



Jack Russell Racing Safety

By Bob Franklin, CT

In the January, March and May, 1997 issues of "True Grit", there were three articles on Jack Russell racing with suggestions for making Jack Russell racing as safe as possible, description of how to set up a race track and discussion about how to organize racing as efficiently and easily as possible on race day. Copies of these articles are available through the JRTCA office.

These articles are still appropriate for race track setup and trial day organization. But, as always, the safety of our dogs still should be a paramount consideration in race track construction. Since these original articles were written, the number of injuries occurring during racing have been greatly reduced. However, over the past 6 years, there have been some excellent innovations for making our race track equipment even more safe. Adding these innovations to the safety precautions advocated in the 1997 articles will make JRT racing essentially injury free. Primary improvements have come in jump and finish barrier design and construction.

JUMP SAFETY

Safe, well designed, jumps can help racing run smoothly and greatly reduce the possibility of injury. The 1997 article describes using rounded jumps, ie: pyramids of white curtain drain pipes, white sewer pipes or round, half circle, smooth roll jumps. Best height for puppy jumps is between 6 and 8 inches and adult jumps 12 to 14 inches. The above jumps are still okay to use. BUT, development of foam rubber jumps have proven much, much safer and superior in all ways.

Making foam jumps - Visualize the cross-section of the jump as a trapezoid with the base of the trapezoid 9 inches wide, the top 4 inches wide centered exactly over the base and the height of the jump either 12 inches or 14 inches per your choice. Make the jumps as long as your race track is wide (8 to 10 feet in most cases).

Have dense, bed type foam cut to exact specifications by a foam supplier and then make a cover to exactly fit. There are small fabricators who specialize in making custom covers for trucks, boats or trailers who will make the jump covers out of tough, nylon impregnated vinyl with white being the color of preference for jumps (look in the telephone Yellow Pages under "Boat Covers, Tops & Upholstery"). A zipper must be installed along the full length of the center of the 9 inch base to enable the foam to be inserted. Two "D" rings (1 ½" or 2" rings) are attached to the very top and bottom of each end of the jumps using nylon webbing sewn to ends of the jumps

For puppies, lay jumps on sides so the 4 inch width is toward direction the puppies are approaching which makes about an 8" high jump. Fasten the "D" ring on 9 inch bottom of jump to fencing with a short piece of rope or a zip tie. When puppy races are finished, just stand the jumps up on the 9 inch base and fasten top "D" rings to the fence.

A word of caution here - sometimes the smarter terriers will start "clipping" the top of each jump since jumps waffle just enough so terriers don't fall, but the terrier gains just that much more speed. This in itself is not bad UNTIL that terrier comes up to a different, hard jump on a different race track and this "clipping" turns into a cart wheeling fall. Therefore, it is suggested that you put a ¾" PVC pipe right in the top of the jump along the 4" side to stiffen each jump slightly so terriers don't get into habit of "clipping" jumps. The foam jump is still just as safe, but the slightly more rigid top discourages such bad habits.

Hurdle spacing is important - When a series of hurdles are placed for human hurdle races or for horse in-and-out or triple jumps, the jumps/hurdles are ALWAYS uniformly spaced between jumps. This uniform spacing enables humans and horses to utilize well practiced striding between jumps/hurdles and thus greatly reduce hitting them..

Although terriers do not have such exacting striding between jumps, they do seem to fare much better with uniformly spaced jumps and the number of crashes on jumps are GREATLY REDUCED than would be the case if jumps are not uniformly placed. The best spacing seems to be 30 feet which enables 6 jumps to be used in the 75 yard track and leaves at least 30 feet at each end of the track without jumps. Anything less than 5 jumps for hurdle races makes it more of a flat race with a few obstacles rather than a true hurdle race. IF the racing judge insists on removing some of the jumps for championship run-offs, ALWAYS remove the first and last jumps and NOT EVERY OTHER JUMP. That leaves the between-jump spacing the same and will reduce the number of crashes in racing run-offs.

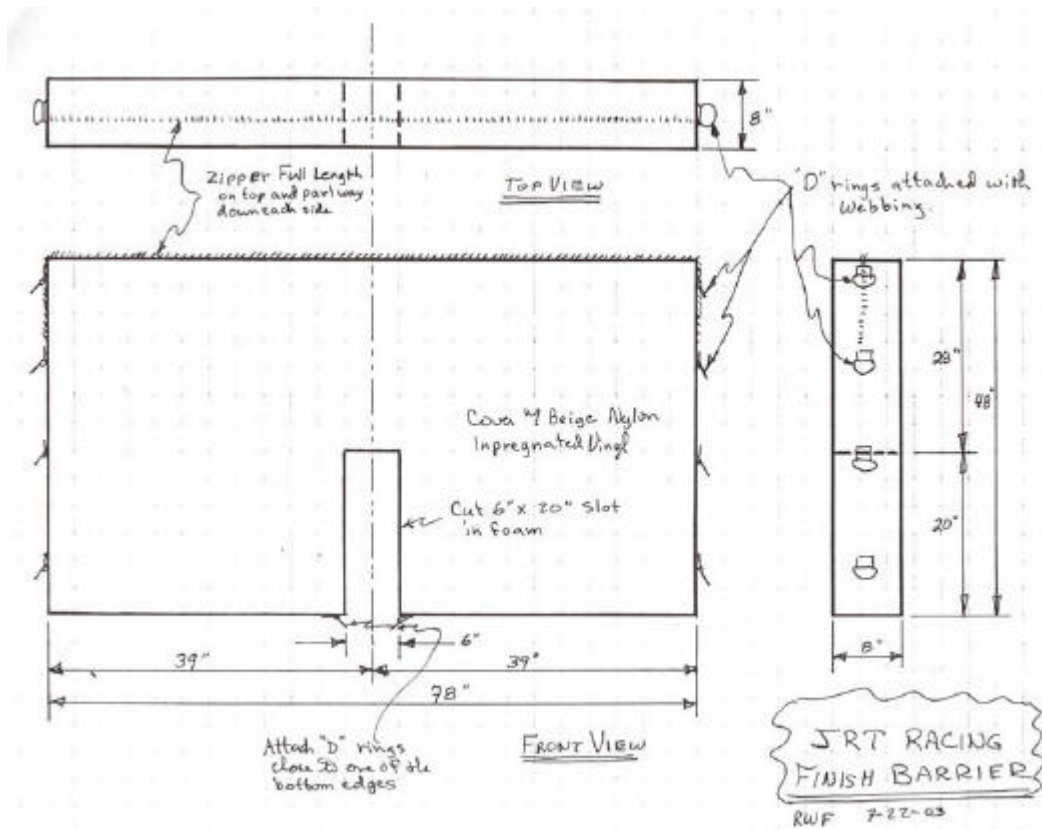
FINISH BARRIER DESIGN

Historically hay bales have been used for the JRT Racing finish barrier. Properly installed, hay bales can still be used safely and the January, 1997 article provides suggestions on how this hay bale finish barrier construction should be done. However, an unfortunate incident occurred a few years back when several dogs collided at the finish hole at the same time. It is not known exactly what happened, but it is believed that the finish hole was only 13 inches high (the height of a bale of hay). The lead dog was pushed from behind at the finish forcing his head upwards and its neck was snapped when the body was carried through but the dog's head hit the second level hay bale on the way through.

The JRTCA Racing Sub-Committee discussed this incident at great length and a major recommendation was made for racing that uses hay bales for the finish. MAKE THE FINISH HOLE AT LEAST 20 INCHES HIGH. Do this by breaking up a hay bale and use the "flakes" on top of the bottom layer of hay bales and under the 2nd layer to raise the 2nd layer 7 or 8 inches higher. Omit the flakes exactly above the finish hole and you have a much higher hole. "Flakes" are defined as the layers of hay compressed by the hay baler that can be easily separated and these flakes are usually about 4 inches thick. Horse people often define how much hay each horse gets each feeding by so many "flakes". The higher finish hole created this way should prevent any accidents like the above description from happening.

Making a Foam Finish Barrier

However, a much better (albeit more costly) way to make the finish barrier is to use dense foam. A foam finish covered with tough Vinyl, nylon impregnated fabric and with a finish hole 6 inches wide and 20 to 24 inches high makes a VERY safe finish barrier. Color of choice is beige or yellow to differentiate from the color of the hurdles. Use a light color please so the finish hole appears darker than the barrier. Get down low at terrier height and look down the track and you will see only a sea of white jumps and a white finish would only look the same



Go to foam supplier and purchase a piece of dense foam as long as you can get it (usually 76 inches or bed size) and at least 6 inches thick (but hopefully 8 inches thick). Height of the foam barrier should be 40 to 48 inches. Cut a finish hole in the very center of the bottom six inches wide and at least 20 inches high. Go back to canvas fabricator and make a cover to exactly fit the foam (forming around the finish slot) out of the nylon impregnated vinyl fabric with a zipper entirely across the top and down 6 inches or so on each side to make it possible to insert the foam.

Sew four, 2 inch "D" rings evenly spaced down each outside edge of the barrier (making sure one is at the top and another at the bottom) using nylon webbing. Put two more "D" rings underneath the finish hole (one on each side) just in case your racing judge feels you needed to help keep the hole from moving too much when several dogs come through the finish simultaneously by staking these "D" rings with "U" shaped stakes so there are no sharp edges. Drive a 6 foot long piece of 5/8" re-bar at the outside of each edge of the finish barrier and slide the edge "D" rings down over the bars to hold the barrier in place. Then make certain the

race track fencing is installed snugly against the edges of the barrier so there is no opening there. Place a bale of hay outside the track on each side next to the finish barrier to further create the image that there is no opening on each side of the finish barrier.

When several dogs arrive at the finish barrier simultaneously, the one closest to the center seems to sort of squirt through and the ones on each side bounce the center of the barrier back as much as a foot and then slide through. This type of barrier has been in use now for 4 years and works very well. Best of all no dog has even come close to being injured.

Refer to the 1997 articles for more information on race track length, race track fencing and design of the catching area. These are all important factors designed to keep our JRT racing as safe as possible. As was said in the 1997 article, "It is up to us to protect our racing buddies".