

WHEN YOU'RE READY HANDLER
(In your own time).....

A Guide To Entering And Competing In Your First Agility Show

BY

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Revised Edition

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“2006 has been my first season of competing with my first agility dog ‘Bella’. So, a completely new experience for both of us. 2006 has been a life-changing year for me, I never knew that competing with my dog would be so much fun. So much so that my car has been traded in for a van –I’ve gone back to camping which I said I would never do again (but a lot of the shows run over weekends) and I’ve actually enjoyed the experience!”

2009 finds me still with the van but now we’ve ditched the tent for a caravan and of course I now have four dogs!!!!

Bella and I have both gained more experience through consistent training and competing and I am still completely in love with this sport!

2011 My goodness, where has the time gone? Still competing, a bit more experienced now. Larger van and six dogs (not all of them compete but they are all active). In some ways it feels like I’m starting all over again now that little dog Pip is starting to compete. And yes, I still love this sport!

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1. Registering Your Dog For Kennel Club Shows

Before you can compete with your dog at KC shows you will need to register him/her with the kennel club. There may well be some forms for this at club or go online to the kennel club site, look for the activity register and download the form yourself.

Pedigree dogs will have a name and number on the breed register but if you have crossbreeds like myself then you have to supply a name that no-one else is likely to have.

For example it would be no use me trying to register my dog as Bella as there are many thousands of dogs with that name. I used the nickname of a grandparent and registered my dogs as Dagwood Bella, Dagwood Megan and Dagwood Molly. Use your imagination but remember when you start to gain places and the results are read out you want the person announcing them to be able to say the name of your dog!!!!!!!

2. Measuring

In order to compete at Kennel Club shows your dog will need to have an official measurement *before* competing. It's different at Unaffiliated shows but more about them later. We will try to have regular measuring sessions at club but check at the following link to find out where other sessions are taking place. Agilityforum.agilityaddicts.net go to the kc shows sections and there is a subforum on measuring. Also check on some of the show schedules as they may have sessions taking place. It may be that you will need to enter your first show and if measuring is taking place at that show you get it done on the day (you will probably need to pre book a time so read the schedule carefully for instructions of whom to contact). Pick up an AGILITY RECORD BOOK from the clubhouse (they cost £1.50). You will need this to have the measurement recorded in the book. You will also need your dog's microchip number or a small photo of your dog for I.D. as well as the registration name and number mentioned in the above section.

Dogs need to be at least 15 months old before they can be measured unless they are obviously large in which case they can have a single measurement at any time. Small/medium dogs will have one measurement at 15 months and another 12 to 24 months later.

There is a small charge for measuring.

3. Schedules

Schedules for shows can come out months in advance of the event taking place. You will find some down at club or look on the internet at agilitynet and agility eye or on the forum link given earlier and download your own. Some shows can be entered online at Iss or simply canine or Uka. Don't be caught out by leaving it too late to enter as some shows fill up very quickly. Shows that offer camping will need to be entered as soon as the schedule comes out, I would also say that the winter Uka shows with multiple Steeplechase classes also fill up quickly. Uka summer shows that don't have a capping level now offer the option of being able to go along and enter on the day. It does cost slightly more but in my opinion is well worth it. Some of the winter shows also offer this option but you would need to check with Uka near the show date

4. Classes

You will be able to enter the following type of classes at KC shows.
Any classes that are grade 1 classes for your height of dog eg
Grade 1 Agility, Grade 1 Jumping,
Grade 1 and 2 Combined Classes for agility and jumping
Special classes such as Helter Skelter, Power and Speed, Pairs etc
Sometimes classes may be 1 to 4 combined. These are going to be more difficult courses but good for gaining experience.

Graded classes have their own set of awards for each grade. For example;

Class 6 Jumping 1&2 graded

This would mean that grade 1 and 2 dogs would jump the same course but there would be one set of rosettes for grade 1 dogs and one set of rosettes for grade 2 dogs. On the other hand;

Class 6 Jumping 1&2 combined

Would mean that grade 1 and 2 dogs would again jump the same course but there would be only one set of rosettes so basically the grade 1 and grade 2 dogs are competing against each other.

Large dogs seem to fair better for graded classes as there are more of them. Medium and small dogs don't have so many in a class but there may well be many classes that are 1 to 4 or 5 combined so new dogs are up against very experienced dogs. Experience will teach you how to pick and choose your classes.

Generally you will get approximately 3 or 4 classes at a kc show as well as pairs and team events. Read your schedule carefully to establish how many classes you are eligible to enter. Sometimes it may be 3 runs plus pairs or team, sometimes only 2 runs plus etc etc

To win out of grade one and into grade two you would need either 1 Agility win (with clear round) or 3 Jumping wins (with clear rounds). You can also move up a grade by accumulating points for places and clear rounds gained. You will need 75 points to move up a grade.

This is another reason why you will need your agility record book because you can record your results in this.

You can only enter results for standard agility and jumping classes. It's not allowed for any classes that are written in the schedule as 'special' such as helter skelter, (a fast flowing circular course) or power and speed (contact section first, followed by a speed jumping section if you are without faults from the contacts.) Pairs and team clears can also **not** be counted in progression points.

5. Ring Cards/Running Orders

OK –let’s assume you’ve found a suitable show, sorted out your classes and have entered. Sometime before the show date an envelope will come through your door containing show information (eg what class is in what ring and when) and also your ring card.

The card will tell you what your show number is and what your running order is for each class that you have entered.

It **may** look something like this:

152 Class	Jackie Partridge	Dagwood Bella		Ring
		R/0	Entries	
Class 1	Agility Grade 1	10	63	2*
Class 5	Jumping 1 & 2 Graded	75	88	5
Class 7	Helter Skelter Grade 1 and 2 Combined	146	202	7

My show number would be 152

I have entered Class 1 and my running order in that class is 10th.

There are 63 competitors in that class and it is being held in Ring2.

Notice the little asterix by the 2? This means that this is the first class in that ring so I would need to be there promptly in order to walk that course and then to fetch my dog and get to the start line because I would be in the first group of dogs to run as my running order is 10th.

Don’t worry if it seems confusing, there will always be someone on hand to help. In some Open shows the classes can be very large so they may be split into part 1 and part 2. This may mean some confusing numbers on your ring card. If this happens please show one of us and we can explain the process to you. It’s a bit complicated to go into in this book.

6. List of things To Take with You

This is where you see how paranoid I am but honestly you may find you need at least some of it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Schedule/Ring Cards

Pen/Paper

Agility Record Book

Directions!

Treats/Pooh Bags

First Aid Kit

Suitable Collar and Lead (no dangly bits on the collar)

Bowl and Water for Dog

Water for yourself

Coffee/tea etc

Lunch and or money (sometimes the refreshments can be very expensive to buy)

Dependent on weather –hat/suncream/boots for walking a soggy course/running shoes for competing.

Shades or canopy for the van

Mallet

Rubbish bag

Spare bedding in case dog is sick on journey!

Change of clothes

Sunglasses

Since this year, reading glasses.....age is catching up!

Mobile phone to text back those good results!

Essential –money for stalls!!!

A walkie talkie is also a good addition to take to larger shows. You can tune into (for listening purposes only) to the channel being used and will be able to hear when classes are close to closing etc. Sometimes tannoys are not audible or are not being used.

7. On Arrival

I probably should have mentioned earlier that you may well have to get up at about four in the morning to get ready for a show as they do start very early. Don't worry –you will soon get used to it!!

So – arrive at show –establish where the loos are!

Establish where the exercise area is

Establish where the food/drink is

Establish where the goody stalls are!!

Give your dog a walk round –sometimes you may not have time to do this as you may have to rush off to walk the first course but try to arrive in good time to avoid this situation.

If your class is not first in ring just have a good walk around with your dog and sort out the general location of all the rings that you will need.

Be aware that different shows have different rules for their exercise area. The number of dogs you can have off lead at a time (so that you have control). Whether or not toys are allowed etc.(Imagine throwing a ball in a small exercise area and having 20 collies running after it!!) These rules are there for a very good reason, to keep you and your dog safe. Of PARAMOUNT importance is the need to 'pick up' after your dog in order that these venues can be used for our shows again.

8.Walking Courses

If your course is not first in ring you will need to listen out to the tannoys and go to ringside to see how previous classes are progressing so that you know when your class is going to be set up and ready to walk. (Be aware that at many shows the tannoys are not allowed to be used in the early morning, therefore you need to check with the notice board at each ring to see information about your class. Sometimes a flag system is used) Conversely, sometimes you may find yourself with three courses to walk at the same time. Before now I have taken a bit of paper with me and roughly scribbled down the layouts to help me remember. One advantage of shows rather than training is at least there are numbers by each obstacle to tell you where to go!!!!

Walk your course as many times as you need to, to make you feel comfortable about how you are going to run it. Personally I walk round several times. The first time I'm walking round just to see where the numbers go, then I walk a few times more to work out my handling and positioning. I also work out the angle that I want to set my dog at before the first jump. Stand behind this jump and look at the next obstacle from the dogs eyeline point of view to work out where you need to set your dog up. I usually have a plan A for a course but also a plan B for if there's a part of the course that may need handling differently due to dog's/my position and even then it sometimes works out entirely different and you just have to think on your feet!! Other people may just stick to one plan and that's fine, it just comes down to personal choice.

As you build a partnership with your dog, you get to know how a course is going to run and will be able to work out how many corners you can cut etc to save time but in the early stages of competing you are aiming for a clear, clean round to build up your own and your dog's confidence.

Feel free to ask any of us to walk courses with you when you start to compete. We are there to help you succeed.

Even now, some of us still walk courses together and then pool our ideas on how best to run it.

As you get to know how your dog runs you will have your own ideas about how to handle different courses. Stick to what you know but don't be afraid to try out new things that you will be learning at training. Don't get stuck in a rut. Sometimes its good to play it safe but sometimes you've just got to risk and try something that will gain you a few precious seconds! I digress because that's further down the line and I'm getting carried away as usual!!!!!!!!!!

9. Points To Remember

When you walk a course do not have any food or drink with you.
You cannot take treats/toys into the ring when you compete. At Kc shows treats can be in your pocket as long as pocket is secure.
Leave your bumbag etc with your lead behind the start line and collect at the finish line which is where it will all have been moved to.
Zip up your pockets to avoid a trail of treats and poo bags!!!!
I know it sounds boringly obvious but it can happen!

DO NOT LET YOUR DOG WEE OR POO IN THE RING –YOU WILL BE ELIMINATED. (See section on warming up)

If unfortunately this does happen, maybe due to a nervous dog, don't worry, apologise to the judge, pick up if necessary then stay by where it's happened so ring party member can bring bucket of water and spray to wash down so no smell remains to distract another dog.

10. Warming Up

Check your running order and make sure that you leave enough time in order to warm up yourself and your dog. Use the exercise area provided and encourage your dog to have a wee. (Bella now does this on command before each class). This is a really important time for you to be bonding with your dog so that your dog knows it's time to get ready to go and do some work (and have some fun doing it).

Warming up and cooling down is important for handler and dog, whatever the weather in order to prevent injury.

11. Ready To Go

OK re-check your running order and what ring you are going to!

Treats, poo bags secure.

Take your ring card with you and its off to the ringside

Look for a person with a clipboard (the caller) and book in with them – you need your ring card for this as they will take either your show number or your running order number (depends on the show).

They may hand you a white score sheet – **check it has your name on it**, then keep hold of it and join the queue.....

12. The Art Of Queuing!

It's important to make sure that your dog doesn't get too hot while queuing up to run. (It also should be mentioned that you need to keep your car/van well shaded and ventilated).

Do not queue up for ages in the blazing sun
either:

Find some shade and wait for the queue to go down
or

Get someone else to stand in the sun and queue for you while you and dog are in the shade!

Try to run within a few dogs of your running order. This can be difficult but take advice from the person with the clipboard. Sometimes there may be few dogs waiting to go and they will allow to you run early to keep a flow going.

13. Focus

When it's nearly your turn to compete –stop talking to the person next to you! Stop looking at the person in the ring (by the way –don't watch too many dogs running your course as it may put you off your plan although sometimes it may make you aware of certain danger spots in the course!)

Instead, focus on your dog –I tend to ask Bella to sit, then I tell her to wait and I walk round her a few times (whilst keeping hold of the lead) and I praise and reward. Then I might ask her to sit and wait then call her towards me. It doesn't really matter but you want that dog's attention focussed on YOU. It also helps to settle my nerves as well!!

14. The Start Line

Right then –no more putting it off –it’s your turn to go!!!

Hand in your score sheet to the steward & they will tell you when you can go to the start line. Take off your lead and bumbag etc.

By the way your dog will need to be wearing a flat collar with a ‘D’ ring only –no ID discs hanging down or the collar will have to come off too. You will be eliminated if your dog runs with ‘dangly’ bits on the collar

Settle your dog (and yourself)

Look at the Scrimmer (this is the person who is doing the scoring and the timing) and THEY will tell you when you can go. They usually say something like, “When you’re ready handler” or “In your own time” The good ones also call you by name which is a final check that they’ve got the right score sheet in front of them.

If they call you by someone else’s name DON’T GO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Do not start without being given the go ahead or you will be eliminated!

If you can get your dog to do a wait then give it the command and get yourself ahead to where you want to be. And that’s it off you go!!!

Stand up straight and walk with confidence. Your dog will know if you don’t! Keep to the same routine and tone of voice as you do at training.

15. Remember Those Contacts

As you are going round the course, whatever you do, don’t neglect your contacts. At this stage you are aiming for a nice clear round to build your confidence & experience. If you go hell for leather too soon it will take months to get the contacts back. (Here does speak the voice of experience, limited though it might be!!)

Get this right from the start and save yourself some bother!!

Dogs get to know very quickly the difference between training and competition!!

16. Stick To Your Plan But.....

Sometimes your round will not go as you have planned it!!
You may end up in front of or way behind your dog!
Bear in mind this means you will have to think on your feet!

To start with don't go running too wide of the jump wings as your dog may just shoot along with you without taking the jump.
Make sure you are at the wing and the dog has committed to the jump.
As you gain experience you will be able to work further out from your dog.

Don't just assume your dog is going to shoot into the tunnel, if they see you move to the side just one iota on your way to the next obstacle they will be right with you!

By the way, if when walking a course you see the number for the tunnel is in the middle section this means you can use either entrance to the tunnel. Took me ages to find that one out!!

17. PRAISE,PRAISE,PRAISE

After your round no matter what has happened PLEASE remember to PRAISE your dog. Hopefully you will have had a good run and it comes naturally to praise your dog but sometimes when it hasn't gone as planned you need to consciously remember to praise your dog just as much because let's face it they will have tried their best for you (unless their name is Derrick!!!!) and 9 times out of 10 it will have been **your fault** if something has gone wrong!

Sometimes you will have had a complete disaster but you just have to laugh about it and move on!

Sometimes you will get there by the skin of your teeth, I sometimes rename my dog 'Bail me out Bella' because of the times she has got me out of tricky situations due to my poor handling!

Try to remember to acknowledge the judge before you leave the ring just with a raised hand an thank-you.

But sometimes, just sometimes you and your dog will fly round a course working together in complete harmony and understanding of what is required of each other. Running past that finish line you know that you could not have done it any better and THAT is the most fantastic feeling in the whole world!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

18. Record Your Times & Points

Make sure that you record your places, clear rounds and the times in your agility record book. so that you can track your progression.

Only record points gained etc from Kennel Club Open shows not unaffiliated or limit shows and as previously stated not for 'special' classes.

To find out your times look at the score sheets in the secretary's tent.

19. Unaffiliated/Independent Shows/Kc Limit Shows

Many of these shows such as Agility Addicts and UKA have their own points and progression systems.

We are fortunate now to have so many Uka shows in our area.

There are generally small class sizes and are excellent shows for new handlers and new dogs. They also may include games classes such as Power and speed, Gamblers, Time fault and out etc. (Descriptions in uka rules books)

The Steeplechase classes have their own progression system and are great fun especially for young dogs that need a flowing course to follow.

(And of course – NO WEAVES!!!!!!)

Large dogs do not need to be measured.

Standard ,(between medium and large size), medium and small dogs can be measured at their first show. The standard category is great for those dogs who struggle a bit with the large jump height at Kc shows.

A second measure is required when the dog has reached 2 years of age.

Uka have their own record books and progression is done purely on points. Your results can be tracked online.

Registering with Uka is a simple online process. Schedules can be downloaded from their website.

Uka are very good at emailing ring plans for shows that you decide to enter on the day. Just give them a couple of days' notice.

If you do enter on the day, you will need to take your Uka handler number and your dog's number or there will be an extra charge.

KC Limit Shows are only different from the Open shows in that they limit the number of dogs that can enter or may be limited to certain league clubs. They are like Open shows in every other respect except that progression points cannot be counted.

20. Conclusion

This is now the second time of revising the handbook. Not so many changes needed this time but there will probably still be omissions and errors which are once again my own!

A very good way to start competing is to enter the classes on our Internal Club Day in the Spring which is swiftly followed by our Limit Show. This is how I started and it was a very good gradual introduction into competing. We also have our Autumn Internal Day which is then followed by the Autumn/Winter league matches. If your dog is getting consistent clear rounds in training then do sign up for the Starters League and gain some competition experience during the winter months.

Don't be afraid to speak to people from other clubs, for many people in your classes it will be their first season out too. I now find that I have a group of people that I still meet up with at every show and it's great fun to see how they are getting on.

Please bring back ideas on things you would like to practise more in training. The club is here to help you succeed.

Most importantly **HAVE FUN WITH YOUR DOG!**

If it's not fun –don't do it.

This is all about getting out, using your training to work with your dog and to enjoy the bond that you have together.

I hope that this information will be of use to you.

Any mistakes are once again my own!!

Jackie P.

20th August 2011