

Dog Agility – the true sport for dogs

Pamela Hunt

Some of you who remember me would be aware that I live with Pembroke Welsh Corgis, a result of having one as a child when they were a very popular breed – but now they are considered endangered! I do enjoy the company of these dogs. When working in Education, walking them was sometimes a definite sanity saving activity!

Upon retirement I had two that passed on early in my retirement. I replaced one with Sam Corgi in 2006. Well, what a different Corgi he was! While people talk of working Border Collies, Sam certainly was a working Corgi!

Upon taking him to Puppy School, where he rounded up most of the other participants from Border Collies to German Shepherds, the vet conducting the school suggested he needed more and that I should take him to obedience classes at a nearby Dog School. He passed through all levels of Obedience, but it was obvious he needed something more active – he was enjoying chasing kangaroos in the nature park behind my house and found logs to jump over and a large concrete tunnel to run through. So, I enrolled him in Dog Agility in 2009.



Sam as a puppy

Dog Agility is a dog sport, started around 1990 in Australia and it possibly came about from Horse Show Jumping. In Agility the titles are Novice, Excellent, Open, Masters and this year has seen an Elite Level introduced. Dogs achieving Masters and Elite titles accrue points toward Championship Titles.



Sam works his way through the twelve poles

Agility has five types of events: Agility, Jumping, Gamblers, Snooker and Strategic Pairs. The equipment available includes jumps (with and without wings), broad jumps, spread hurdles (two jumps joined together), hoops, tunnels, dog walks (three planks joined together about 1200mm off the ground), A frame (two planks joined at the top), see-saw and twelve weaving poles in a straight line. There is a time set for a course and to get a qualification towards a title a dog needs a clean run within the time set. At the different levels they need to get a number of qualifications, e.g. for Novice Agility 5 qualifications and Masters Agility 7 qualifications.

Many people commence training thinking their dog will start trialling soon. However, on average it takes 12-18 months for a dog to learn the equipment and more importantly, for the handler to learn the skills needed to handle a dog in a trial.

Sam (who at the beginning had many people laugh at the idea of a Corgi doing Agility) proved them wrong and when he retired, he was regarded as a 'Super Little Radio Dog'. I could send him out, along and over equipment and meet him elsewhere, and this saved my knee which was giving up. If you ever attend an Agility Trial, the majority of dogs entered are Border Collies but there are people like me who persevere with other breeds with success!



Sam in the tunnel

After a few years of trialling, I trained to become an instructor at my Dog Club – I mostly take Beginners or Excellent/Masters. In 2018 I became an Agility and Jumping Judge as Sam (who made Masters level) was retired.

Joe, my next Corgi, told me he was 'Royal' and didn't do such work, while Izy, my latest Corgi, hurt her back and even though she had a few Novice titles to her credit I wasn't sure she'd recover enough to trial again. However she has, and now is very accurate but very slow at Excellent Level. At her last trial she was 0.05 of a second over time (we use electronic gates), but if it had been hand-held stop watches she probably would have made time!



Izy takes on the A-frame challenge

So, in conclusion, Sam Corgi got me into doing Agility and I very much enjoy it – I think it is the challenge it presents – working out how to best run a course with your dog and now setting courses for others. I had to study and pass practical and theory courses to be eligible to judge. The Australian National Kennel Council (ANKC) has rules about equipment, courses and levels. These change every few years, so one needs to keep on top of it.

Agility has certainly made me bond closer with my dogs, I learnt so much about them and what motivates them! Possibly more importantly, I have met some wonderful people doing this sport. I often am amazed at the people involved – uni lecturers, lawyers, public servants, retirees, defence personnel, custom officers, engineers – and it gives them an outlet from their other lives. I wish I'd found it when I was younger and fitter!

Contributor details

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Pamela was a principal from 1990-2002 at a number of schools – Aria Park Central School, Balranald Central School, Braidwood Central School and Bombala High School. She served on the NSWSPC Executive and was awarded Life Membership in 2002. Since retiring she has involved herself in Dog Performance Sports, Croquet and travelling extensively from Greenland to Ethiopia and many places in-between.