

HANDS UP



The info letter for NZ Agility JUDGES

Issue 6

This issue:

- Safety: Safe course design
- Touching the dog

Hi there,

This is an information letters for Agility judges. The aim is to provide some information and stimulate some discussion, and any/all response will be welcomed!!

The info-letters are now on the website, so feel free to read them and to pass them on to anyone else who might be interested.

Also on the website are a range of quizzes and articles of interest to judges. Go take a look!!

We will soon have a few sets of short courses that you can complete as part of the requirements for going up a level and maintaining Senior Panel status.

Regards,

Karen de Wit
NZ Agility Committee (Judges)

NZ AGILITY JUDGES EMAIL LIST.

To subscribe to this group, send an email to:
AgilityJudgesNZ-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



Renewal of Agility Judges licence.

Hopefully you have all returned your form Renewal of Agility Judges licence. It is good to be able to keep contact details of judges as up to date as possible. There will be a few alterations/updates made to the website as a result of your returns.

To date the following judges haven't responded so if you see them on the weekend please give them a reminder!

Allan Willox, Peter Lieshout, Lorin Sole, Julie Stubbs

Draft Judges Contract.

Thankyou to all those who made comments about the proposed new judges contract. Draft 2 will be out shortly for comment.

Judges seminars and short courses.

There will soon be available on the website a series of short courses that Judges can do to ensure they meet their obligations as a Judge according to the regulations.

Judges stories.

If any of you have any interesting Judging stories to tell please don't be shy to share them, we can even keep it anonymous if you like!!

DOG SAFETY from a judging point of view.

In the world of horse jumping there are definite differences from the entry level classes to the high level class including height of jump, style of course and type of jump.

In agility there are far fewer differences.

All dogs from beginner level (except Elementary in some instances) to Senior/Jumpers A jump the same height jump depending on the dog height category alone. All the obstacles look the same, the Aframe is the same height, there are 12 weave poles in Starters and above.



Vastly different jumps in the horse world!



DOG AGILITY- REGULATED DIFFERENCES.

The only variances in dog agility are:- no hoop in Elementary B, the spread and wishing well are restricted to Intermediate and Senior and Jumpers A. The seesaw is also restricted to higher level agility classes. The other restriction is the number of obstacles that are allowed, from 10 to 25 although few judges put out courses with fewer obstacles than the maximum allowed.

The main way that we can make the course easier for the beginner dog is to vary the style of the course.

USING THE RANGE IN THE REGULATIONS.

The regulations have a range in jump height. In Elementary level all the jumps should be lower than usual as this is an encouragement class for the less experienced dog which is also often less fit and heavier weight than a more seasoned agility dog. Why not consider having a few low jumps at Starters level as well?

The regulations also have a range in the number of obstacles used, but often judges use the full whack. If your course is really nice with 18 obstacles, don't feel that you have to add an extra 2 to bring it up to 20. Jumpers A does not need to have the full 25 obstacles in it either!

DOG EXPERIENCE & TIGHT TURNS.



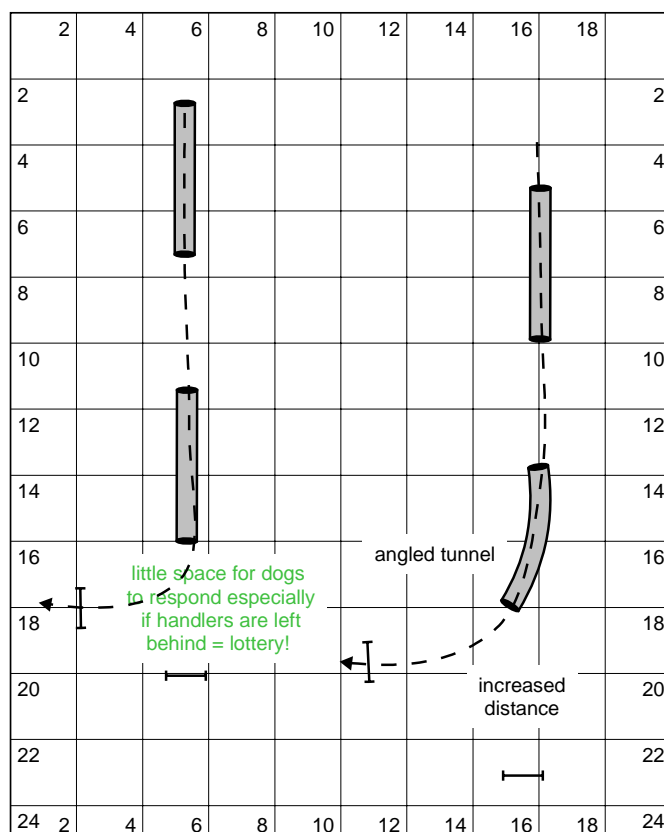
A beginner dog is still learning how to prepare its body so it can land and turn correctly after jumping, and are often not helped by late handling cues, so there should not be any tight turns involving hurdles in Elementary, Starters, Novice, and Jumpers C.

In Jumpers A and Senior there has been

a trend over recent years to add many tight turns to course plans. This is very demanding on a dog's body and continual twisting and turning causes great deal of wear and tear on their bodies. For example: Serpentine – many agility organisations regulate a minimum of 4m between each jump of the serpentine. There are a number of other challenges that can be used to create a safer course, without using multiple tight turns. You will also often find that a more open course is more challenging as the handler and dog separation causes problems in communication!

THE LOOK OF THE JUMP.

Most of our jumps are pretty standard, built by only a couple of manufacturers. In the lower classes the use of two bars is a good idea, but at the higher levels why not put in a few (or a lot) of single bar hurdles? They will add a bit of variability and make it a little harder, especially if positioned after an obstacle where the dog's head is down such as weave, tunnels and contacts.



ANGLES.

The angles on to the contact obstacles should also be straight forward at the lower levels, as the dogs have less experience in how to stabilise themselves when entering narrow obstacles like a dog-walk from an angle at speed. At the lower level the handlers are also often very new to the sport and cannot be expected to handle the dog to ensure a straight entry.

Angles of approach should also be made more gentle when weather and ground conditions are unsuitable such as wet, muddy or slick dry grass.

Even though the tunnels have padded entries there is still the potential for a stray leg to get caught where entries are closed angle. The collapsible tunnel chute will tangle, even if pegged where an acute angle is required before or after it. Repeating tunnels needs to be reconsidered especially when it is wet as they will get very slippery inside.

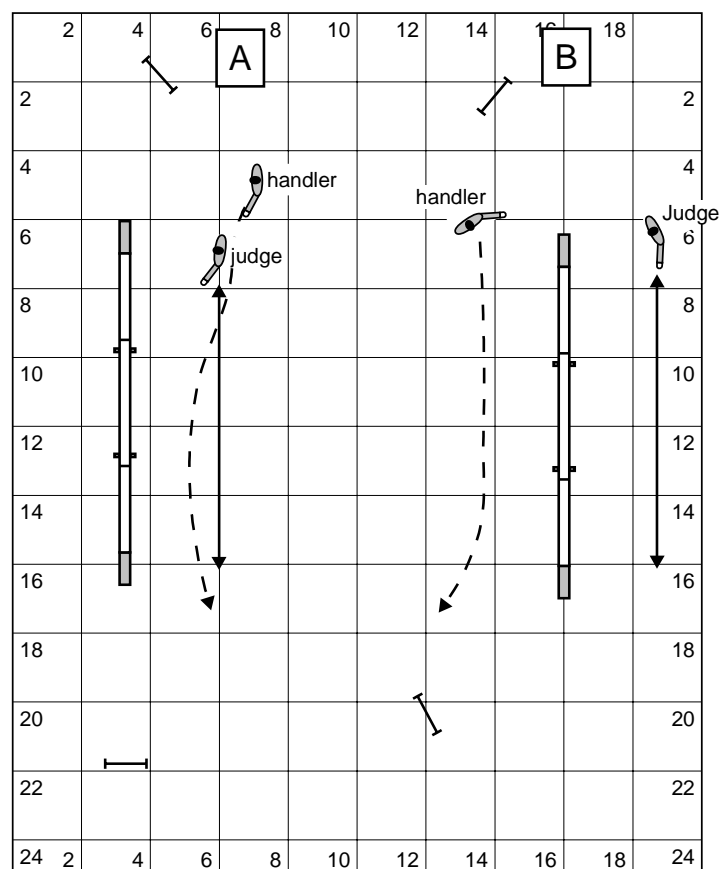
New dogs cannot be expected to be able to “hunt out” equipment so all obstacles should be on “open” angles rather than the closed angles that might be acceptable at Senior/Jumpers A level (see diagram).

SPACING.

Distances between the obstacles in a line should allow the dog time to react eg. A tunnel followed by a tyre is difficult for a new dog to handle but with experience they will find the hoop! If you set a straight line of tunnels followed by a sharp turn left or right you are asking for dogs to decelerate and should give them enough distance to do so. Even angling the tunnel exit slightly will help. Alternatively organise the obstacles leading up to this discrimination so the handler has the opportunity to show their skills and push/pull the dog in the correct direction. If you have set the course so that the handler has little hope of being there then you have set a lottery situation.



DOG STRIDE LENGTH.



You should also take into account the size and stride length of the dog. A large maxi dog which jumps 675mm will take off and land several metres each side of a jump, so placing obstacles to the side may be a safety issue too.

The weather and ground conditions should also be taken into account, it is not only rain and wet slippery grass that affects whether a course is safe or not, but brown dry grass (or scant grass surface) is also very slippery. There have been a number of examples of people and dogs being injured after competing on poor ground conditions, the worst being a broken leg.

CONFLICTING PATHS.

Another safety aspect related to course design involves thinking about where the handler might run. If this conflicts with the path the judge wishes to run, you should look at your course design.

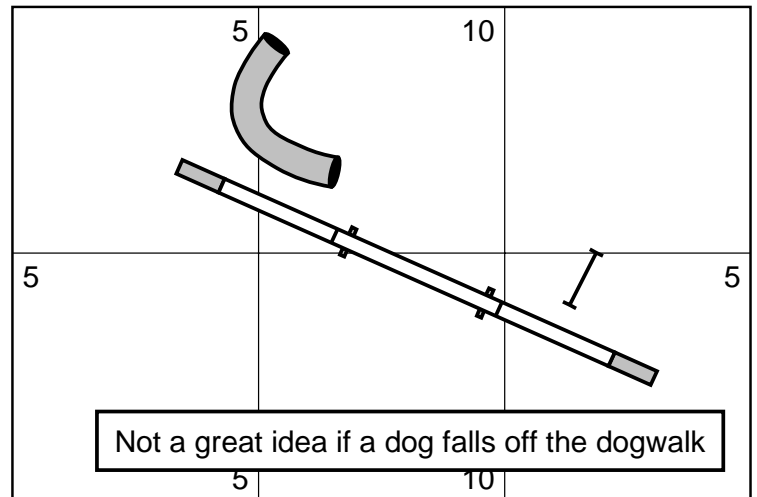
See plan (left). Path A has handler and Judge running the same lines. Path B has the judge on the opposite

side of the dogwalk, by changing the angle of the obstacles leading up to, and following the contact.

PROXIMITY OF OBSTACLES.

When you design your course be mindful of the long stride that some maxi dogs have and be careful how close you place obstacles to each other. If a large dog goes wide on a part of your course you don't want him landing on top of another jump or tunnel.

Additionally, placing obstacles near the contact ramps could cause problems if a dog fell off the ramp. Of course, it also makes it harder for the judge to get into position!



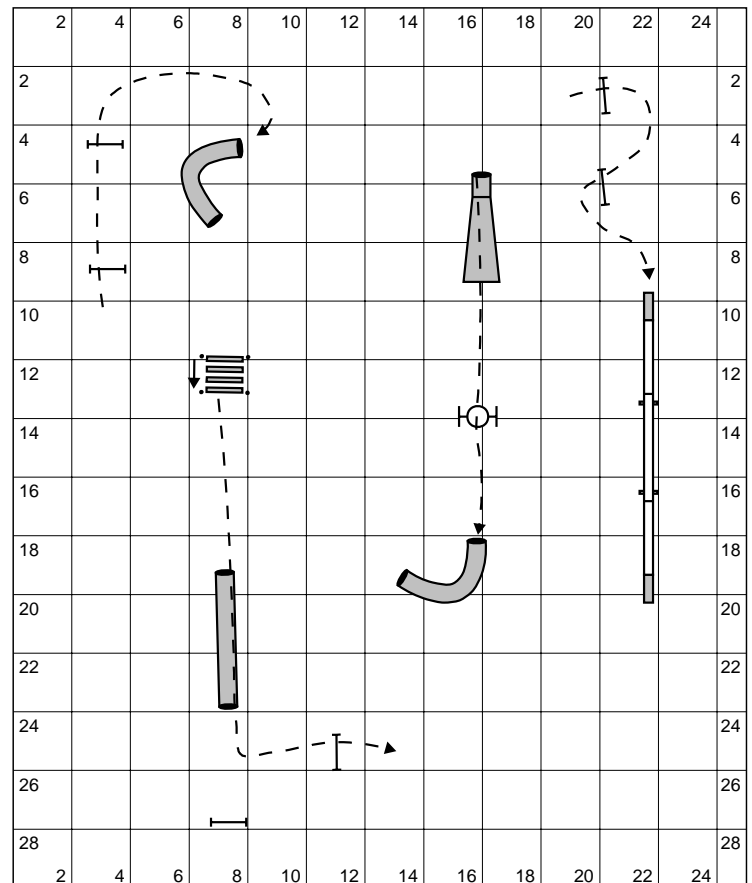
GROUND SURFACE.

Check for holes and other ground conditions that could affect the dog as it runs or takes off and lands, as well as the handler. If it is pointed out to you, don't just ignore the advice but got and look and see if you do need to move an obstacle to create better safety. Sitting a jump over a hole in the ground means no sprained ankles/carpuses on that part of the course!!

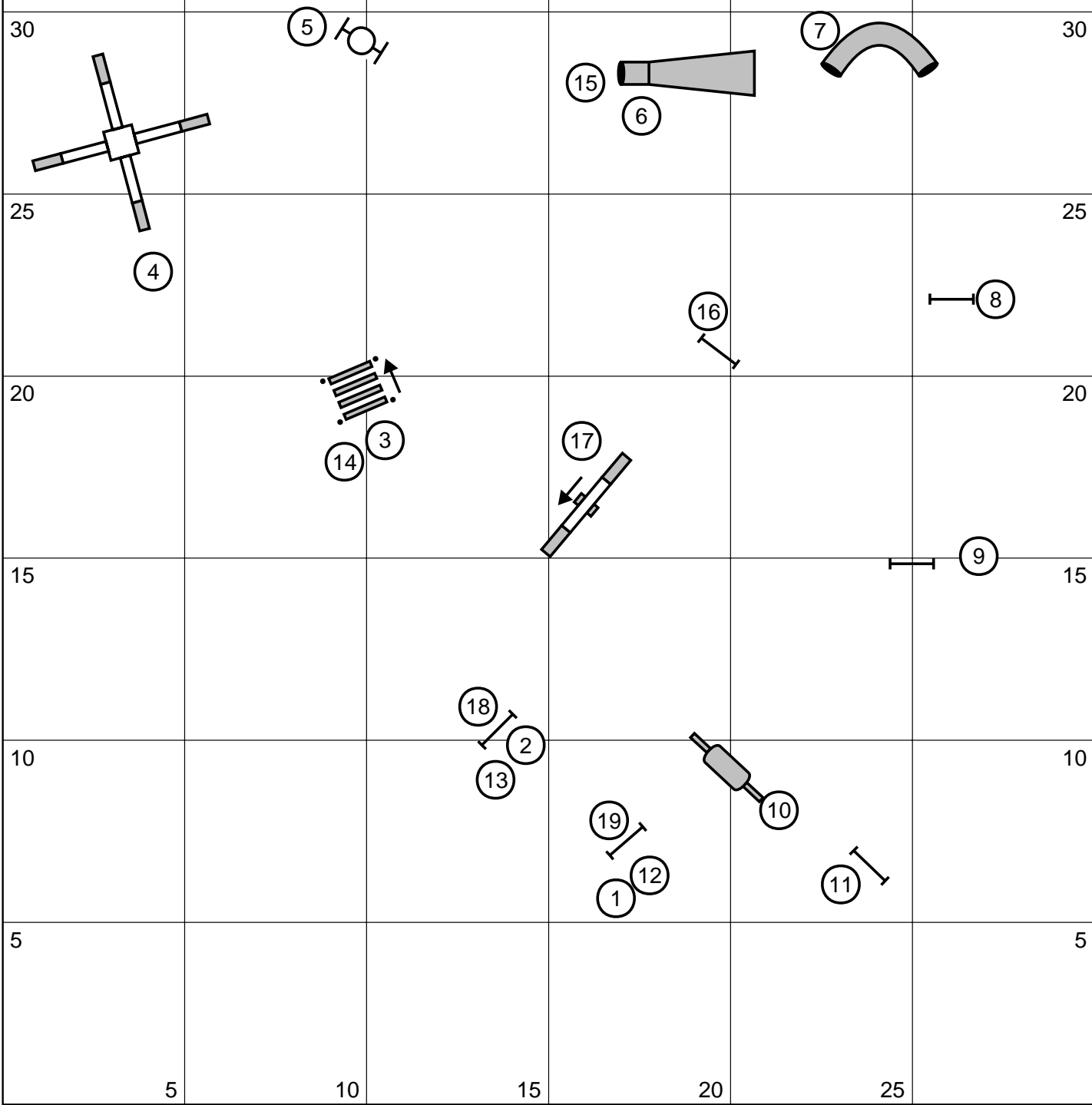
PICTURE (right). The attached diagram shows what might be acceptable for Senior/Jumpers A and what would certainly NOT be acceptable for Starters, Novice, or Jumpers C.

There have been many comments over the years about judges setting unsafe courses, so when you design your course be especially mindful of the level being judged, and at all levels be very careful not to create a situation that will lead to a dog or handler (or judge) hazard!

Consider safety as one of your priorities when designing courses and check all courses for safety before using them.



LIST the unsafe aspects that you can see on this course.
 Then decide how you would make the course safer.



Touching on the Regulations.

The regulation about touching the dog changed earlier on this year.

The regulation doesn't so much look at whether the actions of the handler were accidental or deliberate (which would be very difficult to determine anyway) but whether or not there was any gain.

For example, a handler who falls over the dog without any gain to the dog would not be penalised, however where there is gain such as prevention of an off-course the handler should be penalised.

If you set a course like the one attached and the dog bangs into the handler whilst they are moving between the obstacles, this should be judged as per regulation (b) below, if by touching the dog the handler prevented the dog from carrying on and being disqualified (which is most probable!)

13.6.4.2 Touching the Dog

13.6.4.2.1 Physical contact between the handler and dog shall incur a fault if, in the opinion of the judge, the instance of making contact was
(a) a deliberate action by the handler; or
(b) accidental, but resulted in the dog receiving an advantage that it would not have otherwise received.

13.6.4.2.2 Accidental physical contact between the handler and dog shall not be faulted where the judge deems that no advantage was received as a result of the contact.

