

Agility Competitions

Pure Breeds & Crosses Thriving in Agility Across NZ

by Robyn Fargher



Molly, Papillon, Sarah Collins, photo Lionel Benjamin Photography

Dog Agility is taking off in New Zealand, offering an electrifying blend of athleticism, obedience, and teamwork between dogs and their handlers. These trials test a dog's ability to navigate tricky obstacle courses quickly and accurately. While any dog can take part, some breeds and crosses consistently shine thanks to their intelligence, agility, and enthusiasm. Many handlers start with their family pets before moving on to breeds better suited for Agility as their love for the sport grows.

Top Breeds in Agility

Border Collies are agility superstars worldwide, and it's the same in New Zealand. Their intelligence, speed, and ability to read their handler's cues make them standout competitors. However, they need plenty of mental and physical stimulation to stay happy and out of trouble.

Australian Kelpies are known for their stamina, agility, and independence. Their herding instincts help them focus and respond quickly to commands, making them a favourite in New Zealand's Agility scene.

The Huntaway is a breed unique to New Zealand, traditionally used for herding but gaining traction in Agility. They may not be as fast as some lighter breeds, but their intelligence and strength help them power through courses with ease.

Jack Russell Terriers are small but energetic dogs that are built for Agility. Their compact bodies, endless energy, and quick learning abilities make them fierce competitors. Their high prey drive can be a challenge, but with the right training, they thrive in the sport.

Poodles (Standard and Miniature) are smart, athletic, and eager to please, making them great Agility dogs. Standard Poodles cover ground quickly with their long strides, while Miniature Poodles are experts in precision and manoeuvrability.

Shetland Sheepdogs, small herding dogs often called Shelties, are fast, smart, and agile. They're especially good at weaving through poles and making sharp turns, making them a popular choice in smaller dog categories.

Crossbreeds in Agility

Crossbreeds are thriving in New Zealand's Agility scene, often combining the best traits of two breeds to create exceptional competitors. Some of the most successful Agility crosses include:

- Border Collie x Kelpie: A mix of intelligence, endurance, and enthusiasm, creating highly athletic dogs.
- Heading Dog Mixes: New Zealand's Heading Dogs, similar to Border Collies, are often crossed with other working breeds for Agility success.
- Terrier Crosses: Small but determined, terrier mixes are known for their drive and competitiveness.
- Sport Crosses: Purpose-bred sport crosses, such as Spaniel x Border Collies, or Papillon x Border Collies, are gaining recognition for their speed and work ethic.

What Makes a Great Agility Dog?

Regardless of breed or mix, the best Agility dogs have a few key traits:

- Intelligence: They learn fast and follow commands precisely.



Ruby, Springer Spaniel x BC, photo Dee Ockey

- **Athleticism:** Speed, agility, and endurance are essential for navigating courses.
- **Drive and Enthusiasm:** A strong work ethic and love for the sport are key to success.
- **Strong Bond with Handler:** Agility requires trust and excellent communication between dog and handler.
- **Confidence:** They need to be comfortable tackling obstacles like tunnels, seesaws, and jumps.

Agility's Growing Popularity in New Zealand

Agility competitions are thriving across New Zealand, with clubs and events catering to all skill levels. Dogs New Zealand oversees the sport, ensuring fair play and standardised courses. Local Agility clubs offer training for both beginners and experienced handlers, creating a fun and supportive community.

One of the best things about Agility is that it's open to all: dogs of all sizes and backgrounds can compete. Whether a purebred champion or a rescue mix, a Papillon or a tall crossbreed, every dog has a chance to shine. Many handlers love Agility because it strengthens their bond with their dogs while keeping them active and engaged.

Dog Agility is an exciting and ever-growing sport in New Zealand, with all kinds of breeds and crosses proving their skills on the course. While traditional Agility stars such as Border Collies and Kelpies still lead the pack, crosses and smaller breeds are making their mark.

As the sport continues to grow, more dogs and their handlers will get the chance to show what they're capable of in this high-energy competition. 



Tank, BC X Huntaway, photo Cherie Picking