think you'll run a Boston Terrier again?**

**AC:** I really would like to run a small dog again but haven't decided on the breed.

**MF: You are certified as both an AKC judge and a USDAA judge. What do you like most about judging?**

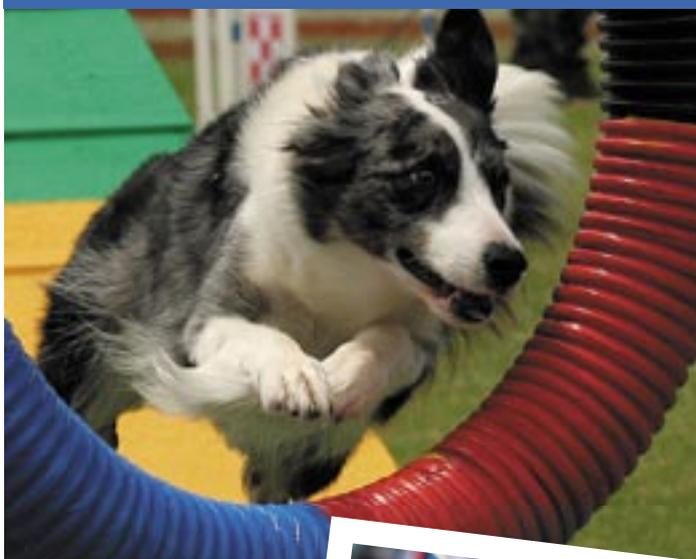
**AC:** The opportunity to travel to different parts of the country. This year I'm judging in Hawaii and Alaska. One of the best things about judging is that you get to see different training styles. I always come away with something new about handling.

**MF: What is your next agility goal?**

**AC:** I would like to continue training and competing at a national level and would love to have the opportunity to compete in Europe someday, representing the U.S. At age five, Trigger is in the prime of her career, and I have a new puppy, Flurry, coming up. I want to continue to improve as a teacher so that I can help more people and their dogs can enjoy our great sport. 🐾

*Martha Faulk is a lawyer and author who lives in Fort Collins, Colorado. She is Chairwoman of the Board of Directors for the Larimer Humane Society and teaches agility there. Martha trains an Australian Cattle Dog and an Australian Shepherd that she adopted from the shelter and also runs a Border Terrier in agility. Martha may be reached at marthfaulk@msn.com.*

**S N A P S H O T**



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**Handler:** Ann Croft

**Home:** San Diego, California

**Occupation:** Full-time agility trainer for the past three years; before that, molecular biologist

**Training Affiliation:** Agility Club of San Diego and Paws on the Wind Dog Sports and Training

**Dogs:**

- ADCH MACH2 Brandy's Ace High Kid EAC, EGC, EJC, CD, a.k.a. Chance, 13-year-old Boston Terrier
- ADCH MACH Fairfax Caper, a.k.a. Caper, 9-year-old Border Collie
- ADCH MACH Trigger, 5-year-old Border Collie
- Bluefires Perfect Storm, a.k.a. Flurry, 1-year-old Border Collie

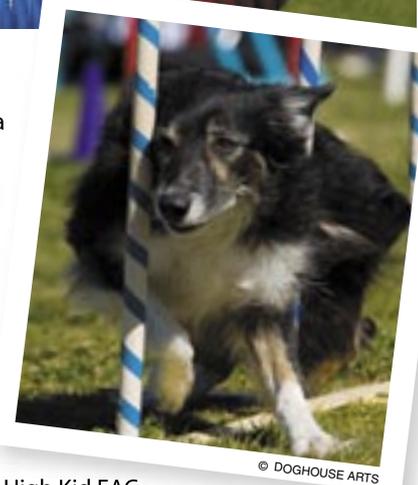
**Most memorable moments:** Winning 2nd place with Trigger in the 24" division at the 2003 AKC Agility Nationals and winning the USDAA DAM Tournament in 2004 with teammates Nancy Gyes and Jim Basic. Also, placing 8th in the USDAA Grand Prix finals in 1998 and making it to the finals at the 2000 AKC National with Chance.

**Most forgettable moment:** At the 2000 USDAA Nationals I was having a great run with Caper in the semifinals, and then I put up my arm, causing an off-course, and missed making it into the finals.

**Favorite pre-competition ritual:** Playing with my dogs before going into the ring and rehearsing the course.

**Best advice received:** From Jim Basic's and Nancy Gyes's *12 Commandments of Agility*, "Work every part of every obstacle, one obstacle at a time."

**Best advice given:** Keep your eye on your dog, and stay connected with the dog.



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