

RALLY OBEDIENCE –

A New Performance Event!

As of January 1st, the AKC began offering titling classes in a new performance venue called Rally Obedience. Simply stated, Rally is a more relaxed form of obedience competition that includes many “doodling” type heeling exercises. Agility enthusiasts immediately understand Rally because a Rally “course” can be compared to an Agility course in that you follow a numbered sequence of exercises or “stations,” and each course is different. Like Agility, the handler is allowed to walk the course beforehand to familiarize themselves with the path.

The fun part is that the handler is allowed to talk to, repeat commands, clap their hands and encourage their canine teammate during the entire course, working at their own, brisk speed. They begin on the judge’s “forward” command, heeling between stations, stopping at each station to perform the exercise indicated, then continuing on through to the Finish sign. Even seasoned obedience competitors are finding their way into the Rally Ring!

Scoring is based upon 100 being a perfect score, with a minimum of 70 points needed to qualify. Deductions are much looser than in traditional Obedience – the general rule of thumb being if the error would be a 1/2 point deduction in traditional obedience classes, it is a zero deduction in Rally. One point errors are scored as such though. You are allowed to re-try stations (a 3 point re-try deduction), and it is only 10 points off if you perform an exercise incorrectly. To encourage briskness in the ring, time has been introduced and it is used to break ties.

There are three levels of Rally in which titles may be earned - three qualifying scores being required at each level before moving up. Novice (RN) is where everyone starts, then one moves up to the off leash classes – Advanced (RA) and Excellent (RE). At each level, additional stations/exercises are introduced; with the level of difficulty increasing proportionately. On average, about 16 stations are included in a course.

Some fun stations are: *Call Front Finish Right Forward*. In that exercise, the handler stops his forward heeling, takes a couple of steps back and the dog comes in to front position and sits. The handler then finishes the dog to the right, without a sit at heel and continues heeling to the next station. Another is *Straight Figure 8 Weave Twice*. This exercise requires that the team heel between four cones in a zig zag pattern, turn and repeat, back to the first cone. At the higher levels, a fun exercise is the *OffSet Figure 8* where food bowls are put out filled with tempting treats and the team must heel around and through this temptation, often with hilarious results! Sometimes Rally is harder for the Handler than the Dog - especially when they miss a sign! We can’t blame *that* on the dog, now can we!

The AKC has introduced Rally as a stepping-stone to the traditional Novice, Open and Utility Obedience program, as a relaxed way for new people to enter the world of dogs. When the Rally team moves over to the regular obedience classes, they will feel less intimidated and more confident with this “ring experience” under their belt. As a matter of fact, when a team earns Rally titles at all three levels, one will have trained a very nice working dog!

I feel the AKC has a winner on their hands and would like to recommend and suggest that we all encourage this new sport to our club members, our puppy buyers and others. Have FUN in Rally!

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