

Agility

Course Design: making dogs smile

Supplied by Rosemarie Baker, rjbagility2020@gmail.com



Justine with Paddy, Glen & Broc.

A beautiful day dawns as we all set out to walk our first course of the weekend.

"Yeah, this judge runs a small dog."

"What were they thinking when they designed this?"

"Who annoyed them before they came up with this idea?"

These are all questions I have heard while people are walking courses. So what does motivate a judge when designing a course?

For me there are a few factors that influence my course design.

Mostly when designing courses I do think about what I would enjoy to run with my dog. This is why we all do Agility: we want to have fun with our dogs. Seriously, we can not be in it for the prize money?

As a judge my favourite thing while standing in the middle of the ring, is watching the dogs smile as they have fun flying around a course.

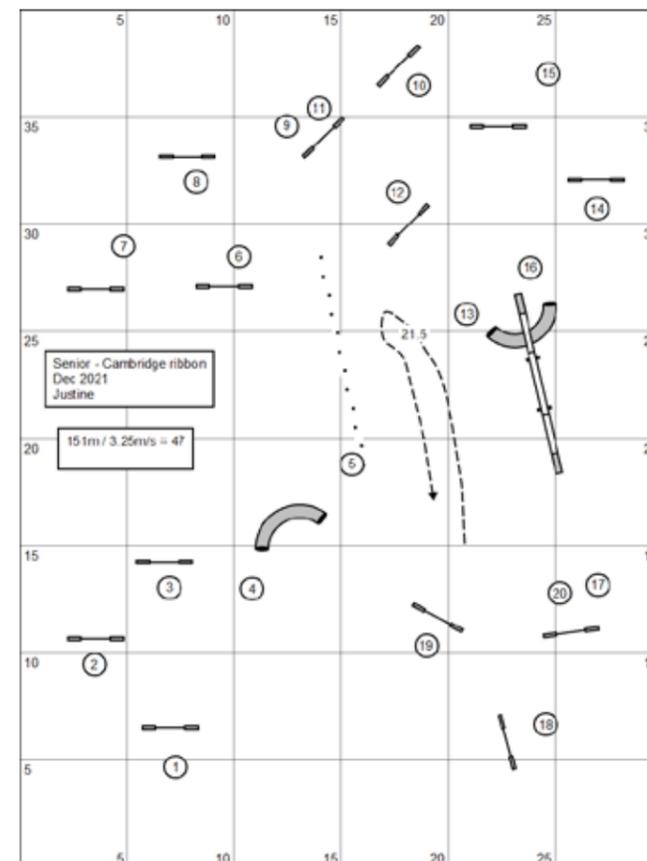
This is my ultimate goal when I design a course. If I can see some dogs smile I feel my design is a success. This does not mean that I do not put challenges into my courses. They are usually subtle little things that if you lose your connection with your dog will cause some heartache.

Did You Know?

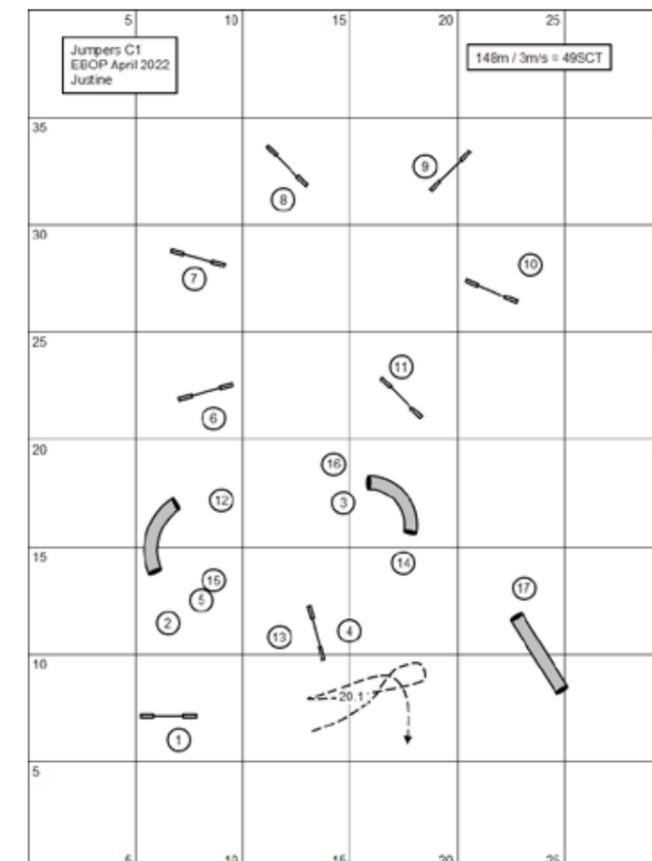
What is/isn't permitted in the ring when competing: www.dogagility.org.nz/cont/regulations.html

There are other factors that have an impact on my course design as well, including the following:

- Knowing there will be around about 250 dogs in a course (in the middle of a North Island summer) will mean I try for a judging line that doesn't involve too much running.
- When my course is the last run of a very big weekend, I try for a shorter lead out start. Always best to try to save a few seconds per run.
- Course nesting. Yes, it's very helpful for course builders on the day, but sometimes this does change my usual style.
- Even the best laid course plans can come undone when torrential rain causes havoc with grounds. A beautiful course can get pulled to pieces as you try to redesign something that is safe for dogs and handlers in the space left.
 - Placement of the main judging obstacles so I get the best view is always a consideration. I need to have the best view at the show for weaves, contacts and tunnel entrances.



Best judging view in the house.



Tunnel fun.

- My judging line is always a consideration as well. Best not line myself up to run into the end of the see-saw. Also best to keep out of the handler's way.
- I try to keep attending handling seminars as well, and yes doing so will have an impact on my course design. As I learn new or different ways to handle challenges I include these in courses I design as well.
- Those who have run my courses also know a major consideration for me is how 'can we do that tunnel again?'. I do love tunnels. They can help to change directions. They are very hard to knock down. They are a great way to keep dogs moving. This is also another little test to check you can reconnect with your dog.
- Some clubs send you a gear list, indicating the only obstacles you have to use. This is great to know before you get there

and have to redesign things on the day because a piece of equipment isn't there or is no longer available to be used. But sometimes when this is all the equipment you have, you do try to use it all. Not always my finest course.

- Achievability. I want challenges for each level but being able to run freely. Sometimes it may not seem like it. But I do want to give out lots of clear rounds. Our sport is about being fast and clear. So if we get lots of clear, you have to go faster to win. Good luck!

This is just a little summary of some of the things that go through my mind as I sit down to work out how to put 20 obstacles in a sequence, so you all can have 30 seconds of fun.

So next time you are walking a course, just smile and see if you can have as much fun as your dog. 🐾

Justine Dale



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