

THE STEWARD IN OBEDIENCE

Per AKC as of 07/11/2006

Planning an obedience trial is an endeavor that involves many months of preparation by the Obedience Trial Committee. The tasks are varied and demanding: Selecting judges, preparing a premium list, compiling a mailing list, soliciting trophies, preparing equipment, making luncheon arrangements, securing admission tickets, and printing a catalog are only some of the tasks to be completed. The training of stewards is a necessary, but often neglected or lightly treated, element of preparation for an obedience trial.

A steward not acquainted with obedience ring procedure requires time-consuming instructions from the judge and can severely slow down the entire judging procedure. In order to ensure the smooth operation of a ring by the obedience stewards, clubs should provide at least one training session for them and use experienced stewards to instruct the training session.

Well in advance of their trial, clubs should appoint a chief steward whose duty it is to invite a sufficient number of experienced persons to act as stewards in the judging rings on the day of the event. Any person invited to serve as a steward must be in good standing with the AKC. The chief steward should, as soon as practicable, confirm in writing to all who accept an invitation to steward, the date and location of the trial, the time at which they are to report for duty, and their particular ring assignments.

People should avoid serving as a steward with judges under whom they have an entry or under whom, in the course of a day's judging, their entries

might become eligible to compete.

Stewards must keep in mind that they have been selected to help the judges and not to advise them. They should carefully refrain from discussing or even seeming to discuss the dog's performance with the judge and should not under any circumstances show or give the appearance of showing the catalog to the judge. When not actively engaged in their duties, stewards should position themselves so that they will not interfere with the judging of the dogs.

Under no circumstances should a steward give information or instructions to owners or handlers unless specifically instructed to do so by the judge, and then they should do so only in such a manner that it is clear that the instructions are those of the judge.

Stewarding functions in the obedience ring fall into three general categories: gate, table, and ring. Under ideal circumstances, a club will provide four stewards to perform these functions (there are two ring stewards). However, if the judge's assignment is relatively light, a club could manage quite well with two experienced persons for each ring. The following discussion will explain the specific duties of each function. Although the duties discussed below cover most of the steward's responsibilities, it is absolutely essential that the stewards be at ringside at least 45 minutes prior to the scheduled start of judging to receive any specific instructions from the judge and to assist in setting up the ring as directed by the judge.

THE GATE STEWARD

The primary responsibility of the gate steward is to ensure that the next dog to be judged is immediately available when the judge indicates that they are ready. As soon as the judge begins the judging routine of a dog, this steward calls the next dog to be judged and

ensures the handler is at ringside when the dog in the ring has completed all exercises. Dogs may not enter the rings until the judges indicate they are ready for the next dog. The gate steward is responsible for ensuring the judging time of the class is not delayed by having the judge wait for dogs.

Dogs must be judged in catalog order to the extent that it is practical to do so without holding up the judging in any ring. If the dog listed next in the catalog is not at ringside when needed, the steward should not hesitate to call the next dog in order. Stewards are not required to seek out handlers: Handlers are responsible for being ready when their dogs' numbers are called. The steward should report any absence to the judge, and the judge will decide when the dog is to be marked absent. This procedure should be followed even if the armband for the absent dog has already been issued.

It is normally the duty of the gate steward to distribute armbands. When exhibitors identify themselves, the steward should check the catalog and ask the exhibitors' names and the names of the dogs. The steward then should check that the number of the armband being given to the exhibitor corresponds to the number in the catalog. It is essential that every precaution be taken when distributing armbands.

Very often, exhibitors make requests for special consideration, such as asking to be judged out of catalog order. Any request of this nature must be directed to the judge. It is the judge's prerogative to grant or deny the request. The steward should never consider the matter.

When stewarding in the Novice Class, upon completion of the Recall exercise, the gate steward should return leashes to handlers before they leave the ring.

THE TABLE STEWARD

The extent to which a judge uses the services of a table steward varies greatly. Some judges prefer to do their own bookwork and do not feel it is necessary to have the steward perform many of the duties in this area. The steward must receive specific instructions from the judge to ascertain exactly what will be required as table steward.

Many judges use worksheets. The judge may ask the table steward to prepare and have ready the worksheet for the next dog. The steward should ensure that the class, proper armband number, and breed of dog are correctly entered on the sheet. If the judge requests, the table steward must double-check to see that the scores on the worksheet are added correctly. The judge — and only the judge — will transfer the scores from the worksheet to the judge's book. The steward should check to ensure that no error has been made. If an error is detected, the steward should bring it to the attention of the judge. Under no circumstances should the steward write in the judge's book.

The table steward usually prepares the Group Exercise worksheets, if the judge uses them. These should be prepared in advance and according to the judge's instructions. It is essential that these sheets be prepared in catalog order, even if that is not the order in which the dogs were individually judged.

The table steward must review the catalog to see what trophies (if any) are offered and to ensure that all trophies and ribbons are available at the conclusion of judging. Very often the steward is asked to assist in the awarding of the trophies and ribbons to the winners.

RING STEWARDS

Each judge requires two ring stewards. It is particularly important for these two stewards to report to the ring at least 45 minutes prior to the

scheduled time for judging to assist the judge in setting up the ring and equipment and to receive specific assignments from the judge. As the duties of the ring stewards vary with the class in which they are officiating, the remainder of this discussion will be divided by classes.

THE CLASSES

NOVICE

The first exercise in the Novice Class is the Heel on Leash. After the dog finishes the heeling pattern, the two ring stewards are required to act as “posts” around which the dog and handler will execute the Figure Eight. Both stewards should be ready immediately when the Figure Eight is called. The judge will indicate where they want the Figure Eight performed. When should the stewards go to the assigned position? Most often just after the judge gives the order, “Exercise finished” for the Heel on Leash portion of the exercise. This method saves time by not requiring the judge to call the stewards each time they are needed. The stewards stand 8 feet apart, facing each other, with their hands hanging naturally at their sides or folded in front. Hands should not be placed on hips or in any way extended from the body. It is absolutely essential that stewards do not talk or move while this exercise is being performed.

Stewards must resist the temptation to turn their head to watch the dog’s performance.

After completion of the Figure Eight exercise, a steward must be available to take the leash from the handler. The judge will then give the order for the “Stand for Examination.” Very often the judges will require the steward to hold their clipboards and pencils. Once the steward has these items, they should promptly move away from the area where the exercise is taking place. But the steward should be close enough to quickly return the clipboard and

pencil when the judging of the exercise is completed and the judge gives the order, "Exercise finished." The steward does not return the dog's leash until after the Recall exercise is completed.

Any number of incidents may occur during the Group Exercises, and stewards must be particularly alert. If a dog breaks or starts to move toward another dog, the steward may be asked to restrain the dog's movement. The steward's attention should be divided between the dogs and the judge to make sure the stewards are alert to a possible disturbance. The steward must be ready to follow whatever instructions the judge may give.

OPEN CLASS

When issuing an armband to a handler, the gate steward should record in the catalog beside the armband number the height and distance of the dog jumps as stated by the handler. The gate steward should also take the leash and dumbbells from the handler when the dog is brought into the ring. A discussion of heights and distance will be described later. It is essential that the steward setting the Broad Jump have a tape measure or steel rule to ensure the accuracy of the jump. The first duty of the judge will be to check that the jumps are properly set. Stewards must arrange jumps quickly and accurately, or much time will be wasted.

In the Open Class, the Figure Eight is performed off lead as part of the Heel Free exercise. The requirements of stewards are the same as in the Novice Class. Again, stewards should be immediately available when the order is given.

The Open Class has two retrieving exercises: the Retrieve on Flat and Retrieve over High Jump. The gate steward takes the dumbbell from the handler as the dog enters the ring and places it on the judges' table. When directed by the judge, a ring steward shall deliver the dumbbell to the handler or to the judge as

specified by the judge. This should be done immediately so handlers are not made to wait. The gate steward will line up the dogs and handlers outside the ring immediately prior to the time the judge has indicated they will judge the Long Sit and the Long Down exercises. The judge should not be made to wait while the handlers are lined up. The Long Sit and Long Down exercise are always done in exact catalog order. As the dogs enter the ring, the ring stewards must line up dogs and handlers along the ringside as indicated by the judge. Ring stewards must make sure that dogs are in catalog order and that they are placed an equal distance from each other. The judge will instruct handlers to place armbands and leashes behind their dogs with the leash on top of the armband in such a manner that the number is easily read. One of the two ring stewards in the Open Class will be assigned to lead the handlers out of the dogs' sight. Prior to the beginning of the exercise, access to this location should be checked by the stewards. Once behind the "blind" area, the steward must watch for the judge's signal to return to the dogs and lead handlers back to the ring. The steward is responsible for having handlers return in the same order in which their dogs are arranged. The other steward assists the judge in the ring in the same manner described for the Novice Class.

UTILITY CLASS

When issuing an armband to a handler, the gate steward should record the height the dog jumps as stated by the handler of the dog in the catalog beside the armband number. The Utility Class contains the Directed Jumping exercise, during which the dog must complete a high jump and a bar jump. As in the Open Class, one steward immediately sets the high jump while the other steward sets the bar jump. Again, this must be done quickly and accurately. As in the Open Class, the judge will make sure that the jumps

are properly set.

For the Scent Discrimination exercise, the gate steward will have placed the handler's articles on the judge's table. The judge will select two articles, one leather and one metal, and separate them from the rest. The judge may position the remaining articles or may ask the ring steward to perform this function.

The articles must be placed so that the closest article is about 20 feet from the handler. The judge or ring steward must touch (not necessary to scent) each of the eight remaining articles, spreading them in a random manner on the floor, or ground, about 6 inches apart. On the judge's order, the handler will place the scented article on the judge's book or work sheet. Without touching that article, the judge or steward will place it among the others.

After completion of the Scent Discrimination exercises, the ring steward places the articles in the handler's container and returns them to the judge's table.

The Directed Retrieve exercise utilizes two ring stewards. While one steward is picking up the scent articles, the other steward takes the three gloves from the judge's table and goes to the far end of the ring. After the dog and handler are in position, (midway between and in line with the two jumps) but facing the opposite direction, the steward will drop the three gloves across the end of the ring. The steward will drop one glove in each corner, about 3 feet from the sides and the end of the ring, and one in the center, about 3 feet from the end of the ring. The three gloves must be clearly visible to both dog and handler. It is not necessary to "iron" the gloves flat, but they should be open, not closed. After the exercise is completed, the steward retrieves the remaining two gloves and places them on the judge's table.

For the Moving Stand exercise, one ring steward will be needed to hold the judge's clipboard and pencil during the examination and will stand aside as directed by the judge.

THE JUMPS

Although the gate steward will ask the handler what height the dog jumps, it is conceivable that the handler will know only the height of the dog. Because of this, it is essential that ring stewards be familiar with the *Obedience Regulations* concerning the setting of the jumps.

The minimum jump shall be set at the nearest multiple of 2 inches to three-quarters the height of the dog at the withers for the breeds listed in Chapter 4, Section 11.

The minimum jump shall be set to the nearest multiple of 2 inches to the height of the dog at the withers for all other dogs, with no dog jumping less than 8 inches or more than 36 inches.

The broad jump is set at twice the distance of the high jump. The low side of each hurdle and the lowest hurdle shall be nearest the dog. The highest hurdles shall be removed first.

The boards shall be spaced as equally as possible as follows:

1. For dogs that jump 16 to 24 inches — use two boards
2. For dogs that jump 28 to 44 inches — use three boards
3. For dogs that jump 48 to 72 inches — use four boards