

Obedient and Agile Dogs Descend on Long Beach

American Kennel Club events swirl with activity and competition.

Sure you've heard of agility. Maybe you've watched it a bit on TV. Of course you've taken your dog to obedience class. But until you see agility and obedience competitions in person, you've got no clue.

Two days of agility and obedience competition took place in Long Beach, Calif., as the American Kennel Club hosted its annual invitationals on Dec. 2 and 3, 2006, in conjunction with the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship, one of the U.S.'s major annual dog shows.

Agility draws crowds

The top five agility competitors of each AKC breed were invited to race the courses at the Long Beach Convention Center. The bleachers that lined two separate courses were filled with competitors, dog owners, and casual observers over the two days. Sitting amongst the crowd is an education, and some people took the opportunity to pepper the experienced with questions as Border Collies, Dachshunds, German Shepherds, and almost every other breed ran, jumped, climbed, and weaved to try to get the best scores. Agility is a test of speed, balance, and behavior as a handler directs his or her dog through a series of obstacles, such as an "A" frame, bridge, tunnel, tire jump, and weave poles.

Over the course of the weekend, crowds jammed the edges of the courses not lined with bleachers, trying to get a peek at the 451 canine speed demons.

In the end, five dogs – each in its own height division – walked away with the top prizes: MACH Senna's Baltinator, a Bichon Frise, won the 8-inch division; MACH7 Blue Moon Sine on Willow, an Australian Shepherd, topped the 12-inch division; The Pyrenean Shepherd Luka De La Brise, MX, MXJ, took the 16-inch division; A Golden Retriever named Susie – MACH3 Flashpaws Runaround Sue – won the 20-inch division; and By For Turbo Diesel, a Border Collie, took the 24-inch division.

You can see highlights of the agility invitational on Feb. 11, 15, and 18, 2007 on Animal Planet. Check your local listings for times.

Obedience on a circuit

Nearly 100 obedience trial champion dogs entered the obedience invitational, staged on the third level of the convention center.

The various testing areas were set up in a ballroom, divided by white fences, and surrounded by seating for the many dog lovers who watched the competition. Obedience trials challenge a dog and handler's ability to navigate a variety of tests. Included are such things as calling the dog to come, then having him stop and lie down while still responding to "Come;" jumping over what looks like a fallen fence; finding a lightweight dumbbell (called a utility article) scented with the handler's smell amongst a group of identical barbells, and fetching a heavier, white dumbbell. Various turns are required, and response to many different commands.

Beginners work with their dogs on a leash, but soon move to leash-free work that includes both voice and hand commands.

At the end of the two-day trial, it was NOC OTCH Chaseabout's Dances With Lions UDX9, JH, MX, MXJ, who had the best total score. Simba, a Labrador Retriever, traveled to California from Littleton, Colo., with his owner, Renate Van Allen for the competition.

For more information about American Kennel Club events, visit www.akc.org