

Dog Frisbee Fun

Got a Frisbee-crazy dog? Try the exciting sport of flying disc.

Lisa Hanks

No matter the level of artistry or skill, anyone and any dog can have loads of fun with a flying disc, also known as a Frisbee. For many, it's a blast just to play catch with your dog. Competitors, though, are completely devoted to the disc.

"My dogs love it; they live for it," says Greg Tresan, of Ball Ground, Ga., a 22-year competitor, five-time world finalist, and executive director of the International Disc Dog Handlers' Association.

An ideal disc dog is flexible and athletic, weighs about 30 to 50 pounds, and has high energy and a strong prey drive. Border Collies and Australian Shepherds often excel at the sport, but many mixed breeds can do equally well.

Disc's popularity has gone worldwide, and in the United States, many different groups sponsor a huge variety of competitions. "The IDDHA is as close to an umbrella group as you're going to find; we sanction events and recognize achievement with titles," Tresan explains.

Whether you're creative, fun-loving, competitive, or precise, there's a flying disc event for you. The rules vary depending on the sponsor, but single-disc events, also called Mini-Distance, or Throw and Catch, are featured at almost every competition. During this timed event, your dog must make as many short catches as possible — using only one disc. Typically, points are awarded based on the distance the disc is thrown before the dog catches it, with bonus points for mid-air grabs.

Dynamic, highly creative freestyle events are a competition staple, too. Judges might analyze the dog's leaping ability and the handler's variety of disc tosses, including forehand and backhand, around-the-back, and upside-down tosses. Distance competitions are also common, and one of the most well-known is the Florida-based Quadruped event.

For some dogs, catching flying discs is as natural as scarfing treats; others might as well try to play a piano. To find out if your dog will chase a disc, which means she has the right instincts, roll it like a wheel along the ground.

Never throw the disc at your dog, particularly her face, unless you're sure she's going to catch it. Nobody wants to get bonked in the head. It's best to hone your disc skills before testing them on your dog.

Flying disc's vertical leaps look thrilling, but are extremely hard on canine joints. Have your veterinarian check your dog's joints before you let her do any jumping.

The sport is also very tough on dogs' teeth, so be sure to use a relatively soft disc that weighs between 107 and 110 grams and is approved for competition. (Competition discs are all about the same size and shape.) The disc shouldn't be treated like a chew toy, although your dog should enjoy playing with it.

For beginners, your best bet is a single-disc competition. "If your dog will run out, catch a Frisbee, and bring it back, you can compete with the best," Tresan says.

Local disc clubs are great resources and often host fun days, training seminars, social events, and competitions. In no time, you and your dog will be leaping with joy for flying disc.

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