

Rally – The Other Obedience

By Susan Chaney

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AKC rally, a variation on traditional obedience, is designed to be a bit more fun and a bit less strenuous, and to serve as a link from the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen program to obedience and agility competition.

Rally for Fun

Sometimes called “rally obedience,” this sport requires you and your dog to navigate a course, your dog performing behaviors as described on signs along the route. The numbered signs include skill descriptions, as well as directional arrows, making it “easy to find the next station when navigating the course,” according to the AKC.



Instructions on a sign tell you what to command your dog to do on an AKC rally course. *(Mary Bloom photo for American Kennel Club.)*

You use voice and-or hand commands, and you may reward your on-leash dog (in the novice class) or off-leash dog along the way with praise. The trial is based on the quality of your dog's performance of specific behaviors and your speed as a team in completing the course – if two dogs finish with the same score, but different times. Skills may include turning, spinning, sitting, dropping to a Down and many more. According to the AKC, “Scoring is not as rigorous as in traditional obedience.”

When you and your dog arrive at a trial, you will face a different course every time. It's up to the rally judge to decide how to set up the signs and which skills each team will attempt. A typical course will include 10 to 20 skills. The judge posts a copy of the course ringside so that “exhibitors know what to expect and where to go once they are in the ring.” He or she evaluates the performance of each skill and the “sense of teamwork between the dog and handler between the stations,” according to the AKC.

The rally regulations explain: “There should be a sense of teamwork between the dog and handler both during the numbered exercises and between the exercise signs; however, perfect ‘heel position’ is not required. Any faults in traditional obedience that would be evaluated and scored as a one-point deduction or more should be scored the same in rally, unless otherwise mentioned in the rally regulations. After the judge's ‘Forward’ order, the team is on its own to complete the entire sequence of numbered signs correctly.”



Various paces are required over the rally course. *(Mary Bloom photo for American Kennel Club)*

Your dog must attempt to perform all the posted exercises. Dogs and handlers begin with a score of 100. Deductions are made, depending on how the dog performs the skills. If the team still has 70 points at the end of the course, that's a qualifying score. The team's score is posted ringside upon completion of the course.

Can Any Dog Rally?

Rally is a much less strenuous sport than agility or lure coursing, for example. Your dog should be healthy and get consistent daily age-appropriate exercise and be well-trained in basic obedience before undertaking rally.

To participate, your dog must be registered with the AKC, listed with the AKC Purebred Alternative Listing/Indefinite Listing Privilege program or with the AKC Canine Partners program, or be a Foundation Stock Service recorded breed. She must be at least 6 months old.



Simple skills such as sitting are required in rally's Novice class. *(Mary Bloom photo for American Kennel Club)*

Your rally dog must be motivated to work with you. If you've trained your dog using positive training techniques, such that she responds to your commands, whether for treats, praise or just to please you, you're well on your way to succeeding at rally. To earn an AKC rally title, your dog must follow your commands without hesitation and you need to train her to perform the various rally skills.

Virtually Anyone Can Rally

Successful rally handlers use positive training methods to teach their dogs the rally behaviors. Consistent use of those commands, whether verbal or manual, is key to preparing a dog for this sport.

Handlers may "talk to, praise, encourage, clap their hands, pat their legs, or use any verbal means of encouragement" during a trial at the novice and advanced levels, according to AKC regulations. However, the "handler may not touch the dog or make physical corrections. At any time during the performance, loud or harsh commands or intimidating signals will be penalized."

You do need to be prepared to reward and praise your dog and encourage her effort, regardless of the result of a trial. If a dog fails to perform certain skills, a good handler knows that he or she needs to improve training techniques or methods, and that it's not the dog's failure.



Sitting in front of the handler, rather than at her side, can be one of the more challenging behaviors to train. *(Mary Bloom photo for American Kennel Club)*

Levels, Ribbons and Titles

AKC rally includes three levels of competition:

- **Novice is for those just getting started.** Ten to 15 exercises are performed with your dog on leash. They range from turning 360 degrees to changing paces throughout the course. "Exhibitors at this level may clap their hands and pat their legs through the course," according to rally regulations.
- **Advanced, the second level,** includes more difficult exercises performed off leash at 12 to 17 stations. Your dog must take a jump and approach you from the front, rather than a Heel position.
- **Excellent, the highest level,** requires dogs to perform at 15 to 20 stations. Handlers may only command their dogs verbally. Dogs must be able to back up three steps, while staying in the Heel position and perform a "moving stand," while the handler walks around the dog.

Your dog must earn three qualifying scores under two different judges in order to receive a rally title. Titles include Rally Novice, RN; Rally Advanced, RA; Rally Excellent, RE; and Rally Advanced Excellent, RAE. For an RAE, your dog must qualify 10 times in both the Advanced B class and the Excellent B class at the same trial.

Get Started Today!

Your dog needs to learn many skills before entering a trial. It's this training time that will truly enhance your bond with your dog. To find clubs in your area that offer rally training, visit the AKC's training club database at www.akc.org/events/obedience/training_clubs.

These resources will help you get started:

- AKC rally page at www.akc.org/events/rally.
- "Getting Started in Obedience, Agility, Tracking, and CGC" is a brochure that outlines the basics of getting started in AKC companion events and is available by calling 919-233-9767 or emailing orderdesk@akc.org.
- "Rally Regulations, Rally Judges Guidelines, The Steward in Rally" includes the regulations and guidelines for AKC rally trials, available here at <http://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RO2999.pdf>.
- "The Ultimate Guide to Rally-O: Rules, Strategies, and Skills for Successful Rally Obedience Competition" by Deb M. Eldredge, D.V.M. (TFH, 2011, \$24.95).

Rally is a fun way to enhance your relationship with your dog, while reinforcing the behaviors she already knows and introducing new ones. Time spent training, traveling to trials and on courses will bring you and your dog closer. It will also give your dog challenging work to do and expend her energy. For most owners, this translates into a happier, calmer canine.

Regardless of why you get involved in this sport – having more fun with your dog, cementing your relationship with her, providing more exercise or earning titles and ribbons – it's all doable with rally.

Revised 08/21/13 to correct the number of stations on a novice class course.

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