

Agility



Hoopers: Through the eyes of...

Canterbury Canine Agility Training Society was very proud to host the New Zealand inaugural Hoopers Championship Show on 1 September 2024 with the tremendous support of the Agility Committee, CCATS Committee, our judges Karen de Wit and Misha Baxter, ring managers Tyler Cooke and Rose Craigie, show secretaries Rieko Ogawa and Pete de Wit, our equipment designers and producers, Rose, myself and Lindsay McKillop who focussed on dog safety and experience, and our many smiling volunteers, working hard and having fun on the day and behind the scenes. The event was a great success socially and financially for the club. For those considering hosting, do it! We look forward to seeing you all next time.

Candace Bobier

Show Manager, CCATS

Misha Baxter: Hoopers through the eyes of a judge

When I was asked to judge the inaugural Hoopers show for CCATS I got quite excited, honoured and then a tiny bit disappointed. You see, I have been training Hoopers at home for a while since my eight-year-old Border Collie couldn't do Agility any more, but had amazing skills that we could use in Hoopers. To say he loves this game is an understatement. The problem was that if I agreed to judge, I couldn't run my dog. But then I thought: he won't know. I give him a run at home before and after and he will be a very happy chap.

Designing the courses took me much longer than it takes to design Agility courses, for several reasons. Firstly, I knew that my courses were likely to set an example of what Hoopers courses in NZ might look like for a while and that is what people will start to practice. With that in mind, I started to think what skills handlers might have. I read the regulations several times but nothing pointed to how difficult a course should be. And what is difficult for one handler might be super easy for another. In seeking guidance, I ended up talking to Carl Ranford of Hawera Dog Training Association, which has recently held a Hoopers seminar up in North Island. Thank you, Carl, for your feedback on my courses. I love that about NZ Agility: we are one big family and I never had any issues when asking for guidance as a judge or a competitor.

When the day came, it felt like any other show: same people, same venue. Just the set-up was so much easier and definitely lighter, with no heavy gear to carry!

I had a good chat with my scribe to make sure she understood the rules and what she needed to write down. It wasn't much: Pass or Fail. Although I believe she couldn't help herself and was writing down the time as well, which wasn't required as it doesn't get recorded.

The majority of the dogs were Agility trained, so for them the course itself wasn't hard to complete. The big difference was the speed these dogs got up to compared to Agility, and the poor handlers were left behind trying to steer the dogs from distance. Personally, I found out that the less I run with my dog the more they listen to my commands. So, distance is good. The same thing was seen in my Distance Challenge course, where those dogs that were too obedient and stuck with the handlers really struggled to complete the distance challenge. On the other hand, some dogs didn't even notice there was someone running and puffing behind them as they found their own way around the course.

I truly enjoyed my day as Hoopers judge, as did the handlers and their dogs. The atmosphere was great, sun was shining, just bliss. I was even able to have a couple of beautiful runs with my special boy at the start of Karen's classes. The only struggle I found was to decide on judge's choices. I have awarded it to dogs or teams that deserved it, but I felt like so many other teams deserved to get my judge's choice as well. I just hope I didn't disappoint anyone by not picking them. I'm happy to say it publicly here: I absolutely love watching teams having fun and being in the moment, cherishing each other company. You all get my judge's choice, be it only imaginary.

Karen de Wit: Hoopers through the eyes of a judge

I was honoured to be asked to judge at the first ever Hoopers event for CCATS. It was a really enjoyable atmosphere with happy dogs, happy handlers, and a lovely sunny day!

It was great to see an assortment of dogs giving it a go from complete newbies to seasoned Agility dogs and retired dogs and dogs who have never done Agility. We had lots of entries in Foundation (50) and Beginners (more than 80) and a few less in distance (46) because I think people didn't really know what to expect.

I had some fun designing my courses, trying not to be either too easy or too hard. On the day, there were plenty of qualifiers with nearly 50% qualifying in Foundation and Beginners and 25% in Distance. One of the limiting factors in course design is a six-metre maximum distance between obstacles which I think is a bit tight for most dogs so maybe this needs to be a minimum!

Most dogs did the courses in under 60 seconds, so the two-minute limit wasn't an issue at all.

It was great that handlers could carry leads, because with most people taking only 20 seconds or less to get around, the lead running system that we use for Agility was not fast enough! I'd encourage all handlers to get themselves a Hoopers lead that they can easily put in their pocket and to work on rewarding their dogs out of the assembly area as the next dog will arrive there in the time it takes to put a lead back on, let alone give them treats or play with a toy!

Communication with the scribes was also a learning curve. We started out by writing all the times down as well as the faults/refusals, but of course time isn't taken into account. We also decided that a single sheet would be a good option as writing on single sheets, then putting them in the plastic container took too long



— the next dog was already on the line!

We also discussed how best to communicate which way to go around barrels, and decided placing the numbers out to the side. Other ideas since then have included adding velcro to the barrels and having arrows to show direction.

Judges' choice was a really difficult job since so many people did really well in their own way, so a pat on the back to all those who gave it a go.

Overall it was a really enjoyable experience with some learning done and we look forward to the next event at CDTC in December.

Tyler Cooke: Hoopers through the eyes of a competitor

Hoopers is shaking up the dog Agility scene with a fresh, exciting event that's perfect for both seasoned competitors and newcomers. Unlike Jumpers, which uses traditional Agility gear, Hoopers introduces entirely new equipment, offering a unique new challenge for handlers and their dogs to learn. Fortunately, many essential handling skills still apply, so initially the focus is on helping your dogs get comfortable with the new obstacles, especially the big imposing barrels.

CCATS designed and built their Hoopers equipment without bases at the bottom of the hoops or tunnels. If you've ever raced your dog with no obstacles in the way, you'll know this makes keeping up a real test. This adds an exciting twist: managing most of the course





from one or two obstacles behind your dog, a scenario some of us haven't had to tackle before!

Without jumps, Hoopers also eliminates the need for running orders based on dog heights. Instead, CCATS mixed all heights together, giving you and your dog the chance to meet with handlers and different-sized dogs than you're used to.

Our experience at the inaugural Hoopers championship was fantastic! Due to the quick set-up, we wrapped up the day earlier than expected with qualifications under our belt and some valuable lessons — mainly, don't get too confident. Even though Hoopers courses might appear simpler than the higher levels of Agility that most of us are used to, they're no walk in the park until you've had some more practice.

Tabasco: Hoopers through the eyes of a canine athlete

It was a sunny spring day in Canterbury, not too hot, not too cold, but just right. A light wind tousled my hair, and the smell of freshly mown grass filled my nose. My friend, a Leonberger, was trotting around the ring before me, deftly negotiating hoops, barrels and a tunnel in his gentle stride. In the other, I could hear the pounding of paws gripping the field, barks of delight and human arms flapping in the air, trying to gain flight. I was pumped. Nose twitching, tail wagging, staring at my human until it was my turn. How 'bout now? I couldn't wait to get out there. Yes – finally; Here we go, into my sit stay, watching human walk away slowly, walking... walking gees c'mon, "OK" – the magic word, it's party time! I beeline for the barrel, while human throws arm up, and starts running the other way, woah the chase is on, this is FUN. Another barrel, human does some dance moves, I go under the tunnel — let's say arch, it's not quite like the tunnels I am used to — I can still feel glorious green duck pooped grass under my feet. OMG another barrel, wahoo, human running away again, I'll catch you! Nek minnit, I'm killing the toy, rrrrrrrrr,



human slipping on lead. We run away tugging, trotting, jumping for joy. What a rush — best 10 seconds ever — since yesterday anyway!

Let's do it again! I look around, I see more canine friends and humans. Big, small, tall, less tall, experienced, inexperienced, young and young at heart - they all seem to be having fun, whether from conformation, Obedience, Rally-O, Scent Work or Agility. Especially that lady — sounds like she won a huge raffle prize with Radical Dog treats and funny water, or something. Time for a sniff around, drink, and later human bribes me to get in the paddling pool. Wait, what? We are queuing up – we get to do it again!!! Yeeeeas, so good. 🐾