

Beginner's Guide

Agility



What is Agility?

Agility is a competition where the dog's fitness and the handler's ability to train and direct the dog over and through certain obstacles are tested. Agility competitions are run against the clock so the fastest time with no faults wins! The setting of a reasonable course time, together with the careful design of the course allows the dog and handler to show their skill at control and speed.

Beforehand

Go and watch. It is a good idea to attend some Agility shows to just watch what goes on. There is usually an Agility show every weekend so there should be one near to you soon. For details of shows get in contact with either your local Dog Training club or the NZKC (contact details on the next page).

Show organisers are happy to have spectators and you will usually find lots of competitors happy to explain the sport to you.

A Suitable Dog

Before training a dog to do Agility it is important to check that it is physically able to do what you are going to ask of it. Providing that it is not overweight, most dogs can cope, but if there is any doubt, ask an experienced trainer.

Three different maximum jump heights are used according to the size of the dog. These are grouped into three basic sizes; Mini, Midi and Maxi.

Age of Dog

Dogs under 18 months are not allowed to compete, but some training can be done much earlier. Your trainer will be able to advise you about this.

Training Agility

The New Zealand Kennel Club can give you a contact for your local dog training club. There are large numbers of clubs training Agility. Many of the clubs will insist that your dog does a basic obedience training course before allowing Agility training.

If you do not train with a club, attending a training day is definitely something that you should do. The YKC holds training events which give you a chance to train with other YKC members.

You do need some control before starting Agility. Socialising with other dogs and people and ensuring that your dog comes to you when called, will avoid your dog becoming a problem at Agility classes.

Agility dogs work off the lead, so the dog must do as it is told. Some Agility clubs have waiting lists to join. There may also be a private training organisation local to you, but this may cost slightly more. If you have problems finding somewhere to train, ask your YKC Agility Coordinator for advice.

It is a good idea to attend a training day with one of the top handlers if you get the opportunity. There are also some great books and videos on agility.

If you join the National Agility Link Association (see contacts below) you can loan these for free.

Registration

Dogs must be New Zealand Kennel Club registered to compete at Open and Championship Shows. If your dog isn't a pedigree you can register them on the obedience register which means they can compete in all agility and obedience competitions.

Your First Show

If you are training with a club, the trainer and other members will advise you which shows to enter and will probably suggest that, as several of the club members will be going, you will have lots of people to help you.

Types of Shows

Club events

Your club may hold club days or interclub days with other local clubs. These are a great opportunity to 'have a go' and find out what it's like to run a real course!

Club days are also a good opportunity to learn about the various aspects involved with running a show. You can learn how to time events, scribe and write up the scoreboard.



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Ribbon Days

These shows are also good for getting started in agility competitions. The four standard classes and often one or more novelty events will be run. When you are getting started you will be eligible for competing in Elementary, Starters and Novice classes. Novelty classes are open for all unless specified otherwise.

Open

The next step up from ribbon trials. Some of these shows are for specific breeds eg German Shepherds. The schedule for these competitions can be found in the NZKC gazette or on the NZKC website. These competitions must be entered prior to the show.

Championship

In Agility, this is highest level of show. Shows are advertised in the NZKC gazette and must be entered by post before the show. There will usually be two to four shows run in the same weekend so each dog can run up to 8 times.

At the Shows

Arrive early. First ensure that your dog is exercised, has a drink, and then leave it safe while you go and find your competition number at the registration table. You can order your own copy of the show catalogue when you send your entries in for Open and Championship shows, although there is a charge for this. Now you

Checklist for your first show

- ✓ A good pair of shoes with reasonable grip on grass; touch shoes are great for agility
- ✓ number holder or safety pin for holding your number card
- ✓ Suitable clothing according to weather eg sunblock, sunhat, wet weather gear (a spare pair of socks is also handy)
- ✓ for your dog; water, water bowl, bedding, crate, leads collar, shade cover, food, toys etc

should go and find the rings that you will be running in. The class running order will be displayed by the ring. Look for your number here and watch for when your turn comes up.

Before the class begins, the handlers walk the course. Please note, dogs are not allowed in the ring except when competing. Do not tie your dog to the ring ropes, as it may get into trouble trying to get to you. Firstly, just walk around, following the numbers, learn where to go. Then walk it again visualising where you will be and deciding what side of the obstacles you want to go. If you have time, walk it several times but do not forget that you may have more than one course to walk.

If you get the opportunity to walk the course with your trainer or another experienced club member even better as they will be able to discuss various features of the course with you.

When it is your turn, walk calmly to the start. Remove your dog's collar and lead. Remember that you must not carry anything in the ring, so bum bags, toys, etc, must be left OUTSIDE THE RING. At most shows, a steward will take your collar and lead to the finish ready for you. Wait to be told by the timer or scribe/timer to go in your own time but once given the OK, do not delay. Try to keep calm and whatever happens, be nice to your dog. Most errors are due to handlers.

For further information about shows:

New Zealand Kennel Club,
Phone (04) 237 4489, fax (04) 237 0721

<http://www.nzkc.org.nz/calendar.html>

Further Information

For further information, please contact the NZKC Young Kennel Club office at:

New Zealand Kennel Club,
Prosser Street, Private Bag 50903, Porirua 6220
Phone (04) 237 4489, fax (04) 237 0721

<http://www.nzkc.org.nz/>

National Agility Link Association
<http://www.nala.org.nz>

Library Enquiries:

Diana Bird, 85 Fox St,
Hamilton East
Email: library@nala.org.nz

Recommended Reading

Agility is Fun by Ruth Hobday

Teaching Agility Peter Lewis and John Gilbert

Videos

Susan Garrett's One jump DVD

Agility Foundation Training 1 Greg Derrett

Great Dog Shame about the handler 1 Greg Derrett

