



Kiwi Dog Agility

'THE NEWBIE'

I have been asked to write a small article on being a newbie in the world of Dog Agility. Just a little background. I started my Tui in obedience at 1 year old and was told on the second night that I needed to get control of my dog.

Well, those words have sent me on a journey to where a few weekends ago, I attempted my first Agility show. Not where I thought I was headed with her.

Along the way I have had lots of advice and encouraging words from those at my club and from those I have met at Breed shows, Obedience shows and that first day at Kumeu Northwest Agility ribbon show and the following show at Cambridge/Wag Agility Ribbon Show.

What I would really like to say is how it has felt. I have grown to love the experience. Grown from it all but not without a few hurdles along the way. Unless you know a few people within the Breed, Obedience or Agility world, the progression could be a real nightmare. I am a tenacious person and am driven and inspired by the top handlers within their field, but thinking about the whole picture, any other newbie would have given up.

So, this asks the question - How many people does the sport lose? I know others ask that question, as one group commented, how there were so many newbies years ago and not so many these days. Why, you ask? A newbie is like a child going to his/her first day of school. New dog, new rules and none of them written down to easily refer to, well, none that make a lot of sense anyway. Maybe an A4 page with a few basic guidelines on the table would be a good thing for us newbies when you enter. Just a suggestion.

I tend to think school was easier than this. Just like school we all learn in our own time. And remember, we were at school 6 hours a day, 5 days a week.. But with a dog you can't always spend that precious time with your dog, as life's reality is always knocking at your door.

If I had one cent for the number of times I have been told 'Oh, I've been in the sport X amount of years (usually 20) and have forgotten what it's like to be a newbie' I could buy a lotto ticket. Not that that fazes me. I just know I hit the jackpot once again. To me, the information out of those minds is more valuable than the D on my score sheet. Now that brings to mind someone asking me if I was American, as I was saying 'D.Q', which was more an American term, than Agility PC apparently.

Having a dog that was not toy driven, was also a worry for me as the newbie. I had to find a trainer that would work with me on that. I love watching the handlers play with their dogs at the show, but I have a dog

that has only just learnt to retrieve a ball and to her, a treat is far more important than that rope or ball. Great that my trainer says "Whatever works for you." Tui worked without treats at Cambridge. What a step up that was. And she ran without her collar, or was the collar just comfort thing for me, the handler. I know I have fun telling Non dog people that you run naked at Agility. You sure get some looks.

Back to that first show. Another interesting thing was, I only entered 2 events. Someone who was kind enough to share their time asked me, what had I entered and then told me "enter as much as you could. It's all experience". But what could I enter. I hardly knew what was on offer. The words Elementary, Starters, NAC and Starters Jumpers were not common everyday terms to me and those weaves were on the back of my mind as it is on any newbies mind. I was surprised at the number of other newbies who mentioned while waiting in the entry que that this was their first day. Did I look like someone who knew anything? I started to wonder if the Chinese whispers happen within this sport as I was being asked by newbies what was what. Being only 6mths in the sport and telling newbies what little I know, now that is scary. I think they suffer nerves just like me. Never mind, you take the good from the day and work on it. Back to school.

Well just as praise for good behaviour encourages the confidence in your dog, encouragement of the handler is just as important. This can be from the trainer or from those within the training group and at shows. Information is important whether it be about training or entering an event. There is a difference if you want to enter a ribbon show to a champ show if you haven't got a breed dog. Yes I had joined the Kennel Club but still it all seemed gobble-de-gook to me. Back to school and more questions. Suggestion: Don't e-mail the kennel club. Ring them to get the information and forms to list a non breed dog in Agility. They were lovely and I got the papers with a personal note on how. Bonus.

Just as training is important, so is diet. Yourself and the dog, as I have found out, now I have to run faster. No one told me about that. Now that 'wait' I thought I had, has suddenly turned into a pressure switch. Happens when you least expect it but before you know it, you're standing at jump 2 and the dog is at jump 4. Oops. Back to school. This is where straight line running happened. I would be in front until the dog caught me. You know what? You're really lucky if your dog runs fast as you don't have to go so far. Out of breath and thinking I should have trained that dog to chase a toy or fetch. Then again, if you watch the seniors, some of them don't say much to their dogs in the ring. They don't move round much either. How does that happen? Back to school.

E-mail groups was the next thing. Getting involved in one or just getting into one. Well that wasn't too hard at all. But seems like I've got to learn a lot more. Names? There is no class for this, I guess it's just travel round the shows and talk to people. But then they talk about stuff, and I'm not sure what it's about??? Back to school more questions.

As a newbie sometimes we fail to ask questions because we don't want to look dumb and sometimes we don't ask because we don't want to embarrass ourselves and look dumb. Please if you run into a newbie, ask them how their day is going and ask them if they need any help with the endless questions that run through their minds. Remember they are just like a new kid at school. I know I haven't stopped thinking about the why and what of this wonderful pastime. I look forward to my next show and see how the top guns do it and run my Beardie, Tui.



I would like to acknowledge those that have helped me thus far, had a little faith and encouraged me to go for it. You know who you are. Thanks heaps. Can't finish without a little bit from the dog.

Tui's version of the tale.

Ok we're at the start. Do I have to wait that longggggg. Nah not gonna. I'm off, Tyre, jump, jump, tunnel. What the hell does she think she's doing? Where are you? I'm over here at jump 4. I'm here you silly woman and where's my treat. But wait I'll just go over there and talk to the people outside the ring and see how they think I'm doing. They were friendly. Back to business. Weave, weave, jump, tunnel. Geez woman, I'm at the finish and where are you? Finally you're here. What took you so long? Now where's my treat?

**Cheers everyone Dianne and Tui
Dianne Western**

Diane is a member of Rotorua Dog Obedience Club. I requested she write something to give some insight into what it feels like to be a brand new handler in today's NZ Agility world. I am also Diane's trainer.

Steve Chester

So what do I stand for? Well nothing really. I don't believe a committee member should have preconceived agendas. The committee serves the interests of its members, and communication is the key to this. I would bring to the table a balanced and well researched head, willing to listen to all sides and make what I would consider a fair decision. This is not to say that I don't have specific interests and these would be Judges issues and the NDTA, and it is these sub committees I would be interested in working more closely for.



**Steve
Chester**

Candidates Corner



**Susan
Tansey**

The NZKC Agility Committee needs members who can offer many things. Having been in the agility world for more than 20 years, I feel I can offer experience. As a Senior judge for more than 15 years, and also one who frequently judges, I also feel that I can offer a perspective from a judge's point of view. However this is not always what is needed. As a competitor I have competed to the Senior level, but currently have a dog in Starters, so I feel I am in tune with new comers as well as the experienced crew. As an owner of maxi and a midi dog, I also feel in tune with the issues of height classes, as well. As a frequent agility traveler to both the North Island (approximately 5 times a year as a judge and competitor) as well as a very well travelled competitor and judge in the South Island, I feel I will be available to a wide geographical contingent of agiliteers, who may wish to have their opinions heard and conveyed.

Of course as a mother, I also have an interest in juniors competing in agility. A committee needs good administration as well, and over the years I have been the Zone 4 Rep and I am currently the South Island Deputy Regional Obedience Rep (a position that I will step down from this year). These roles involved frequent meetings, paper organization and also conveying committee decisions to members as well as receiving feedback. I have also been on many successful NDTA and National Dog Show committees as well as representing in our zone team several times, and have an interest in the organization of these National events (so much so that I am currently advising the Dunedin 2009 committee). As an obedience competitor, I am keen to maintain good relationships with this code, while maintaining agility's very separate identity.

I have been involved in Agility for about 18 years, or at least so long I am no longer sure! In that time I have had dogs ranging from an Agility Champion to the downright difficult and have done just about every job in Agility from Senior Judge to jump picker upper.

I was elected onto the current committee in late 2008 to fill a vacancy caused by a member's resignation and have found the job challenging but worthwhile & I am therefore standing again.

The major items I see as important for the incoming committee are;

Pace of change

I believe that we have made important changes in the last 2 years and that consolidating, and if necessary, refining them, is crucial. We should therefore only be making major changes which are urgent, in the next couple of years.

Democracy & Representation

My strong belief is that the agility community should be fully involved in all important decisions, rather than electing a committee who then make all the decisions with some undefined consultation with the community. The process of consultation should be clearly documented & defined and all processes should be as open & transparent as possible.

Specific Issues

Splitting Heights - This issue does need to be addressed. I don't see an easy solution as even mini owners are divided as to whether splitting Minis off is a good idea. The only approach I can see working is for a set of possible options to be developed, refined and then voted on by the whole community.

Support at club level

I would like to see an emphasis on building up a national structure to help support clubs, which are still the fundamental building blocks of Agility. The smaller clubs, at least, often struggle to survive and I believe a support structure could help a lot.

It is very difficult to fit everything in this small space, if you would like to know more about how I would like the Agility committee to proceed for the next couple of years, please visit my website http://www.webjam.com/why_vote_for_me or feel free to email me at schester@value.net.nz