

## *Beyond Fetch: Other Canine Activities*

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### *West Wind Dog Training*

When people think of dog activities, probably one of the first things that come to mind is a dog show. Another thing that pops into many minds is playing fetch in the backyard. Well, there are many more activities open to all dogs than people realize! Regardless of the size or background of your dog, you can do some activities for fun or outright competition. Some sports are group specific like terrier trials while others are open to any dog. Let us look at some of the options you have that go beyond fetch.

Why should we allow our dogs to express themselves? Aren't they happy just being pets? Well, yes and no. Dogs are often very happy being our companion, but many breeds have a long heritage of doing something and would really like something to do with their human by their side. Domestic dogs were used by humans for many functions, allow a dog to use the brain he was born with helps alleviate boredom, is good for the health of the dog (and human) and tightens the bond between man and beast.

Now, let us look at some of the dog sports available to you!

**Obedience** is open to both purebreds and the United Kennel Club has opened it to crosses as well (American Kennel Club is for purebreds only). Starting with basic Novice and going up to Utility and even to Obedience Trial Championships, Obedience tests the dog and handler working as a team. As dogs advance, they are tested over jumps and later scent articles. Basic Obedience is also a strong background for many sports and is a great way to build a working relationship with your dog.

**Agility** is open to any dog of any breed or cross. It combines speed and accuracy over a series of obstacles. Jumps, tunnels, weave poles, A-frames and many others are combined to test the skill of dog and human. The more advanced the dog, the harder the course. Though some of the most common breeds in Agility are Border Collies, Shetland Sheepdogs and Jack Russell Terriers, any dog or cross can compete.

**Tracking** is another sport open to all dogs. A track is laid and the dog's ability to follow it is tested. Some breeds, scent hounds, were bred specifically for tracking, but any dog has the capabilities.

**Lure Coursing** is for sight hounds like Afghans, Basenjis, Greyhounds, Whippets, Borzois and the other sight hound breeds. A fake lure (generally white plastic bags) is pulled across a set course to mimic fleeing prey. The dog's ability to follow the lure and time it takes are judged.

**Field Trials, Hunt Tests and Coonhound Tests** mimic hunting scenarios for those with sporting breeds.

**Herding** tests are designed to allow herding breed to do what they were bred for.

**Earthdog Trials** give smaller terriers and Dachshunds a chance to show off their old hunting skills.

**Weight Pulling** and **Sledding** (and the less familiar **Skijoring**) show off strength and endurance.

**Schutzhund** is a combination of protection, tracking and obedience that requires a very stable dog and handler.

**Flying Disc** competitions allow a dog to show agility, speed and accuracy – as well as some great gymnastics.

**Freestyle Obedience** – also called Dancing with you dog – takes basic heeling work to a new high! If you like to dance and would like to include your dog, try this sport.

### ***GETTING STARTED***

Getting started in a sport is as easy as clicking your mouse or picking up the phone. Many local kennel clubs have members who are involved in sports. The American Kennel Club and United Kennel Clubs have lists of various local and all-breed clubs. Many sports have their own parent clubs with multiple smaller clubs all over the country. A quick internet search of the sport should open up a wealth of contacts.