

SUPPORTING THE 'NEWBIES' AT SHOWS

BY LESLEY WHITE

For many of you reading this, memories of your first agility show are probably light years away, but I am sure you can still recall the anxiety, nerves, sweaty palms and dry mouth that you felt. Thoughts such as 'Will I fall over?' 'Will I remember the course?' and 'Will people laugh at me?' probably entered your head, along with many others.

You may have arrived at the show with your family, friends or fellow club members to support you, but the bottom line is, when you are on that line, you are on your own. No matter how much you were looking forward to the experience, had rehearsed it in your head and dreamed of the outcome, it is your first show.

Days earlier, when your running orders arrived in the post, were they clear? Did you understand all the different numbers and columns? I have often been asked at shows, by new competitors to explain them, which I have been happy to do, as I was not competing and had the time to do it. However, as you know, competitors are very busy people, they have rings to find, courses to walk, dogs to exercise and classes to compete in, helping the floundering 'newbie' is not always possible.

This is where I think show organisers could help out.

When agility clubs are organising shows, roles and responsibilities are shared out amongst its members. Organising such an event is no mean feat, it takes months of preparation but I am not going to insult your intelligence by going into details as I would be teaching my granny to suck eggs. However, as someone who has stood on the sidelines for the past four years observing, and as someone who used to organise an event three times a year, for 500 instructors, single-handed, I would like to make a suggestion. Do with it as you will.

When the various jobs are being allocated, I would like the committee to allocate someone the role of 'mentoring' the new dogs/handlers at the show. Let me explain.

If your show is offering classes for Grade 1 handlers, or classes for combined Grade 1/2 handlers, you know that they are new to agility. It may be their first show or they may have been competing at that level for a while.

When sending out schedules and forms, ask the question, 'Is this your first show?' or 'Is this the first time you have competed at this show?' This could either be added to



your show form or as a separate slip of paper. When the entries are returned the Entries Secretary would know if there were any 'first-timers' and details of them could be passed to the 'mentor.'

On arrival, the person at the entrance, checking them in, would know they were 'newbies' as there could be a mark beside their name and they could be directed to report to the marquee to meet the 'mentor'. On arrival the mentor could do the following;

- Explain about getting the dog measured, the KC Agility Record Book
- Give a map of the site (after all they have never been there before) showing the rings, stalls, toilets, refreshments etc.
- Go through the running order with them to ensure they are clear
- Remind them to listen to the tannoy announcements
- Explain the procedure about lining up, booking in, which number to give etc
- Who to go to for the dog's time and when
- Explain how the Steeplechase and/or Power and Speed works
- Volunteering to be part of a ring party

the above is not exhaustive but tries to address some of the questions new handlers may have.

Throughout the day, the Mentor could be the point of contact that new handlers go to for information, help and advice. That way they wouldn't have to bother other handlers who are competing and already busy and the newcomer would feel welcomed to your agility show and remember it as a positive experience. If no-one is new to your show then there would be no need to allocate such a role.

Of course, most agility clubs would have probably run through all these things already and if members are attending the show, they may take on the role of 'mentoring' their new club member, but it may not always be the case or possible. What happens if the 'newbie' attends a show that other club members are not going to? What if you do not have the time because of ring partying and competing?

The first show I attended was 'SupaDogs' when it was at the Hop Farm. I wasn't competing, just having a weeks holiday with my NFC dog, watching classes, helping on the rings and learning. I did not know anyone, although I did by the end of the week, but if I had been competing, I would have found it very daunting as I was on my own. Since then I have attended many shows, supporting my daughter, Amanda, so she has always had the support she needed as a 'newbie.'

Agility is becoming more and more popular, being

AGILITY HELPERS' GUIDE TO BEING HELPFUL!

By Chel Seabrook

Judge

THE most important person in the ring ;-) without them, there is no course to compete on! The judge is responsible for the marking of the competitor taking part in the ring. To become a judge there are various courses for people interested in judging to undertake to ensure they understand the rules and regulations as well as build safe courses. The judge has the most difficult job, having to make split second decisions on the dog and handler working in their ring.

Ring Manager

The Ring Manager's job is to run the ring, they make sure there is enough help, and that helpers get time to walk courses and have time to run their own dogs etc. Ideally a Ring Manager should be able to take over any help position that needs them too. They are usually the ones with the walkie-talkie to the secretary's area. It's the Ring Manager's job to help and organise when course changes need to happen, and ensure the judge has enough to drink. The same applies to others that are helping on the ring - most shows provide refreshment boxes for each ring.

Scrim

The majority of shows now use electronic timing. Back in the day, a separate, manual timer was used when the dog took the first jump and cleared the last. The time would then be read out and noted on the score sheet. The timekeeping role is now obsolete and the role of the scribe, has now become "scrim", a combination of scribe and time-keeper.

The scrim's job is to watch the judge, (not the dog!) and record any faults that are signalled on the score sheet. The scrim also writes down the time, from the timer box, after each run (unless the dog is eliminated). They must also inform the judge of any timing errors, e.g., the timer not starting or stopping. Being a scrim for a judge requires a lot of focus and being able to focus with distractions too! The scrim should also call the handler

promoted on television and encouraging spectators at Olympia, Crufts and Discover Dogs to find their local agility club, join and take up the sport. Agility Clubs on the whole are friendly and welcoming, but competing in that first show is frightening. I call on clubs to make 'newbies' not only welcome to competing but making your club's show a memorable, enjoyable and supportive experience.

And here's a great guide for agility newcomers on how to be helpful... and we need all the help we can get!



by name to ensure they have the right score ticket for the right person.

The scrim is also the person who starts the dog, so when the judge indicates they are ready for the next dog, the scrim will say something along the lines of "in your own time John". This is the usual custom and will be advised at the briefing the judge gives before commencement of their class.

Pads

The pad runner takes the queuing competitor's running order, matches it to a score sheet, and then hands it to the scrim. The customary method is using 2 clipboards, one for the dog running and being judged, and one ready for the next dog to run. The pad runner should also check that the ticket is for the correct for that handler AND dog. It's not uncommon for people with multiple dogs to bring the wrong dog to the ring.

Runner

This person collects the score sheets from the ring and takes to the scorer or score tent. Some shows have scoring directly behind the scrim eliminating the need for this role.

Caller

The caller controls the queue. They need to make sure that there is a steady flow of competitors and that the queue doesn't get too long. They also have to be strong-willed enough not to be bullied into letting people in who have a later running order and want to get home early!

A caller is best placed (but rarely is) at the end of a queue, so as not to have people walk through the people and dogs to find them.

The competitor gives their running order number to the caller who checks the name of handler and dog and then marks them off so they can join the queue.

Pole Picker

The pole picker is one of the jobs anyone can walk in to do. However, always check beforehand that the jumps you are picking up are not re-used on the course, or you could get in the way of the dog and handler coming back round to take the obstacle a second time. If a whole jump is moved, or the long jump knocked down, the judge needs to check the placement before starting the next dog.

Leads

If a start and finish jump are very close, sometimes the need for a lead person is less, but usually this is the job with a lot of walking! It's the lead person's job to take the lead (toys, coats, titbit pouches, mobile phones and other sundries) from the competitor, or ground and take to the finish jump. Ideally the lead is not thrown to the last jump, but placed by the finish near the edge of the ring. Some shows now use buckets or boxes to house leads at the finish.

Scorer

This is the person who gets the tickets after the dog has run and records the scores onto the master score sheet. They also have to spot if there are two clear rounds in the same time and notify the Ring Manager so that they can organise both competitors to return to the ring at the end of the class for a run-off.

Usually the scorer uses several bulldog clips to place the tickets in the right order, based on time and faults. Although each scorer has their own method, in theory there is a clip for clear rounds, 5 faults, 10 faults plus, and Eliminations. If filed in the right order from the start it makes the job easier at the end when working out places. (And to show curious competitors who want to find out where they are placed.)

The scorer needs to ensure they know the course time so that they can add time faults if required.

At the end of the class, the scorer writes out the list of places for presentations.

So, next time you go to a show you know exactly what you need to do to help, so please do volunteer!