

RULES and GUIDELINES FOR ENCOURAGEMENT RINGS

The Obedience and Tracking Committee, DogsNSW

The purpose of an encouragement ring is to provide a relaxed, friendly ring experience in a trial environment for handlers, as preparation for trialling in the obedience ring. As the name indicates, the goal is to encourage handlers to continue training and to compete in obedience trials.

Generally, the intention is to be as flexible as possible; handlers may discuss any special requests with the judge.

Encouragement rings may be provided for any class - CCD, Novice, Open or Utility - or for a combination of classes - e.g. CCD/Novice.

Entries may be taken in advance or on the day. The ring may be conducted in association with an Obedience Trial, or independently.

A club does not need to apply for permission to conduct an encouragement ring.

RULES FOR ENCOURAGEMENT RINGS

There are no set rules governing the exercises in an encouragement ring. They are generally set by the judge officiating, usually in consultation with the affiliated club which is conducting the ring. Suggestions are made in the guidelines section.

If the ring is open to people who are not members of the club conducting the ring, then the judge must be a person who is licensed to judge at that level. For example, a novice encouragement ring must be judged by a person who is a licensed Novice judge.

If the ring is conducted in association with an Obedience Trial:

- If entries are taken in advance, then participants must be catalogued in the usual way, with all dogs registered with the Royal NSW Canine Council (or an equivalent interstate body) and all owners and handlers current financial members of the Royal NSW Canine Council (or equivalent body).
- Rules and regulations relating to aggressive dog incidents and misbehaviour of handlers apply
- Handlers may not physically reprimand their dogs in the ring. Harsh verbal reprimands are not permitted.

GUIDELINES FOR ENCOURAGEMENT RINGS

This section consists of suggestions only; these guidelines may be modified as required. It is recommended that the club and the judge discuss in advance how the ring will be conducted. Handlers will also need to know on the day how the ring will be run.

Participation in the ring may be, for example,

- open to all dogs which are not competing in that class or a higher class at the trial;
- open to all dogs which have never competed in that class; or
- open to all handlers who have never competed in that class.

Praise and rewards

- Verbal and physical praise is permitted and is encouraged.
- Handlers are usually permitted to carry food, and use food. The club may also choose to allow handlers to use toys. These options should be chosen depending on the circumstances of the ring, since dogs may be

competing formally in the obedience trial in rings nearby. The club, officials and handlers must remember that the encouragement ring generally, and praise and rewards in particular, must not be unreasonably distracting for those dogs. For example, the club may rule that dogs must not chase rewards, and toys etc must not be audible to other dogs. If it is possible for the encouragement ring to be at a distance from the other rings, then more leeway can be permitted.

Exercises

- The exercises are based on the exercises for that class.
- The club may decide to include all exercises, or a subset. A commonly used subset is "heel on lead, stand for examination or stand stay on lead, recall, and group exercises".
- Exercises may be shortened or simplified; for example, a shorter recall, omitting fast pace from the heeling pattern, and reducing the distance and time of stay exercises.

The club may elect to have all encouragement dogs work on lead only, to avoid disrupting other rings.

The judge may decide not to offer a particular exercise to a dog, or may curtail the exercise, if the judge considers that the dog is not able to perform the exercise on the day, or that its behaviour during the exercise is likely to be unreasonably distracting to other competing dogs.

Handlers may elect to omit any exercise.

The club should provide at least one steward for the ring. If the heeling pattern is to include a Figure Eight, then there should be a second steward available if possible.

The club may choose to offer prizes for the ring. This should be discussed with the judge in advance, and agreement reached on the method of allocating prizes. For example, if points are allocated, it may be decided that

- talking to the dog or extra commands during an exercise will not incur an automatic zero or deduction of over 50%;
- dogs will not lose marks for occasional praise or encouragement during an exercise;
- overly frequent commands, encouragement or praise will receive minor deductions.