

# SKILL OF THE MONTH

BY KAREN HOLIK

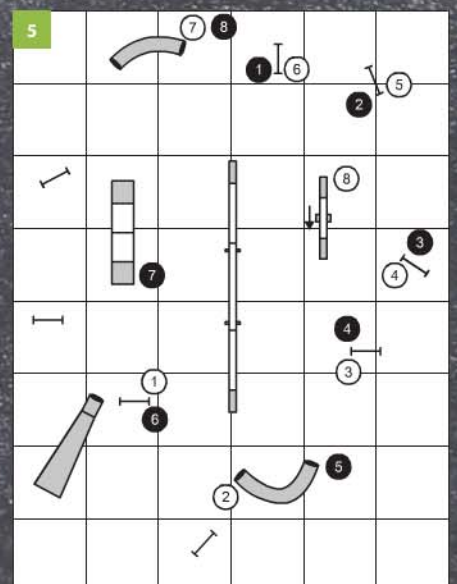
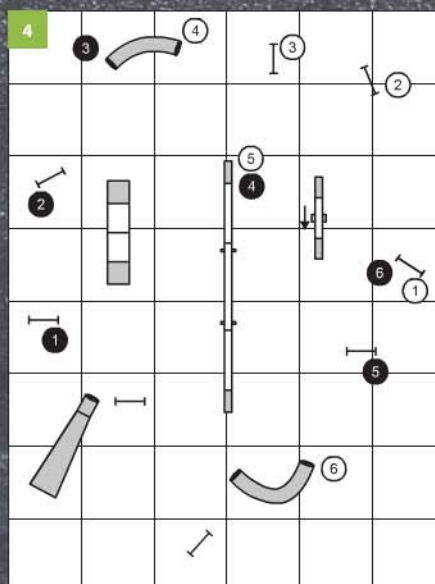
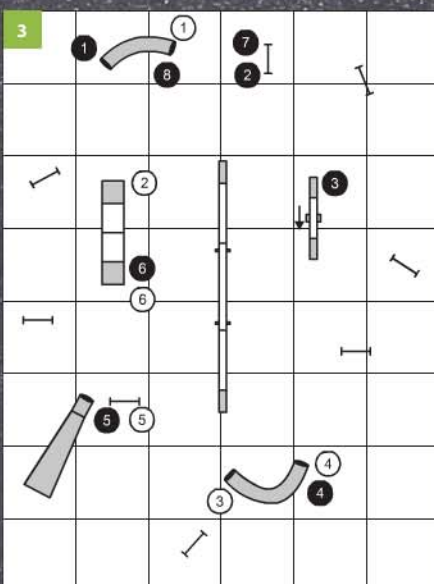
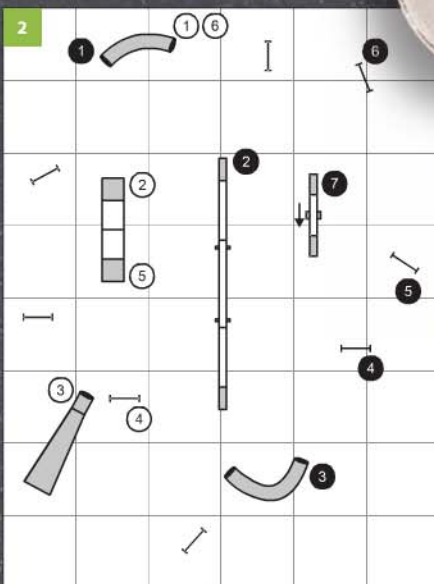
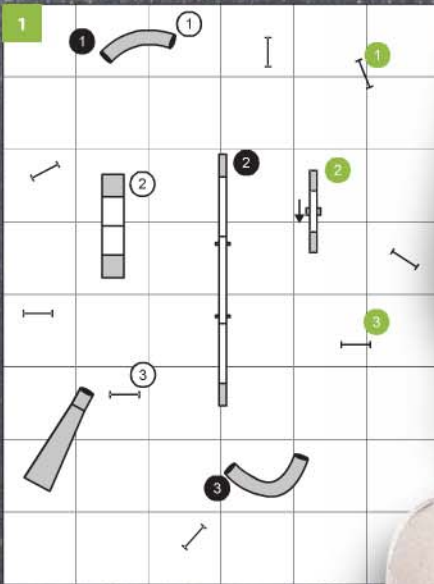
These exercises focus on contact obstacles. The biggest complaint I hear when talking about contact obstacle performance is that the dog's performance in the ring does not match his performance in training. I find that most of the problems are caused when the handler does not practice distance from the contact obstacles, including sending ahead, running past the obstacle, and getting lateral distance. When we are in a trial situation, all of these skills are required on the course. Sometimes we get stuck behind the dog or we are forced by the design of the course to be ahead of the dog or at a lateral distance from the dog, and if we haven't practiced that, the dog's performance is not the same.

In **Figure 1** you should try staying behind your dog on the contact in each short sequence, then try driving past the contact, and then try running with 5' or 10' of lateral distance between you and the contact. When staying behind, try stopping before you get to the contact and see if your dog still drives ahead. Also, try running ahead to the third obstacle in each sequence while your dog is performing the contact. If your dog cannot do this, you might want to revisit some of the articles on contact training in previous issues of *Clean Run*.

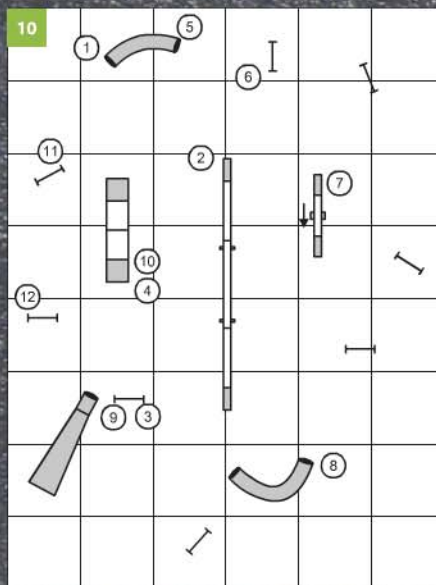
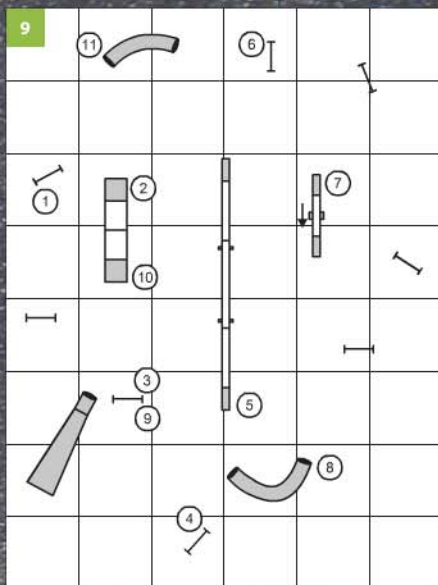
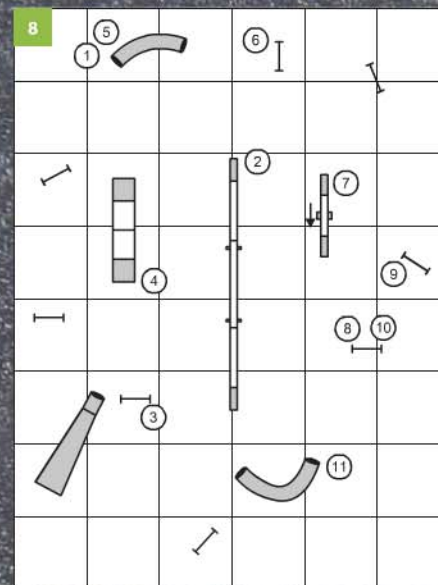
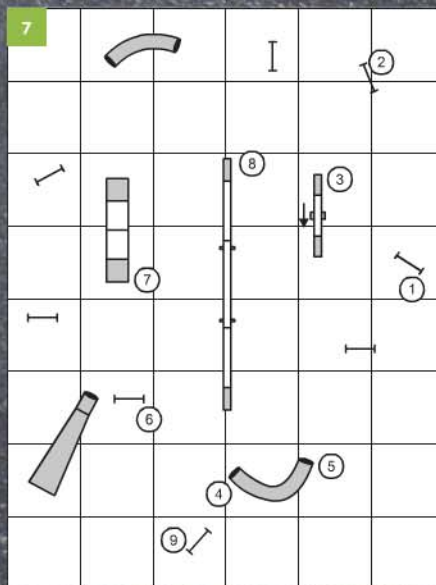
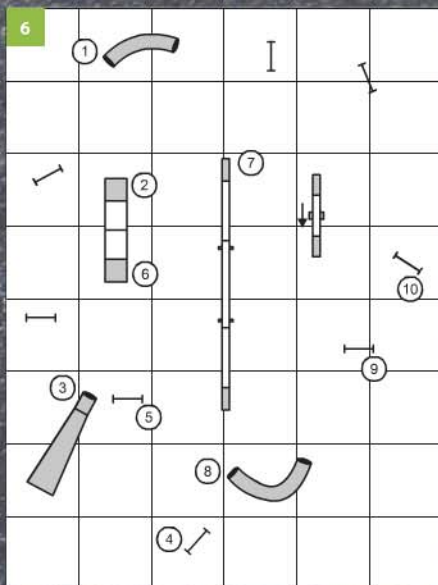
**Figures 2 and 3** challenge you to get ahead of your dog while he is performing the contact obstacle so that you can handle the sequence effectively.

In **Figures 4 and 5** try starting the sequence without a lead-out to resemble times when you might be on course and get caught behind your dog.

The last five sequences in **Figures 6 through 10** offer many opportunities to send your dog ahead to the contact and wait for the proper contact performance, and also to get ahead of the dog







to handle a tricky sequence after the contact. Have fun and remember to reward often for proper contact performance and to go back and retrain areas that need improvement.

*Karen Holik has been involved in agility for over 15 years as a competitor and a USDAA and AKC judge. She has competed in the finals of the USDAA Grand Prix of Dog Agility World Championships and Dog Agility Steeplechase Championships many times with all her dogs: two Shelties, a Border Collie, and an All-American. Her youngest dog, ADCH MACH2 Triune's Feelin Hot Hot Hot, a.k.a. Sizzle, is a two-time USDAA National Steeplechase Champion and was a member of the AKC/USA World Team in 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2007. Karen offers private lessons and seminars; contact her at [oncourseagility@comcast.net](mailto:oncourseagility@comcast.net).*