

What is Agility ?

In short, Agility is a sport in which a dog runs through a timed obstacle course under the guidance of the handler. Agility training strengthens the bond between dog and handler, and provides fun and exercise for both.

History of Agility - King of Dog Sports

Where it Began - The idea of agility was born in 1977 when Crufts Dog Show needed something to fill up spare time in the main arena between the end of the obedience championships and the start of the group breed judging. Various dog training demonstrations were held over the years, some of which included dog jumping. The new demonstration had to be a nice to see test and it should be suited to the hard Olympia floor. The main idea of a dog jumping competition is based on the show jumping of horses. Some people put their heads together and they came out with a test based on vast practical dog training knowledge and experience in working trials. Main factors that had to be kept in mind were : that it should be fun, without being dangerous and it should have to amuse spectators. They built the equipment. Another club was contacted to form a second team of four dogs and they all helped each other with training ideas and modifications to equipment. And so the base was laid for the agility we know now.

Today, Agility enjoys enormous popularity in Britain, with well-attended competitions every weekend during the show season. The larger events draw thousands of competitors and attract huge, appreciative audiences - many competitions are now even televised. This enthusiasm for Agility has spread to virtually all of Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand, followed by the USA in 1986, making Agility a truly international dog sport.

Agility in Canada - Agility roots were planted in Canada by our own Art Newman, of North Gower, Ontario, in 1988, with the founding of the Agility Dog Association of Canada (Now called the Agility Association of Canada - AAC). Agility clubs are now firmly established in all major centres in Canada, and many smaller outlying areas.

Training Methods

ADSC uses operant training methods including clicker. Praise, toys and food are used to motivate the dogs from puppy stages through the advanced levels of training. Dogs are always encouraged to perform obstacles and never forced.

Safe equipment which meets the standards set forth by the Agility Association of Canada is used for training. All the equipment is fully adjustable to introduce new dogs to the obstacles to build confidence and basic understanding of executing the obstacles. In addition, the club has miscellaneous equipment used to help improve the dogs coordination like wooden ladders, hoops, wobble boards and small ramps.

Puppies and Agility

Agility puppy training can start with dogs as young as 4 to 5 months! Granted, it doesn't really LOOK like agility at first. There's a lot of playing and silliness - but really, at any level of training, isn't that what agility should be for our dogs? FUN! Puppy agility NEVER physically stresses little puppy bones; so our young dogs don't do any real jumping. They step over small cavaletties that are only a couple of inches off the ground. We do a lot of target work to teach them to work away at a young age. Target work also helps our puppies to have excellent contact control! Puppies LOVE running through the tunnels (usually chasing each other or a ball!). And we do basic commands that help them to go DOWN on the table QUICKLY! The puppies even learn correct weave pole entry, using a touch stick!

Puppies are so eager to learn and so happy to please. They really pick things up quickly. But the key to a successful training session is to keep the lessons SHORT and POSITIVE (kind of like their instructor!). We also employ lots of rewards, from special food treats to toys and games (and lots of hugs). Once a puppy figures out an obstacle, they've GOT IT! And agility training works WONDERS for improving confidence in a shy puppy. The other huge benefit is the socialization these puppies are getting with each other; in fact, I think they look forward to the play sessions the most!

The Equipment

Jumps - Each type of jump is set at the proper height for each class, determined by the height of the dog at the withers (shoulders). Dogs must clear the full height of the jump without knocking a bar off.



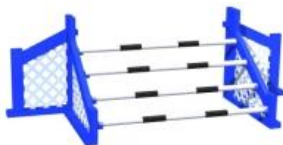
Standard Jump



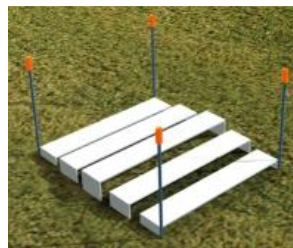
Wing Jump



Double Jump



Spread Jump



Long Jump



Tire Jump

Tunnels - There are two types of tunnels, open tunnels which are long flexible open tubes; and closed tunnels or "chutes", which are open at one end and have a collapsed fabric tube at the other.



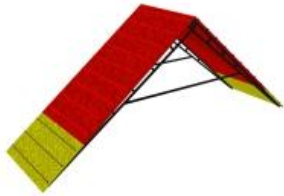
Standard Tunnel



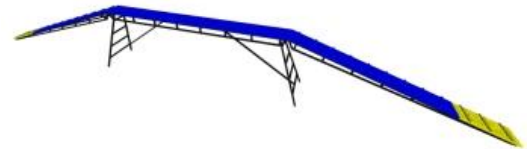
Chute

Contact Obstacles - The contact obstacles, named because of the yellow "contact zones" at each end. To perform these obstacles correctly, the dog must get at least one paw in each contact zone on the See Saw and in the down contact zones on the remaining obstacles. The revised contact zone rule is for safety considerations.

For training purposes all of the contact equipment is adjustable except the cross-over



A-Frame



Dogwalk



See-Saw



Cross-Over

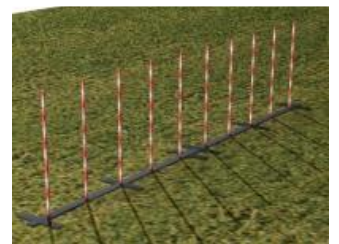
Weave Poles - The dog must enter to the right of the first pole and zig-zag through to the end. They must not miss a pole.



Puppy Weave Poles

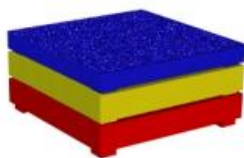


Slanted Weave Poles

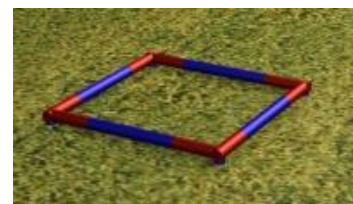


Standard Weave Poles

Pause Table / box - The dog must land on the table or in the box and assume a down position for a count of five seconds.



Pause Table



Pause Box

What Happens at a Trial ?

Judge's Briefing - When the course has been set up, the handlers gather together for a "judge's briefing" where the judge summarizes how the class is judged.

Walk the Course - After the judges briefing, handlers only (no dogs) are allowed to walk the course. Handlers walk the course to familiarize themselves with the layout and flow of the obstacles. Most handlers will walk or run the course several times looking for potential challenges for themselves and their dogs. Based on their previous experiences, handlers will plan their own strategy to handle the challenges set forth by the judge.

The Competition Runs - Agility dogs run their courses naked (no collar and no lead) to prevent hooking a collar or catching a leash on a piece of equipment and having it come crashing down. The Judge usually tells the handler when they may begin the course. The Timer starts the stopwatch as soon as any part of the dog crosses the start line and stops when any part of the dog crosses the finish line. Sitting next to the timekeeper is a Scribe who records any faults the dog may have which have been signaled by the judge with hand signals or by voice. Once a run is completed the timekeeper shows the scribe the stopwatch and watches as the scribe records the correct digital read on the scribe sheet. The scribe sheet is then taken by a runner to the score tent for final calculation. Final scores are then posted for competitors to view their placement and if their round earned them a qualifying leg towards an agility title.

The Judge - Each judge designs unique courses for each event run. The same course is never used twice. The judge is responsible for monitoring the final setup of the course ensuring it matches their layout and finally measures the course for an accurate yardage to determine the standard course time (SCT). Judges are dedicated agility enthusiasts who spend upwards of 8 hours at a given trial carefully scrutinizing each competitive team as they maneuver their way through the maze of obstacles.

Faults - Common course faults include: missing a contact zone, incorrect weave entry, non-completion of an obstacle, off course (taking an obstacle out of sequence), knocking a bar off, leaving the table before the judges count of 5, and exceeding the time allowed for completing the course.

The Events

Standard - courses must include jumps, all 3 contact obstacles, weave poles, the table, the flexible tunnel and chute. The number of obstacles increases with the level of competition. It demonstrates the overall ability of the dogs to perform all the obstacles.

Gamblers - the object of Gamblers is to successfully complete as many obstacles as possible within a set time allowed in an opening sequence. The obstacles each receive a different point value, common values are jumps, 1 point, tire and tunnels are 2 points, contact 3 points, weave 3 to 5 points. The opening sequence expires with blow of a whistle, at which point the handler has a shorter set time to complete a closing sequence. This final sequence or "gamble" must be done with the handler remaining outside a prescribed area usually outlined with rope or tape and within the time allowed. A minimum number of points are required, in addition to the successful completion of the gamble within time for a leg to be earned.

Jumpers - is composed of jumps, tires, tunnels, and chutes. This game is probably the most popular event by many competitor and spectators alike. It involves excellent handling skills and real teamwork. The pace is fast and furious with twisted flows and potential chances for off course penalties at every turn.

Team Relay (2 dogs) - designed to demonstrate team spirit, strategy and sportsmanship. Relay involves a course layout similar to standard agility. The course is divided in sections and each dog on the team is selected by the team members to run a specified section. All team members must run clean and under the time allowed to earn a qualifying leg. Upon completing their respective section, the handlers passes a baton in a specified area to allow the next handler to continue on the next section. Failure to pass the baton in the specified area results in elimination.

Snooker - is base on the British game of Billiards. There are two separate sequences. The opening sequence requires the handler to perform one of 3 or 4 designated (red) jumps followed by an obstacle of choice, and repeat this pattern at least twice more, a third time is an option left to the judges discretion and outlined in the briefing. The closing sequence requires the dog to follow the obstacles numbered 2 to 7. The game is based on points accumulated and as long as the dog has reached or surpassed the required point level, a qualifying score will be earned.