

# Agility

## Alan McClumpha: 30 years in Agility

Supplied by Rosemarie Baker, rjbagility2020@gmail.com

I was first introduced to Agility through Hamilton Dog Obedience Club where I had been doing domestic dog training with my Border Collie Quinn. I had seen Crufts Agility on TV and thought I would love to give that a go, so when choosing a puppy I was drawn to the Border Collie since they looked pretty good on the telly. Borders were not a very common breed in NZ in those days, not like they are now.

I had heard stories that the club had some Agility gear and did some training on Sundays after Obedience training. Finally one Sunday the gear came out and we had a go. I was hooked. It took about another month or six weeks till the gear came out again but by then Quinn and I were well on our way, as I built bits and pieces in the back yard from whatever was left over from our building renovations. My best innovation was jumps made from empty paint cans filled with concrete and a piece of 4x2 sticking out with notches cut out to hold the jump rails, 760mm in those days. A motorcycle tyre hanging out of the willow tree was pretty good too.

Our first competition was at Cambridge in mid-1989. We did fairly well until stopping for Quinn to have a leak on the brush jump, the first time I had been disqualified by John Muir, something he continued to do over many long years. Quinn and I had our next go at Waikato Canine where we did fairly well until we found out we couldn't do 12 weaves which again ended in disqualification and a trip to the

garden centre to buy more bamboo stakes to make 12 at home. Our next time out was at Akarana and beggar me... we won Starters. I have never forgotten the special feeling of that first ribbon, and a win to boot. We had no cell phones and as the only person from Hamilton I knew hardly anybody, so I drove over to Mount Wellington to show off to my mother-in-law.

By this time I had hooked up with the small band from the Waikato who were keen on Agility. Greg Brown was on the committee of DATA (Dog Agility Training Association), a Zone One group set up by Ian Gray to promote the sport. Greg couldn't attend a meeting and asked me to go in his place.

Now I was rubbing shoulders with the true pioneers of Agility in NZ: the great Ian Gray, Alan Willox, and Len Lenehan. Interestingly, these guys were all running German Shepherd Dogs with the exception of Ian with his Swedish Vallhunds. Agility was run by the Dog Obedience Committee of NZKC and to some extent we were seen as a bit of a nuisance. Canterbury Cats had formed around this time, w e r e

led by Peter and Karen De Wit who making noises in the South Island. It was great fun and also hugely frustrating to be involved in those early days of trying to be taken seriously as a dog sport.

The only people who could judge an Agility event at the time were Obedience panel judges. (We didn't have champs, ribbon trials or open shows, just Starters Open and Senior events.) There were a small number of judges who did a bit of Agility and were fairly good but most had no idea. This led to a campaign for a specialist Agility judges panel.

My memory is a bit hazy here but I think it was 1991 and I went on the panel the next year, which gives me close to 30 years of judging Agility. I got pushed into judging because at that time we needed to get more and more specialist Agility judges who knew and understood the sport — we were starting to

get more shows and we needed more judges. Who would have guessed what a great ride that would turn out to be?

I have always said the judge has the best seat in the house. Having been involved in the politics of our sport from 1989 at club zone and national level until 2019, I have seen and overseen massive changes. That makes another story all of its own but standing in the middle as a judge watching the changes evolve into practice has been greatly satisfying.

Judging has allowed me to travel all over the country, meet many wonderful people and observe different ways of running shows, and take some great ideas back to my own club. My greatest thrill has always been when a handler has absolutely nailed my course to perfection. As a judge, that's the best reward I could hope for. I strongly encourage anyone to take up judging. It will give you an extra dimension to the sport and also provide you with an endless supply of campfire stories, many of which cannot be seen or heard from 30 metres away.

It has been fascinating to watch the changes in course design and handling techniques. I have often thought course design is a bit like fashion clothing. If you watch for long enough you will see styles come and go and then come back again, one example being the blind cross. Courses have gone from tight and intricate to open and flowing and back again. I think at the moment we are too focused on speed both in course design and equipment design. While this is fine for our elite trainers and dogs, the average weekend warriors are struggling with this pace which can lead to injuries for dogs who are not prepared and trained to cope.

**Did You Know?**  
Want to become an Agility judge? Visit:  
[www.dogagility.org.nz/cont/judge\\_forms.html](http://www.dogagility.org.nz/cont/judge_forms.html)

For anyone out there thinking of becoming a judge I say go for it. Don't be put off by some of the bad stories out there: trust me, the good times far outweigh the odd niggle from a disgruntled competitor. For me, the worst times have been when I have set a course that may have looked good on paper but just does not work and having to suffer the whole class knowing I could have done better. By the end of the class I have usually redrawn it in my head and looking forward to using version two.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the many wonderful clubs and people who have hosted me during my judging career. We have had some great times on the paddock and later around the campfire. I look forward to still coming to the odd dog show and enjoying the comradeship. Mostly, I would like to thank the competitors who have attacked my courses with gusto and given it their best shot. I have never gained any enjoyment from disqualifying dogs but watching a top quality clear round from the best seat in the house always put a smile on my face.

Three years ago Mel and I made the move to the Bay Of Plenty with the aim of moving toward retirement, which has led to rekindling some old interests like fishing and motorcycles. Unlike a dog I find I can go faster on a motorcycle by a simple twist of the wrist. Just like what happened in Agility all those years ago, I am now on the committee of the local bikie gang.

So now its time to hang up my whistle and I do so with no regrets, other than I can't figure out how 30 years can fly by so quickly.

But geez what a ride, mate. 🐾

Alan McClumpha



Allan with Mac & Jillie.



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