

Agility

We all have goals!

Supplied by Rosemarie Baker, rjbagility2020@gmail.com

Did You Know?

'My Messages', a new feature on the AC website has been added below 'My Dogs'.
www.dogagility.org.nz/index.html



Sue Whitwell's Australian Kelpie, Edge, in action. Hayley Rohde Photography.

So, on yet another long trip home from yet another Agility show, I had time to contemplate just how much my life, my aspirations, my expectations have altered over the years.

I can vividly remember walking into the Agility ring for the very first time, with my very first dog and just feeling so terrified. This is an accurate description of the emotion: my hands were shaking, I was possibly going to wet my pants, I was sweaty...

Even then, I knew that it was not a logical way to feel, but the potential for disaster was just so real. I was about to step out in public without any clue as to how my dog might react. Would I stay on my feet? Would I remember where the Elementary course went? Would the group of people I so wanted to be a part of judge me? Mock me? Laugh at me?

Turns out that it is possible to still run a dog, badly, when under duress. My dog is an actual super star — in my eyes anyway — and it didn't matter what he did. He was still my dog and still awesome. Now I find myself on the rollercoaster of Agility, there will be many tears and much pain, physical and emotional. For better or worse, I am now an Agility addict.

We went from that first outing to just wanting a piece of cardboard, just one. A clear round, the first one of which is also never forgotten. Next step was the lofty ambition of winning a ribbon, any ribbon, just one. Then wanting to maybe get second...

Then it's the desire to win something, Starters or Jumpers C. I can still remember my dog sending me to tears by just being so awesome and screaming around those courses. A judge once told me in the ring "you really need to stop admiring your dog and concentrate on the course". It was sage advice, but my dog was just so impressive. Well, I thought so.

Up the ranks we go and we are now playing with the flash speedy dogs. The courses are becoming very complex, and clear rounds are not as regular because we need to push our boundaries and speed, which means we are losing some consistency. But I put my big girl knickers on and we do our best.

Then out of the blue, we achieve a challenge. That's big, and there are more tears. We are back to wanting a piece of cardboard more than anything.

I find myself obsessed with my competing dog's comfort: warm bed, cool bed; warm coat, cool coat; correct nutrition, fresh water always available; warm up, warm down; shade; core strengthening exercises; toys; treats; positive training; a trusted vet; a trusted physio... so it goes on.

I made a solemn vow to never under any circumstances run my dog unless he is in perfect health, no matter what piece of cardboard is at stake.

He, on the other hand, is way more relaxed about the whole thing and just wants to play the game.

As an Agility addict, you are no longer able to purchase those expensive clothes, but when would you ever wear them anyway? Who needs restaurant dinners when you can grab a camp chair and a sandwich and truly enjoy the company of your fellow competitors and their dogs? Your housework is a little sporadic, but nobody cares. It's called living your life.

You learn to forego other more fundamental creature comforts such as hot showers and proper meals, even coffee. You travel endless miles, are consumed by doubt about virtually everything. But there are such great positives.

Every time you arrive at an Agility show, you have so much in common with everyone else there. We all love the game we play with our dogs, we all love our dogs, we all travel, most of us camp. I find my fellow Agility addicts to be the most caring, generous and helpful people I have ever known as a competitive group.

My human family is very understanding and tolerant of my quirky lifestyle. No, actually they think I am quite mad but have not tried to have me committed yet. That is how I know they truly do love me.

My non-Agility friends also think I am slightly insane because I chose a paddock in the middle of nowhere over a pamper trip to



Bali and many birthdays and dinners and shopping trips but that's how I know they also truly do love me.

The result for me is an unconditional commitment and love for a furry family member who is so tolerant, talented and pivotal to how I choose to live my life.

Sometimes we just need to look backwards to move forwards. 🐾

Sue Whitwell



Sue's Miniature Schnauzer Wallace is now retired.

Ad/Fill