

What the devil is Rally Working trials and other fascinating questions!!



Now some of you might have heard of British Working Trials where dogs compete in nosework exercises such as tracking and searching, agility and obedience but the problem with this sport is that it is not only very competitive but also there are many advanced exercises that have to be trained before you can even think about competing at the most elementary level.

For instance at the entry level, if you want the qualification Companion Dog Excellent (CDex) the dog has to do all of the exercises below to a high standard:

Heel on lead

Heel free

Recall to front and finish to heel

Sendaway (usually around 50 yards)

Retrieve a dumbbell

Search to find and retrieve 3 small articles hidden in a 15 yard area

Sit stay 2 minutes handlers out of sight

Down stay 10 minutes handlers out of sight

Vertical scale jump (6 feet high for any dog over 15 inches at the shoulder)

3 feet hurdle (clear jump)

9 foot long (broad) jump

As you move up through the levels they add tracking and the exercises get progressively harder.

Hmmm no wonder Working trials, from having a huge following in the UK in the 80's is now slowly dying a death with dwindling numbers and fewer people running working trials training classes.

The other problem is that the exercises, although interesting when Working trials began, have become very outdated. For example there is still the requirement for dogs that compete above the basic level to have to do an exercise called Steadiness to Gunshot. Strange in a country where you cannot legally own a handgun but guess what judges use to test the dogs.....that's correct ....a handgun!! Now granted the gun is usually no more than a starting pistol but it is still a handgun albeit incapable of actually firing a real projectile.

So what was needed was a change that looked at the CONCEPT of training exercises that may be more useful for owners, and even the communities in which they live. It also needed to be FUN (remember that in competition dog training?)

Now we already have Rally Obedience and, while there is nothing wrong with this it is still errr OBEDIENCE.

So Rally working trials has been born, pioneered by a group of hardy dog enthusiasts in a remote field near an equestrian centre in bonny Scotland organised by Darcregan Dog Training, where many handlers braved the weather and introduced the world to a new fun way to train a dog and even get a title.

The beauty of the event is that there are no rules!! Please do not come up with some or it will no longer be Rally Working Trials. We included elements from several types of working trials and even obedience exercises but in a new format which is similar in style to rally obedience but there is the world of difference.

For example, at the second Rally Working Trials event in Wisconsin, organised by Moongazer Dog Training, we dispensed with competition heelwork, you know, the dog wrapped around your legs while you do a funny walk type of heelwork. We replaced this by asking the handler to hold a cup of water in the hand that they held the dogs lead in and walk 100 yards along the road. The marks that they obtained were in proportion to how much water they had left in the cup. This was for the Bronze level. For the Silver level the same exercise but with TWO full cups of water, both held in the same hand as the lead. At the end of this section the handler had to place one cup on the ground and empty the other cup into the one on the ground. If the water overflowed then you got the full ten points available. If the cup did not overflow then you got no points at all.

We included a retrieve a toy instead of a dumbbell but you had to be sat on a chair when the article was thrown. The dog had to retrieve it to hand without the handler rising from the chair.

We also included a seek back where an article is dropped during a lead walk and, after walking on for many paces the dog has to be turned around and asked to seek back to find and lost article. At the bronze level you could drop anything you wanted for the dog to find.

At the silver level you had to place three small balls 15 feet away while the dog was in a stay. After returning to the dog it had to be sent to retrieve two out of the three balls.

The twist for the gold level was that the dog had to retrieve the handlers choice of either a large dog biscuit INTACT or a raw egg. At the gold level there was also a Speak on Command requiring ten barks.

We include clear and long jumps plus the scale at the silver and gold level but only one way and not at a height of 6 feet.

At one point in the course dogs could be asked to retrieve the owner's shoe. Those that failed had to complete the rest of the course with just one shoe.

The course is laid out for each level and signs are placed at each of the stations which let the handlers know what the dog is required to do. And can include any practical exercise from any dog sport. The handlers then walk the course to memorise what is required and then each attempts to complete the course with the least faults. The whole round is timed and in the event of two dogs finishing on equal marks then the fastest time wins.

There are no set rules on how many stations that are presented on the course and no set rules on how it is judged or what the stations are as long as they include some agility, basic control and nosework (scenting) exercises.

At the Rally Working Trials in Wisconsin all dogs took part in a 1,000 metre rotation track and each had to find a certain number of articles in order to qualify in the various levels. What were the articles that the dog had to find? Assorted pens, flashlights, lottery tickets, notepads etc all of which they got to keep.

Remember that the emphasis is on having FUN so any competitor not doing so should be severely penalised by the judge!

The sight of a wonderfully playful Pit Bull Terrier running around the field shaking its handlers designer boot instead of retrieving it to hand had the whole group, including the owner, laughing hysterically. Also Emma the Labrador going out to retrieve the ball that her owner had thrown but then with ball in mouth she decided to continue to the next station by herself and do the sendaway with her owner still sat on the chair at the previous station. Priceless!

If you are interested in learning more then you will need to contact some of the wonderful group of dogs and handlers who have already taken part.

For the record, the first dog in the world to gain the gold level at the inaugural event in Scotland was Indra, a German Shepherd. The event was then repeated in Wisconsin where Ryuk, another German Shepherd won the gold level test with Shiloh, a mixed breed gaining gold and finishing second.

So history has been made .....are you up to the challenge????