

Are You Ready to Rally?

By Mimi Englander



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Rally Obedience that is, which became an AKC titling event in January 2005.

Rally Obedience (“Rally” for short) is a sport in which you and your dog, heeling at your side, complete a set course of 10-20 stations, depending on the level, that has been designed by the judge. Each of these stations has a sign providing instructions about the skill to be performed. Signs are numbered to indicate the course you take during the performance.

There are 3 levels: Novice (performed on-leash), Advanced and Excellent (both performed off-leash). Once you complete the Excellent title you can pursue an RAE, where you have to qualify in both Advanced and Excellent at the same trial 10 times.

What types of exercises are performed on a Rally course?

There is a lot of variety with each Rally course. Signs (“stations”) instruct teams to go fast or slow, to halt (dog must sit at heel), to make turns and circles, to reverse direction, jump, and follow other basic obedience exercises. Many of the stations involve activities you are probably familiar with; such as Slow/Normal/Fast Pace Heel, Halt, Left/Right/About Turn, and Finish Right/Left. Others are simple extensions, such as 270° and 360° Right/Left Turns, Straight Figure Eight, and Send over Jumps.

Here are examples of Rally signs and how they should be performed:

Call Front - Forward Left : While heeling, call the dog to the front position, taking several steps backward as the dog turns and fronts. Then the handler moves forward while the dog goes to the handler’s left and into heel position (swing finish - no sit).

Halt - 1, 2, 3 Steps Forward : After a halt, the handler takes one step forward, halts, 2 steps, halts, 3 steps and halts. The dog heels with the handler and sits each time the handler halts.

Spiral Right : The handler, with dog in heel, makes a sequence of right turns around a line of 3-4 pylons, with the first two turns around the end pylons and each successive turn on one end getting tighter and tighter.

Off-set Figure 8 : This exercise has 2 bowls of dog treats or toys and 2 cones arranged in a 5’ by 10’ cross. The team performs a figure 8 around the two cones passing the tempting bowls along the way. If ever your attention heeling will come in handy its for this exercise. You won’t see this on a Novice course.

You mean you can actually talk to your dog throughout the Rally course?

Rally is different than Obedience in that handlers may talk to their dogs, praise them, and give them verbal commands as much as they want. It’s not only allowed – it’s encouraged. That helps dispel the ring nerves.

The judge says nothing during the performance, which lasts from the time the dog and handler cross the starting line until they cross the finish line. Scoring is based on how well the dog executes

each command and remains in heel position.

Handlers can also use hand signals, point a finger and, at the Novice and Advanced levels, clap your hands and pat your legs at any time. And perfect “heel position” isn’t required. It’s a great event for older dogs – at the upper levels there’s at least one jump on the course, but it would never be set higher than 16”, even for the tallest Berner.

How is the performance judged?

Each team has a starting score of 100 points from which points are deducted for such faults as missed or incompletely performed stations, touching the dog, leash corrections, etc. To qualify you must earn at least 70 points. The team with the highest score (i.e., fewest number of faults) wins first place, followed by the next highest score for second place, and so forth.

If two teams achieve the same score, the judge determines the placements according to the time recorded for each team’s course completion.

Okay, I think I get it! How do I go started?

Teaching your dog the different Rally exercises is a lot of fun and knowing that you don’t have to leave your words of encouragement at the gate when you enter the ring is a huge benefit, not to mention instant de-stressor!

If you want to learn more about Rally Obedience here are some helpful links to get you started:

Tips for getting started in AKC Rally Obedience:

http://www.akc.org/events/rally/getting_started.cfm

AKC Rally obedience signs and descriptions:

<http://www.akc.org/pdfs/rulebooks/ROR999.pdf>

Rally Obedience Yahoo Group:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Rally-obed/>

This group is invaluable resource for answers to all your Rally questions. This list has thousands of members – many just beginning themselves, as well as many seasoned competitors and judges who are always willing to help.