

A Spectator's Guide to Dog Agility

WHAT IS DOG AGILITY?

It's a sport in which a dog runs through a timed obstacle course as directed by the handler. Agility training strengthens the bond between dog and handler, and provides fun and exercise for both. An agility event is held most weekends around NZ. To find out when and where these are being held go to the website www.dogaqility.org.nz

WHAT HAPPENS AT AN EVENT?

The Event Area is set up.

The event area comprises one to four rings, marked by a rope. At one end of the ring will be a second roped area - the assembly area where the next competitor to run will be waiting and where each competitor finishes, rewards their dog and puts the lead back on. There will also be a tent or a building where the administration for the event will take place. In addition there may be sponsors tents or marquees, especially in summer! Many competitors will set up their tents and Motor-homes around the rings.

The Course is set up.

The members of the club and other helpers will set up the course as per the scale plan provided by the Judge. Once the equipment is placed the judge will inspect the layout and make any minor changes, after which the equipment will be pegged down. The course is then measured with a measuring wheel and the judge sets a standard course time based on the level of the class and the equipment used.

The Course is Walked.

When the Judge is happy with the course, the handlers "walk the course". They do this as a group, without their dogs, following the numbers to become familiar with how the course goes. Most handlers try to walk the course as many times as they can in the time allotted, to plan their strategy. You may see handlers during a course walk actually running the course with an imaginary dog, giving the commands as they would during

their competing round. Or other handlers gather in little groups and discuss potential problem spots and how they are going to handle them. The Course walk is usually limited to 5 - 10 minutes, then the course is cleared and the competition can begin.



The Competition.

A board is placed near the start of the course which has a list of all the competitors in order. Sometimes the order changes, especially if the competitors are running more than one dog and competing in more than one ring. The dogs run the course individually, off leash. The handler begins when the Judge and scrimmer are ready. The electronic timer (which is placed beside the first and last jumps) starts as soon as the dog crosses the beam and stops when the dog crosses the finish. As each dog runs, the judge indicates the faults (by using hand signals), which are noted on a sheet of paper by the "scrimmer." At the completion of the round, the scrimmer writes down the dog's time, and all this information is then conveyed to a whiteboard for everyone to view, and then to the Event Scorer who enters the results into a computer. At the end of the class they will print off clear round certificates for those without any faults, and the order of placings.

The Prizegiving.

At the end of the day the competitors all gather around as the list of winners is announced. The club will provide ribbons to placegetters, and prizes as well. Often the Club sponsor will provide dog food or additional awards. Sometimes there are trophies for the top dogs at a particular level. All those who went clear on the course (no course penalties or time faults) will get a cardboard clear round certificate. In NZ there is a

tradition of wetting those who gain their Agility Champion titles - people will pour multiple buckets of water over the "lucky" person or they might get transported to a nearby stream for a celebratory dunking!!

TYPES OF OBSTACLES.

On the agility course, you will see a variety of obstacles.

- **Jumps** - Most of the jumps are simple bar jumps, some with colorful and decorative wings holding up the bars, spread hurdle(s), brush jump and the hoop jump. Each type of jump is set at the proper height for each class, determined by the height of the dog at the shoulders. Dogs must clear the full height of the jump without knocking a bar off.
- **Tunnels** - Tunnels are long open tubes that may be set in bends.
- **Contact Obstacles** - The contact obstacles, so called because of the different coloured "contact area" at each end, consist of the A-frame, the dogwalk, crossover and the see-saw. To perform these obstacles correctly, the dog must get at least one paw in each contact area when they descend the obstacle. The contact area rule is for safety.
- **Weave Poles** - There may be 6-12 poles set in a straight line. The dog must enter to the right of the first pole and zig-zag through to the end. They must not miss a pole.

THE RULES.

Agility has a set of rules that govern the actions of the dog and the handler and penalties include faults, refusals and elimination. Faults occur if the handler touches the dog or an obstacle while on course, or if the dog displaces a jump bar, misses a contact area; misses a weave pole, or exceeds the amount of time set by the judge for running the course. A refusal occurs if the dog runs past an obstacle. An elimination occurs if the dog runs the wrong course, or toilets in the ring



LEVELS OF AGILITY.

There are three types of Agility - standard Agility, Jumpers and Games. Agility has four levels - Starters, (for beginners, no contact obstacles), Novice, Intermediate, and Senior. Jumpers and Games have 3 levels - A, B, C (for beginners). As you would expect, the courses and the rules get harder as you move up.

There are five different height divisions - 240's, 320's, 380's, 500's and 600's and many of the obstacles will be altered for the different sized dogs.

WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM YOU AS A SPECTATOR?

Please remember that there will be many dogs around, and that many people will be busy getting ready for their turn. However you will find that most people are more than happy to talk to you about their dogs and the sport of agility.

- Before you reach out to pet a dog, always ask the owner/handler FIRST. Please especially be sure your children observe this rule. Please supervise your children at all times.
- Feel free to sit or stand ringside and observe, but please remember to stay back a reasonable distance from the ring itself, and away from ring entrances and exits.
- Don't stand too close to the ring edge if eating - you might find that the dog competing in the ring would like to share your food!!
- Feel free to clap and cheer the dogs on, and show your appreciation at the end of a particularly good or entertaining run.
- It is against the rules for spectators to assist or coach the handler/dog team by, for example, yelling out the correct obstacle order from the sidelines. It is also not appropriate to shout the dog's name, since this would distract the dog from the handler's commands.

Article written by Karen de Wit (updated 2020 to reflect new heights),

If you would like to go and watch an agility competition or train your dog to do agility go to the website www.dogaqility.org.nz for a list of Clubs near you.