

Agility

Paw Blacks in Australia 2018

by Chelsea Marriner and photos by Natasha Coulter

On the 5th April, four handlers and dogs boarded a flight to Melbourne for the Australian Agility Nationals 2018. They were Kevin Burnette with Biz, Karen Morrison with Fate, Paula Beasley with Atlas, and myself with Legend (a last minute decision of mine, after poor Debbie Shute's dog Swifty was out with an injury). Also aboard were camp mother extraordinaire - Bronwen Burnette, and moral support and judge Dyson Beasley.

First up was a slightly delayed flight, and then a bit of a rental car saga. Car #1 was good and would fit our crates, car #2 had seats that wouldn't fold down. Karen had to be reminded that it was for our 'cargo' since we weren't supposed to have dogs (not made any more subtle by Paula unzipping her suitcase, and a dog bowl and Hollee Roller falling out). The company said if we came back in a couple of hours, there would be one returned by then, the same as #1. This plan B was short lived when a phone call came in to report that the vehicle had just hit a roo and sustained a fair amount of damage. Plan C was to pick one up from their depot right in the middle of the city. This excursion led to a bit of driver and GPS miscommunication, some confusion, a lot of wrong turns, even more bad language, and several trips past the Ferris Wheel (the first time we admired it, after several times later, we never wanted to see it again!). We finally collected our somewhat relieved dogs, and our adventure began.

Kevin and I were musing over the number of scratches and dings on the rental vehicles. However, once he pulled out the driveway and nearly ran straight up the backside of the car Dyson was driving,



we figured that touchy accelerators may have something to do with it! Our rentals were soon dubbed Skiddy and Squeaky, after the sound effects that went with them. One of our tourism stops was a nice lunch and wine/beer tasting session out near Mt Martha, which left the gravel driveway to the winery with a few less stones on top, after Dyson and Kevin's inner boy racer surfaced, and they let loose on the way out.

Shenanigans aside, all our dogs were to compete in the 500 height class, and the top level of agility and jumping, "Masters" (the equivalent to our Senior/A in New Zealand).





Chelsea Marriner & Legend

Friday saw us hire a paddock of gear to have a quick training session. A few noticeable differences to our gear:

- Every jump has wings and is lower than we jump here (our dogs who jump 570mm in New Zealand were jumping 500mm).
- Contact equipment is all uniform height and length.
- Tyre jump is crazy! Sometimes it's a lollipop type, sometimes drainage pipe, and sometime it breaks apart on both sides (the best option we decided).
- The seesaw is much lower than here.
- The dog walk is higher and has no slats, and
- The A frame is much lower and only slatted on the top section.

In general their contact gear is nicer than we have, but our dogs all struggled a bit with telling the seesaw and dogwalk apart, even after lots of runs.

We had entered a standard show for the weekend after we arrived, to get ourselves and our dogs used to the differences in equipment. Our plan was to enter all that we could, and scratch from what we didn't like the look of, or once our dogs had had enough. Turns out we all enjoyed ourselves too much and ran them all, which ended up about 13 runs over the weekend, a full on couple of days!

Some nice results from the first weekend were:

Saturday 7 April

Kevin and Biz: 2nd Masters Jumping, 4th Masters Jumping, 1st Novice Strategic Pairs with Legend

Chelsea and Legend: 4th Masters Jumping, 1st Novice Strategic Pairs with Biz

Karen and Fate: 1st Novice Gamblers, 1st Novice Snooker

Paula and Atlas: 6th Excellent Gamblers

Sunday 8 April

Kevin and Biz: 1st Masters Agility, 2nd Masters Agility, 4th Masters Agility, 3rd Masters Jumping, 5th Masters Jumping

Chelsea and Legend: 1st Masters Jumping

Karen and Fate: 6th Masters Jumping

Our support crew turned up before Nationals, which consisted of Libby (judging) and Jaz Ellery, Natasha Coulter, Lucinda Robertson, Michelle Jopson, Sue McKee and Kim Monaghan.

Nationals event has a 45 minute lunch break each day, even though it means sometimes we ended up running in the dark – apparently lunch takes precedence above all else in Aussie! The tyre jumps let us down in some of our nationals run, sometimes the dogs didn't even appear to sight them, and they are set in some bizarre places. Paula's dog Atlas was of the opinion that most of their courses were too simple and required at least one extra backside jump than they had (normally with the rest of her run absolutely beautiful, and receiving lots of compliments ringside). Biz held the team up the whole way through with her consistency and had lots of lovely smooth clear rounds. Fate did some nice work with some great clear rounds, and a few deviations when she wasn't in the mood for the seesaw or hoop. Legend was his typical self, full speed ahead and managing the odd good run amidst chaos. This height class has massive entries, Masters 500 Agility had about 120 dogs and Masters 500 Jumping 175 dogs. Much bigger classes with how they work their heights over there.



Karen Morrison & Fate

Saturday 14

Our Open day was postponed with stormy conditions making it unsafe to continue running, dogs were even getting blown off the contact equipment. We moved into the big indoor pavilion to await the decision of what was going to happen, they postponed and would re-evaluate at 2pm. Bronwen, Kevin and I headed back to the camping ground to await the call, and with the weather unrelenting and the day cancelled, we decided on a spot of pet shopping under cover as an alternative.

Karen and Fate managed a nice qualifying run in Open Agility before they cancelled the day!

Sunday 15

Sunday morning greeted us complete with gazebo graveyard and buckled metal crates, and winds so strong it was a challenge to stay upright at times.

This was Finals Day, a delayed start, then a break for the rain to pass, then recommenced in less than ideal conditions. We did get to run all our courses at least, and the rain and wind improved slightly as the day went on.

Kevin and Biz continued their consistency with two nice clear rounds in Open Jumping Finals and Open Agility Finals. They also had 8th in Masters Jumping Finals and a super 3rd in Masters Agility Finals – this was after a re-run the placing as they posted the same time as Simone Holt. This event was manually timed as the electronic timers weren't working properly in the rain. Libby's Agility Finals course was very exciting and had a lot of compliments.

Chelsea and Legend had a lovely run for 3rd in Masters Jumping Finals on the very cool course



Paula Beasley & Atlas

Wednesday 11 April

Chelsea and Legend: 1st Masters Jumping

Kevin and Biz: 3rd Masters Snooker/Snooker Final - this due to there only being 1 set of Games Classes.

Karen and Fate: qualifying run in Snooker

Thursday 12 April

Karen and Fate: 3rd Masters Jumping, qualifying run in Gamblers

Kevin & Biz: 8th Masters Jumping, 8th Masters Agility

Paula & Atlas: 10th Masters Agility

We tried our best for the teams event, Kev and Biz put in a lovely clear round in agility but their somewhat hooligan team mates couldn't quite follow suit!

Friday 13 April

Kevin & Biz: 3rd Masters Agility, 7th Masters Jumping, 4th Novice Strategic Pairs with Legend

Paula and Atlas: 4th place in Excellent Strategic Pairs with Megan and Edge (137 teams entered, awesome effort!)

Chelsea and Legend: 4th Novice Strategic Pairs with Biz. Dare I say we had a solid plan for our pairs, and it would have been flawless except Ledge dropped the spread jump and Biz had to come over and correct it, which cost us lots of time!

of Libby's. The Aussies reckoned it was one of the best Masters Jumping 500 Finals they had seen, the course and the quality of the dogs made for some stunning runs.

All in all, a fantastic experience amongst awesome company, with lots of laughs and good memories along the way. All our dogs did us proud and we put some of the Aussie's firmly in their place!

A few thanks to be made:

- Malcolm at Admor Promotions for our very smart uniforms that got lots of comments.
- Sue at Woofa Wares for our team leads.
- Tim from The Flag Shop Ltd for the cool PawBlacks flag and decorative bunting.
- Genevieve at Pet Transport for organising our dogs to get to Melbourne in the first place.
- Natasha Coulter for the stunning photos, all photo credits go to her!
- Paula for her hard work in getting our dogs' flights, paperwork etc sorted.
- Bronwen for being a super efficient camp mother and keeping us all on our toes.
- Team mates, Kiwi judges, supporters and our hard working dogs for making Melbourne 2018 the epic adventure that it was!