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# DOG Sport

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# FLOATS TO BOATS

## Teaching A Dog To Jump For Joy



By Deborah Lee Miller-Riley

**L**ike a rocket on the Fourth of July, an airborne dog is pretty darn exhilarating to watch. Throughout history dogs have leapt into water to retrieve, rescue and transport for the love of a human. The modern dog continues to serve us in the water, but splash sports from dock diving to boatwork are drawing the limelight these days.

Getting a dog with the strength, ability and desire to perform an inspiring jump from a platform takes patience, planning, and progressive training — training that smartly balances safety, experience, muscle strength, flexibility, self-control, performance ability and enthusiasm. The following training program is designed to help you teach your dog to jump from a boat platform with ability and attitude.

### Before jump work is started:

- A dog should have no hesitation about joining the handler for a swim.

- Use a canine lifejacket — accidents can have long term adverse effects on your training goals and the dog's confidence.
- The dog should be healthy and rested before entering the water.
- Know your dog's limits and stop training before fatigue starts.
- Gradually build for strength, body awareness and water confidence.
- Make sure jump decks provide safe traction for lift-offs.
- Remove all throat-wear. Long lines and leashes are an unnecessary hazard.
- NEVER push or pull the dog into the water. Behavior that is volunteered reduces canine stress and fear and increases team joy, trust and confidence.

### Shore work:

1. Permit the dog exploration of three kinds of jump decks.

Photos by Deborah Lee Miller-Riley





### Lure for a jump

a) A large towable float. This is a modern day inner tube — sold at marine stores, durable enough to be towed behind speed boats. The float is used to teach tolerance for turbulence, balance, and distance from shore, relaxation and control.

b) A submergible table/platform. Used as a steady deck below the surface. Allows the dog to focus on foot position, launch posture, and strength building. Two height sizes are used. For building control and confidence a “step” height platform is used in shallow water. A taller, 36”, platform is needed to complete the jump training in deeper water. You can make your own with PVC pipes (add holes) or use an old grooming table for the tall platform and a set of concrete blocks for the short platform.

c) A row boat with a solid platform placed on the stern’s gunnels. Introducing one deck at a time, praise and toss treats for any initial curios-

ity. Encourage the dog to step up on top. Play with and feed the dog on each deck and work toward a dog who happily jumps up, sits, and downs on top. The boat is the final destination for platform jumping. If you do not have access to a boat, the other decks will teach the jump behavior and prepare the dog for an easy transition to the boat’s jump criteria.

2. Teach the dog a CUED response to boarding the float, water platform and the boat. When the dog is enthusiastically getting on the float, platform and boat, attach a cue to the behavior of boarding up. A simple “Boat-Up” cue is fine. When the dog jumps on board, mark it with a click or yes and toss the treat away from the deck. As the dog returns, give the “Boat-up” cue and mark the dog’s contact with the deck, then toss again. Play games of sending the dog to the platform for a sit or down-stay followed by a treat chase game.

**Getting a dog with the strength, ability and desire to perform an inspiring jump from a platform takes patience, planning, and progressive training**





**Building manners - all on a stay**

**Accustom the dog to boarding from different angles to learn how to balance on the buoyant object.**

3. Teach the dog a CUED response for getting off a float, water platform and a beached boat. Sit on or stand next to the platform with the dog on top and toss a treat away as you give the cue for getting off. When the dog comes back, treat for the return and give the cue for boarding up. Repeat two more times. Next, give the cue for "off", delay tossing the treat until the dog is jumping off. Throw several treats, but wait until after each has been eaten before flicking the next one. Practice.

### **Shallow water work:**

#### **1. FLOAT /BOAT**

Over the next several trials, move the float (Repeat for boat) closer to the water until it floating slightly and moves when boarded. Accustom the dog to boarding from different angles to learn how to balance on the buoyant object. Have the float/boat held so that it does not launch if the dog jumps on or off of it.

#### **2. PLATFORM**

Bring the short water platform into the water, so it is just underwater. Rehearse boarding and stepping off.

#### **3. FLOAT**

Bring the float off the shoreline so that it is free floating and line it up with the water platform so the dog can step onto the platform and then onto the float. Play in the shallow water until the dog is comfortable getting on an off the float using the water platform.

#### **4. BOAT**

With the handler positioned to move with the boat, board the dog. Pull the boat into a few feet of water and then back to shore, allowing the dog to jump off. Feed the dog treats while the boat is moving. If the dog jumps off before cued, say nothing and start over. Practice this exercise with the dog in stand, sit and down positions. Next, the handler joins the dog on the boat. Take care to pull





## Boat platform stays

the boat off the beach before the handler sits. Practice cueing the dog to sit and down while floating in water just deep enough to keep the boat free-floating. Bounce the boat a bit and feed the dog for accepting this game. Have the handler sit on the middle of the boat platform and lure the dog to a sit position next to the handler, then guide the dog to sit on the opposite side of the handler. Practice this movement with a down or sit-stay next to the handler over various durations.

### 5. FLOAT

Practice a few sit and down stays on shore. With the dog in a stay on the beach, move the float off the beach so it is free floating. Cue the dog to board. Be sure to hold the float so it does not launch away from the dog while boarding. Rehearse, stay on shore with a release to board the float on cue. Next, call the dog to board, then move the float out a short distance from shore and move it parallel to shore for a few strides. Treat while

moving. Gradually build the duration of these rides. (Do the same with the boat.)

### 6. FLOAT

Board the dog and move the float further away from shore, treat the dog for remaining relaxed on the tube, then return to shore. Gradually build for distance away from shore. Then, while away from shore and in swim depth for the handler, cue the dog to down and then sit. Reward the dog for responding to the changing cues and for remaining calm and balanced. Build the ride duration, distance from shore and focus on the swimming handler.

### 7. PLATFORM

Move the short water platform to a depth that allows the dog to swim onto the platform and stand in elbow-deep water. Call the dog onto the platform. Encourage the dog to feel the edges of the platform. Treat for staying on the platform. When

**Practice a few sit and down stays on shore. With the dog in a stay on the beach, move the float off the beach so it is free floating.**





**Reinforcing a sit on platform**

the dog is comfortable, give the “off” cue and wade toward shore. Praise and treat for the push-off while in the water. Return to shore. Next, ask the dog to push-off the platform on a course parallel to the shoreline. Mark and treat the push off. Rehearse the parallel push off in both directions. Next, ask for a push off toward open water, away from shore. Mark and reinforce for success. Train for a confident push-off in all four directions.

### **Building body awareness and strength.**

Shallow water training builds handler focus, cued directional control, confidence and the ability to move on and off the platforms. This training is fine for young dogs. Jumps from positions above the water surface, which often include great intensity, add to the risk of injury. Dogs should be physically mature and at least 18 months of age before starting jumps above the water.

1. Place a 36"-tall water platform (water table or a grooming table) in the water at a depth that permits the dog to stand on it, elbow deep in the water. This allows the dog to rehearse a fixed base push-off at a greater distance from shore. Rehearse push-offs in all directions. Practice with the handler away from the platform calling the dog off; with the handler standing next to the platform sending the dog off with a cue; and then with the handler sitting on the platform and sending the dog off. Practice each handler position with the four send directions. Have fun at this stage. When you train for performance joy, speed, strength, jump technique, and endurance will follow.

2. Adjust the water platform depth to bring the water a few inches below the dog's elbow. Rehearse the handler positions and the send directions. Gradually over a few more sessions bring the platform to depths that place the dog higher out of the water. These gradual changes teach the dog how to use his body to jump safely, confidently and powerfully on cue.

3. When the dog is jumping joyfully near the surface of the water, invite the dog onto the float and bring to a minimum three-foot water depth. With the float held in place, give the dog permission to jump. Toss reinforcement ahead of the dog. Celebrate the jump. Practice for joy.

4. Boat jumps. Begin in water at least three-feet deep to insure the dog does not hit bottom when jumping. Make sure all jumps are straight off the broadest edge of the stern based platform. With the dog on the boat's platform next to the handler, cue the jump. Handler may toss food, toys or her-



**Stepping off the shallow platform**



self into the water to celebrate the success of this jump. Avoid pulling the dog back on board the boat. Guide the dog to a water platform or restart from shore. Dogs must be trained (another lesson) to board a boat from swim depth to avoid pain or injury, which can lead to boat aversion. Rehearse jumps from either side of the handler and turn the boat to face the four directions for jumps.

5. When ready to add retrieve and delivery games, return to the submerged water platform to build solid behaviors. Working delivery games between two platforms can make training fast, easy and fun for the dog. When the dog has been taught to safely board a boat from the swim position, you are ready for boat retrieves and those impressive, skillful jumps. **DS**

**Deborah Lee Miller Riley** is the founder and director of Canine Water Sports, a sports organization dedicated to providing swim challenges for all kinds of dogs. She is also a watersports competitor, instructor and judge for Canine Water Sports and the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America. [www.caninewatersports.com](http://www.caninewatersports.com)



Getting ready for the tall platform

## Why We Train ...

- To minimize fears and maximize trust.
- To ensure safety and freedom through cooperation.
- To increase confidence through manners and domestic order.
- To provide enrichment and play for emotional wellness.
- To nourish mental and physical growth by facilitating challenges.
- To strengthen healthy social behavior and guide innate ability.
- To bear witness to moments of canine brilliance.
- To share an awareness from which love grows.

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CANINE WATER SPORTS

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