

## **Organized Dog Activities**

Maybe you're looking for something you and your dog can do together that's a little more organized, and perhaps a bit more competitive. There are a variety of organized activities that you and your dog can participate in together, including the following:

### **Agility**

Agility is a team sport, pairing up a dog and his owner. During an agility competition, competitors direct their dogs through obstacle courses, attempting to show off their training and dog-handling skills by finishing with the fastest time. Agility courses are designed by agility judges, using guidelines from the sponsoring organization. As a team improves and progresses to new skill levels, the courses become increasingly challenging.

### **Dancing**

Dog dancing, often referred to as canine musical freestyle, is a relatively new addition to the dog sporting world. It combines obedience with dancing to highlight the relationship between dog and handler. In competition, a routine set to music is performed, with the dog performing various movements in response to the handler's interpretation of the music through different body motions. In most cases, both the handler and the dog wear costumes.

### **Dog Shows**

Basically defined, a dog show is an event where dogs are judged on how closely they conform to their breed standard. Dogs are divided into different classes (puppy 6 to 9 months, puppy 9 to 12 months, 12 to 18 months, novice, American bred, bred-by-exhibitor, and open). Within the classes, the dogs are divided by sex, with males only competing against other males, and females only competing against other females. Ribbons are given to the winners in each class, who then compete against each other to become the Winners Dog, a title that earns the dog points toward a championship.

If you purchased your dog from a breeder, she probably discussed with you whether or not your puppy was potentially show quality. If a dog is show quality, he has no disqualifying faults and otherwise conforms to the breed standard. Show dogs also should have a real personality—dogs that play to the crowd and really seem to “ask for the win” can easily win over a judge. If you think your dog might make a good show dog, ask a breeder or someone else who knows dogs

to evaluate him and make sure he has show dog potential. If not, there are certainly other dog activities he can participate in, and dogs that aren't show quality still make wonderful pets!

## Fly Ball

Flyball consists of relay teams of four dogs and their owners who compete against other teams. One dog (per team) at a time runs through a course, jumping hurdles and triggering a machine that spits out a tennis ball. The dog catches the ball and reverses the course. Once the first dog finishes the course, the next dog takes a turn. The team that finishes first wins.

A naturally fast and agile dog would be a great Flyball competitor—and a love of tennis balls would certainly help!

## Flying Disc

Dogs love a good game of Flying Disc (Frisbee) as much as any human. This game is becoming increasingly popular, and flying discs are now available in all different sizes and materials. There are also special training techniques for puppies that make it easier for them to play at a young age. Competitions are available on a variety of different levels.

## Obedience

Obedience competitions test the ability of the dog and the owner to work together. Some skills required for obedience competitions include retrieving, scent discrimination, coming to heel, and hand signals. The great thing about obedience competitions is that every dog can go home a winner, because the trials include scored exercises where your dog is really only competing with himself.

Obedience training is foundational for all organized canine sports. If a dog does not have a competence in obedience, he will be unsuccessful in agility, tracking, and other sports.

## Rally

Rally is a sport in which the dog and handler complete a course that has been designed by the rally judge. The judge tells the handler to begin, and the dog and handler proceed at their own pace through a course of designated stations (10 - 20, depending on the level). Each of these stations has a sign providing instructions regarding the next skill that is to be performed. Scoring is not as rigorous as traditional obedience.

Unlimited communication from the handler to the dog is to be encouraged and not penalized. Unless otherwise specified in these Regulations, handlers are permitted to talk, praise, encourage, clap their hands, pat their legs, or use any verbal means of encouragement. Multiple commands and/or signals using one or both arms and hands are allowed; the handler's arms need not be maintained in any particular position at any time. The handler may not touch the dog or make physical corrections. At any time during the performance, loud or harsh commands or intimidating signals will be penalized.

Rally provides a link from the Canine Good Citizen® (CGC) program to obedience or agility competition, both for dogs and handlers. In addition, rally promotes fun and enjoyment for dogs at all levels of competition.

## Tracking

Tracking events test a dog's ability to follow a scent. A competitor must locate items, retrieve them, and bring them to the judges. Small terriers and scenthounds are usually best suited for this event, due to their keen sense of smell.

All you will need to get started is a harness and a tracking lead (between 20 and 40 feet long) and either a large yard or some other open area where you can lay out tracks. It's possible to be your dog's tracking trainer, but you may want an experienced trainer to help you get started to avoid having to retrain him at all. Once your dog is ready for tracking competitions, there are several levels of tracking, determined by the number of turns in the track, the length of the trail, and several other things. There are several titles available for dogs that excel in this sport.