



FEATURE

# How to choose the *Best Exercise* for your Dog

While walks to the nearby dog park are never a bad thing, sometimes dogs need more of a challenge. Doesn't matter if you have a dog who loves water, or one who can run for miles, choosing the right sport for him is essential to make sure he stays fit, has fun and doesn't get injured.

Here are some tips on how to choose the perfect sport for your dog.

## Walking/Hiking

If you have an active dog who isn't quite up to running, he might be better suited for walking or hiking. The best hiking dogs are working breeds with a sense of adventure. If you have a dog who will just keep going and going, as long as there's something to smell, investigate and discover, you might have the perfect hiking companion.

Good walking dogs are usually sociable, lively and always up for joining their human companions, whatever they're doing. And while good running dogs tend to be medium to larger, good hiking dogs come in all sizes.

Walking is also ideal for dogs who are scent-oriented, meaning there's just nothing better for them than smelling the world around them. Your dog's sense of smell uses a lot of brain power, which is why nose work (training games that require your dog to find things using his nose) can tire out even the most active and hyper of dogs. If you have a dog that just puts nose to the ground as soon as you step outside, hiking and all the new smells along the way can provide an amazing workout for both his body and his brain.

**Best For:** Terriers, because they have boundless energy and hiking can be the perfect way to tire them out; gundog or working breeds that are always curious, such as Labrador Retrievers and Australian Cattle Dogs. Also Scent Hounds, who love to discover new scents along the way, e.g. Beagles, Foxhound, Harrier.

**Less Suited For:** Dogs with flat faces (it's harder for them to keep their breathing under control after a very long walk) and dogs with short legs such as Dachshund, British Bulldogs, and Welsh Corgis (they might not be able to handle steps, steep hills or the rocky terrain you often find during a steep hike).



## Scent Work

Scent Work is a sport that is based on the task of working detection dogs to locate an odour and communicate to the handler that the odour has been found. Detection is done in a variety of environments and often during changing weather or environmental conditions. <sup>1</sup>

Scent Work is a positive, challenging activity that allows dogs the opportunity to use their strongest natural sense in a way that is fun, engaging, and builds and strengthens a foundation of trust between the handler and dog. <sup>1</sup>

Dogs are trained to recognise specific odours and to alert their handlers when the odours are detected. Dogs may paw, bark, point with their nose or body, sit, lie down, or use any other non-destructive behaviour to communicate the location of the odour. <sup>1</sup>



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Handlers take their dogs through a search area which may be set up in a variety of environments. The dog and handler must work together as a team. <sup>1</sup>

**Scent Work is Best for:** Hounds and Gundogs but open to all breeds. Eligibility of exhibits for Scent Work trials are open to dogs that are: (a) registered with the relevant member body; and (b) 6 months of age or over on the first day of a sanctioned event which includes a Scent Work trial. <sup>1</sup>

## Catch and Frisbee

If you have a dog who will bring you back a ball 100 times without ever getting bored, you probably have a dog who will love playing Frisbee – also known to professionals as “disc dog sport.”

An activity that requires agility, speed and fast reflexes, this is a great choice for quick dogs who love to jump, are already fit, and have tons of energy. During formal competitions, disc dogs are awarded points based on how many times they can catch the disc in 60 seconds, how high they can jump to catch it, and even for choreographed routines they perform with their owners.

But even less-than-gracious dogs can get a lot out of this sport, as it gives them a “job,” enhances the bond you two have, and uses up a lot of energy in a short period of time.

**Best For:** Lean, medium-size dogs such as Border Collies or Australian Kelpies (they have the right leg length, are built for power jumping and never seem to run out of energy).

**Less Suited For:** Dogs with flat faces or short legs, such as Basset Hounds, Dachshunds and Pugs.

## Dances with Dogs

Despite the title of this fast growing sport it has nothing to do with dancing but plenty to do with music. If you can walk with your dog you can enjoy heelwork to music. If you love music and enjoy time with your dog then this is the sport for you. <sup>2</sup>

Handlers have the opportunity to develop and utilise their creative skills, and to train and showcase their dogs in a unique way. Dogs are kept active which improves their fitness as they develop greater flexibility. <sup>2</sup>

For information: <https://www.dogsnsww.org.au/events/dances-with-dogs/>

**Best For:** All breeds.

## Trick Dog

Trick Dog is a new Dogs Australia discipline which became an official event in

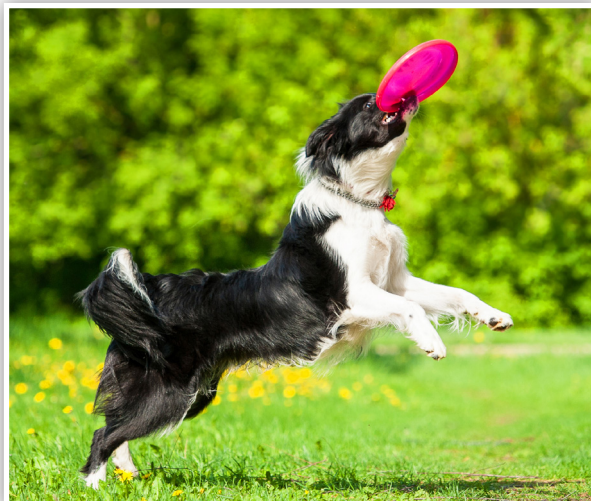
January 2020. Developed by members of Dances With Dogs discipline, the intention of Trick Dog is to encourage handlers to teach their dogs skills and to display behaviours in a positive environment. <sup>3</sup>

As many of the tricks are simply an extension of basic obedience training, teaching your dog foundation tricks can parallel your dog's training. Teaching your dog tricks must be fun. You can teach your dog many tricks, but your dog must truly be enjoying itself. Sessions should be short and fun for both dog and handler. <sup>3</sup>

For more information:

<https://www.dogsnsww.org.au/events/trick-dog>

**Best For:** All breeds.





## Running

Whether you're a seasoned runner or just thinking about taking up jogging, having a canine companion can be a lot of fun, however, just like running isn't right for every person, it's also not the right sport for every dog. For example, running isn't ideal for dogs who are too young, as their bones are still growing and the impact could be damaging. Senior dogs might not be up for running either, especially if they're suffering from joint issues.

Aside from age, there's also your dog's temperament and body build to consider. Certain breeds, such as huskies and large hunting/work breeds (like Weimaraners and Border Collies) are naturally suited to running, as they have longer legs, great stamina, and the proper snout length to make heavy breathing easier. On the other hand, dogs with flat faces (eg Pugs and Boxers) can easily overheat when running, making the sport dangerous for them.

If you have no idea if running is right for your dog, you can always give it a try. Start slow, on a day when it's not too hot or too cold and see how your dog does. You can't expect an untrained dog to be able to run two miles on his first try, but if your dog is still ready to keep going and super excited after a half mile run, this could just be the perfect sport for him.

## Endurance



For those dogs with stamina you might like to try Endurance, which is a test to demonstrate the dog's ability to work under physical strain over a 20km distance. The course covers over three varying surfaces, such as bitumen, unsealed roads, dirt tracks, grass, etc and owners who run the test usually train with their dogs with riding a bicycle beside them.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the dog's physical structure, such a test can only consist of a dog travelling at a

suitable pace for a performance of some lengthy duration, which, it is known places an increasing load, not only on its internal organs, such as the heart and lungs, but on many other aspects of the dog's physical structure and temperamental characteristics. The effortless accomplishment of such a test will be the evidence to the physical fitness of the dog.<sup>4</sup>

For more information: <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/events/endurance/>

## Lure Coursing

Lure coursing is a performance sport developed in the early 1970s by sight hound fanciers who hunted jackrabbits in the open field. They invented lure coursing as a safer, more controlled sport for sighthounds that would recreate the physical requirements of open field coursing, allowing them to continue testing the functional abilities of their hounds. Lure coursing aims to preserve and develop the coursing skills inherent in sighthounds and to demonstrate that they can perform the functions for which they were originally bred. The hounds chase plastic bags on a course laid out to simulate escaping game. The plastic bags are pulled around on a nylon string course, propelled by a hand controlled motor.<sup>5</sup>

A coursing dog should have the ability to course without showing signs of undue stress or lack of fitness. Coursing tests many aspects of a dog's physical structure and temperament. As a consequence, dogs who participant in lure coursing need to be both sound and fit.<sup>5</sup>

Lure Coursing is open to all breeds and associate register dogs. There are two streams with two separate sets of titles. Sighthound stream breeds are: Afghan Hound, Azawakh, Borzoi, Greyhound, Ibizan Hound, Irish Wolfhound, Pharaoh Hound, Saluki, Deerhound, Sloughi, Whippet, and Italian Greyhound plus Basenji and Rhodesian Ridgebacks.<sup>5</sup>





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The Coursing Ability stream is open to all other registered breeds and associate register dogs. Try out days are an opportunity to see if your dog will run without the pressure of a trial. <sup>5</sup>

For further information: <https://www.dogsnsww.org.au/events/lure-coursing/>

**Best For:** Large hunting/work breeds such as Siberian Huskies, Weimaraners and Border Collies (they are naturally suited to running, as they have longer legs, great stamina, and the proper snout length to make heavy breathing easier). Also sight hounds, that love to run, for example Salukis, Afghan Hounds, Greyhounds for running and lure coursing.

**Less Suited For:** Dogs with flat faces such as Pugs and Boxers (they can easily overheat when running, making the sport dangerous for them, particularly in warm weather).

## Agility

Working breed dogs often excel at agility for one simple reason; they were born to solve problems, love to have fun and have endless energy. But agility work can be great for any dog, as it's a great workout to boost self-confidence and strengthen the bond with your dog.

Have a dog who's always getting in trouble because he's bored? Agility might be the answer, as it tires dogs both physically and mentally so your pooch doesn't get in trouble again as soon as you turn your back.

Agility requires some work, so you might do well searching for your local kennel club where you can at least learn the basics to then practice on your own. If you have a yard, you can even build your own agility course using common materials such as PVC pipes, wooden planks, and a collapsible children's play tunnel from your local toy store.



**Best For:** Working, medium-size breeds such as Border Collies, Australian Shepherds, Australian Kelpies, Standard Poodles (these are full-of-energy breeds that love completing tasks and pleasing their owners).

**Less Suited For:** Large breeds such as Mastiffs and Great Danes (the impact of the jumping might be a little too hard on their joints), flat-faced dogs such as Boston Terriers and British Bulldogs (they might have trouble with their breathing throughout the workout)

For more information: <https://www.dogsnsww.org.au/events/agility/>

## Flyball

Flyball is the fastest sport on four paws! Nicknamed "Drag Racing for Dogs", flyball is a relay race between two teams of four dogs. Each dog on the team has to jump over 4 hurdles, trigger and retrieve a ball from a specially designed flyball box at the other end of the lane and then return over the hurdles before the next dog on the team has their turn. <sup>6</sup>

It's one of the most exciting sports for both competitors and spectators because dogs of all sizes and shapes over the age of 12 months can (and do!) compete. Spectators are encouraged to clap and cheer for their favourite team, and many of the dogs actually run faster, the louder the cheering! To make it fair for all dogs, the height of the four hurdles is set based on the ulna (top leg bone) length of the shortest dog on the team. This means that dogs with shorter legs jump smaller jumps than those with longer legs. Jump heights go down to a minimum of 18cms and up to a maximum of 35.5cms. <sup>6</sup>



**Best For:** Again working dog breeds often excel at flyball due to their boundless energy, however flyball would suit any breed that has the ability to run fast.

For further information: <https://www.flyball.org.au/> or <https://www.dogsnsww.org.au/events/flyball/>



## Swimming

First, let's get something out of the way: it's not true that dogs can naturally swim and it's also not true that all dogs can become good at it even if you spend a lot of time practicing. In fact, some breeds like Pugs, Boxers, Bull breeds and Basset Hounds are just not natural swimmers at all and will have a hard time in the water because of their anatomy (top-heavy with large chests, short and stubby legs) or flat facial features.



On the other hand, if you have a dog whose name contains a water-related word (e.g. Portuguese Water Dog, Chesapeake Bay Retriever), has webbing between their toes or has a water-resistant coat, chances are he'll love the water. Hunting and rescue breeds often make great swimmers as well.

In addition to being natural for some dogs, swimming is also great for older dogs or dogs with joint issues who cannot walk long distances for exercise. Water activities not only help fight stiff joints, but also keep ligaments flexible and help prevent obesity in dogs that otherwise wouldn't get much exercise.

## Draft Test

Draft Test is a new discipline to Australia but it is well established in USA, Canada, The UK and Europe. Draft Tests are run by breed clubs to maintain the inherit working abilities of these draft breeds. <sup>7</sup>

In Australia it is hoped that traditional drafting breeds will embrace this as the performance of these exercises is intended to demonstrate skills resulting from both instinctual abilities and training. It is a real working test! <sup>7</sup>

Dogs that pull a cart have to be physically strong and sound, well trained, adaptable and of good disposition. They must work well with their handler in variety of terrains and situations that they might encountered. <sup>7</sup>



**Best For:** Large utility breeds such as Saint Bernards, Leonbergers, Newfoundlands, Bernese Mountain Dogs.

For more information on drafting please go to <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/events/draft-test/>

## Tracking



All breeds of dog can learn to track – it uses their natural scenting instincts which is enjoyable and rewarding. Some breeds, such as the Bloodhounds, Basset Hound, Beagle and German Shepherd are particularly well suited to this form of exercise, due to their incredible scent detectors in their noses. <sup>8</sup>

Tracking involves training a dog to follow a ground scent trail and find any discarded articles of clothing along the track. Dogs must wear a tracking harness and must track at the end of a 10 metre lead, unless topography makes this difficult. <sup>8</sup>

Tracking in NSW is done mostly in winter, due to the risk of snakes and heat of summer. A number of obedience and tracking

clubs teach tracking, in which a dog and handler may learn how to track. Some of these clubs also run tracking trials, where dogs and handlers can enter to gain their tracking titles. <sup>8</sup>

To be eligible for entry in Tracking Trials a dog must have passed the Preliminary Tracking qualification test. A track is a scent trail or scent path left behind as a person or animal walks or moves, along the ground. There are a lot of varying views and theories on what forms the scent track and without becoming too complicated, it is generally accepted that the track is formed in two ways: Ground Scent and Body Scent. <sup>8</sup>

**Best For:** Such breeds as Bloodhound, Basset Hound, Beagle and German Shepherd

For further information: <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/events/tracking/>





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### Herding

Herding is fun and a great social activity. It gets you outdoors, keeps you active and is good exercise for all involved. Herding will intensify the relationship between you and your dog. It's a great pleasure to watch dogs perform the basic farm work they once were used for. Ask any handler and they will describe the satisfaction in learning to work your own dog.<sup>9</sup>

Herding is complex and very challenging to learn, but well worth the effort!<sup>9</sup>

**Best for:** This sport is mainly for working dogs, such as Border Collies, Australian Kelpies, Australian Cattle Dogs, Australian Shepherds, Old English Sheepdog, etc

For more information: <https://www.dogsnsww.org.au/events/herding/>



### Earthdog

Many Terriers and Dachshunds were bred originally to hunt, chase, go to ground and bolt quarry of one kind or another, usually fox, otter and badger. Today, the sport of Earthdog allows these dogs to use their natural instincts in a safe, simulated hunting environment. They can have lots of fun and earn titles too.<sup>10</sup>

Earthdogs are tested on their ability to enter the den, find their way to the 'quarry' through a series of turns and tunnels, and work the quarry. These challenges become increasingly difficult at each stage.<sup>10</sup>

**Best for:** Dogs 6 months of age or older and registered with Dogs Australia are eligible to participate in Earthdog tests; as are spayed and neutered dogs with Limited Registration, provided they are classified as eligible breeds.<sup>10</sup>

The following breeds are classified as eligible to participate in Dogs Australia Earthdog tests: Dachshunds, Australian Terriers, Australian Silky Terriers, Bedlington Terriers, Border Terriers, Cairn Terriers, Dandie Dinmont Terriers, Fox Terriers (Smooth and Wirehaired), German Hunt Terriers, Glen of Imaal Terriers, Jack Russell Terriers, Lakeland Terriers, Manchester Terriers, Miniature Pinschers, Norfolk Terriers, Norwich Terriers, Parson Russell Terriers, Portuguese Podengo Pequeno, Scottish Terriers, Sealyham Terriers, Skye Terriers, Tenterfield Terrier, Welsh Terriers and West Highland White Terriers.<sup>10</sup>



### Retrieving

The purpose of retrieving and their trials is to test and determine the dogs' natural hunting ability in the field, under natural conditions. Retrieving trials allows the owner/breeder the opportunity to test the natural working instincts of their dogs, and a chance to select breeding stock based on preserving natural working instincts which have been developed over centuries. Retrieving trials are held on country properties, where the terrain can be quite challenging; it may be up hills, through gullies, and with thick cover. The cover may include tussocks or long grass, which conceal the retrieve and force the dog to use its nose to scent it out.<sup>11</sup>

Items to be retrieved are cast from a mechanical thrower and dogs must be able to determine the depth of fall of the 'game' and then be able to seek and retrieve the game and gently deliver it to the handler. All retrieving trials are held under Dogs Australia rules and are held in all states around Australia.<sup>11</sup>







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**Best for:** All dogs entered must be over six months of age and trials are conducted by various Gundog Clubs during the year. All types of gundogs compete and at any trial you can see breeds such as the Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, German Shorthaired Pointer, Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, Brittany, Flat Coated, Retriever, Weimaraner and various other breeds of gundogs.<sup>11</sup>

For more information: <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/events/gundogs-and-retrieving/>

## Obedience

Whether your dog is a puppy or a more mature dog, has a pedigree, is a rescue dog, or a cross breed, the basic training he has received at the local obedience club will enable you and your dog to get ready to enter the world of Obedience Trialling and Rally Obedience. Please be warned that Obedience Trialling and Rally Obedience will open up a new world for you and your dog. Some people newly introduced to the world of obedience find trialling addictive and each weekend people head off with their dogs to compete in Obedience and Rally O, along the way forming friendships with like minded people. Often people go on to find other avenues in which they can compete with their dog, but no matter what dog sport is chosen, obedience is the key and is the basis of all training to have control over your dog.<sup>12</sup>



There are five levels of Obedience in Australia plus Rally Obedience, which also has different levels from Novice through to Master. For more information on Obedience or Rally Obedience and their levels: <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/events/obedience/><sup>12</sup>.

**Best for:** To enter in these competitions you need a trained dog that is registered with a controlling body, (in NSW - DOGS NSW), either on the main or associate registers. You also need to be a member of DOGS NSW.

**Words:** <https://yourdogadvisor.com/best-dog-exercise/> with extracts from **DOGS NSW Website**

**References:** 1- 12: Information on all featured sports listed under <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/events>

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