



# KiwiDogAgility

## IFCS World Championship Judging

by Allan Rohde



I was at work when I got an unexpected phone call from Steve Chester, who was at the time the chairperson of the Agility Committee. He asked if I would be interested in judging at the International Federation of Cynological Sports (IFCS) World Agility Championship in Italy. It took me all of two microseconds to say I would definitely be interested. He explained that New Zealand had been asked to nominate a judge for the event and that the Agility Committee had decided to offer me the opportunity. This was a very exciting opportunity that I don't think any New Zealand judge would turn down, and I wasn't about to let it slip by me either.

A few days later I was contacted by Steve Drinkwater, the president of the IFCS. He provided me with more details of the event. It was being held from 9–12 April 2015 at the Cowboy Guest Ranch in Voghera, Italy. Initially there were to be three judges doing three events each but later this changed to four judges, Anton Kudrin from Russia (three events), Arnaldo Benini from Italy (two events), Wim Bekendam from Netherlands (one event), and myself from little ole NZ (three events). The events consisted of agility (x3), jumpers (x3), gamblers, snooker, and a team relay. As I did not have a lot of experience with judging the games, I was allocated two jumpers and one agility event.

Having agreed to judge at the event, planning for the trip needed to start. At the time there were a few kiwis thinking about making the trip to the competition but this dwindled down to just myself and Fiona Ferrar. Fiona and I agreed to travel together which I was grateful for. Fiona is a lot more organised than myself so made the planning stage of the trip a lot easier for me. Our final plan was to travel via Dubai where we would spend a few days before flying on to Milan, Italy. There we would pick up a rental vehicle and drive the hour or so to the venue in Voghera. After the event we planned to visit Venice for a few days before heading back to Milan where I would head home and here Fiona would continue on with her overseas expedition.

As part of my preparation I had to study up on the IFCS rules for the event and design my courses. Fortunately the rules were similar to ours so there were only a few things to be mindful of. One of

those was that no collars were allowed while competing. I did have occasion to disqualify one dog at the event for a transgression against this rule, which was surprising at this level. Another difference was with the long jump/spread jumps where the rules stated "should be situated in a way which allows the sportsman to provide a relatively straight approach". As far as distances went it was no different than any other jump other than "More than 4 metres should be considered after..." which from what I observed on some of the courses wasn't being adhered to. One course had the dog doing a right angle turn immediately after the long jump. In New Zealand we are supposed to provide a minimum 6 metres straight run before and after these obstacles.

Some other differences worth noting were refusals, course design, start procedures, review system and practice equipment. Although refusals were written basically the same as in the New Zealand regulations, the application was different. Apparently the norm in Europe was that the dog should be within 2 metres of the obstacle before a turn away would be considered a refusal. Anything further back was just considered time wasting. At the judges meeting it was agreed to call refusals this way. This was the area that I had most trouble with applying in the ring as in New Zealand we could call a refusal from further back than the 2 metres. Out of my three courses I judged, there were three review requests for refusals I had given. One I decided to change my call on as the dogs was further away than the 2 metres and the other two I left as is, which the chief judge supported.

Course design was a little different as we were only allowed to have 20 obstacles (up to 25 here). I found this a little limiting as I would get to obstacle #20 when designing my courses and then still want a couple extra to finish of the course. Distances between obstacles were also a little different with a recommendation of 5–7 metres and the preference was for less than 7 metres between obstacles. In the months leading up to the event I included combinations in my courses that I thought would be good for the event. However, when it came to actually designing my IFCS courses with these combinations in, I sometimes had to spread things out a little more



which often made the challenges easier to do. One thing I did find useful was that I have a group who train each week at my place so I was able to set up some combinations, and in one case, a whole course, to see how it would run. I was then able to fine tune things as we went. All courses had to be submitted for review to ensure they were within the rules, which is when I found out that the shorter distances between obstacles were preferred. I had one combination where you did a jump, went past the next jump and then into a tunnel. The distance was probably about 9–10 metres from the first jump to the tunnel which did not meet the expectations so I ended up having to redesign that part of the course. My other two courses were fine.

The starting procedure was a lot more formal than we have in New Zealand. Competitors were advised not to start until the judge had blown his whistle. That way no dogs should be start before the judge was ready. To enforce this, they had a helper walk out in front of the first jump until the whistle was blown. Even with these procedures being used throughout the competition, I still had one competitor start before I blew my whistle, but that person ended up going off course at an early obstacle so disqualified themselves before I got to do so for the early start. Although this practice prevented dogs (all but one) from starting before the judge was ready, it did add extra time to the starts. I don't think there is any real benefit in adopting such a system here. Educating competitors not to start early as we do now seems to work quite well. We do see a few early starts here but they are a very small in number compared to the number of runs we see. As an example, I judge around 4,500 runs a year and I could count on one hand the number of early starts I encounter.

The one thing that impressed me while I was at the competition was their review system. Not so much the fact that teams could review any decision but more the systems they had to do the reviewing with. There were four cameras mounted around the ring which gave them the ability to record almost all situations. These fed to one screen where all four camera images showed at once. They could then review these images either collectively or individually. The review process had a number of steps to it. The first was that a formal request to review a decision would be lodged by the team manager. This had to be done within 30 minutes of the last dog being judged. At that point the chief judge would review the video footage and from there two paths that were followed. These were:

- Where the chief judge agreed with the judge's call, he would advise the team manager accordingly. The team manager then had the choice of accepting that decision (which most did) or to review the video footage themselves. If they chose the latter and still disagreed with the call, the chief judge would review the footage again with the President of the IFCS and/or the judge concerned. The decision after this would be final.
- Where the chief judge thought there was some doubt on the call, he would review the video footage with the judge. The

judge had the chance to either overturn their call or to stick with it. Again, the decision would be conveyed to the team manager. If it wasn't the decision they wanted then they had the opportunity to review the footage themselves.

I had four reviews of my calls and with the exception of one refusal call which I chose to overturn on review, they all stood as originally called. The most interesting review I saw over the course of the competition was with regards to a dog's time. A review was lodged because the official time recorded was a few seconds longer than someone had recorded on their video. They were using electronic timers so this review seemed highly unlikely to succeed. However, when the video footage was reviewed, it was deemed the official time was wrong. I still don't know how that came about but to me to allow reviews on a dog's time is heading down a dangerous path.

The other thing with the competition that is quite different from ours is the access to warm up/practice jumps. In New Zealand these are often made available to competitors and a number of people bring their own jumps to shows, but for the IFCS competition, no practice jumps were allowed to be used except for three jumps that were situated in the starting area by the ring. These jumps were placed there in the morning and competitors were not allowed to move them at all. I don't know if this a normal practice at IFCS shows but I would not want to see something like that appear here.

As far as the competitors went, there were some very good handler/dog combinations as well as some average combinations. I thought that our top handler/dog combinations would not be out of place against the combinations there, although they were a lot more consistent compared to us. The Russian team were definitely a step above the rest. Their use of verbal commands was amazing at times with some very tricky manoeuvres being completed on verbal commands alone. The Japanese were notable for their use of rear crosses a lot of the time. One thing that I did notice was that handlers were often hell bent on getting in a front cross which I am guessing is working on the basis that keeping ahead of your dog will keep it moving quicker. However, I often saw the handlers not getting into position early enough causing the dog to overshoot the obstacle before turning back to it. I think a little more use of rear crosses would have been beneficial in a lot of these situations.

I thought the organisation of the event as far as judges were concerned could have been done a lot better. I won't go into specifics but as a judge, our own shows like the NZDAC look after the judges much better. Having said that, I still thoroughly enjoyed being part of the event. It was great to see all the competitors getting into the spirit of things at the prize givings.

So it was a great experience judging some of the best combinations in the world, and I received positive feedback about my course design and judging which was great. It brought me down to earth returning to New Zealand on the Friday after the event (after a couple of days in Venice), and judging in the rain at WAG.

