

Rally - A Beginners Guide



Gail Holl

Introduction

My name is Gail Holl and my partner in crime was the infamous Roger, a Pomeranian who made a name for himself in the Rally and Obedience world by being just 'Roger'! He loved Rally and was still 'having a go' at online competitions at nearly 14 albeit in his own way.

We fell in love with Rally in 2011 at Blackpool after paying £1 to have a go at a course whilst we were competing at an Obedience Show. We were hooked, and competed at our first Rally Show in 2012 where we gained 200 points in Level 1a (this was before KC Rally). Roger had managed to work his way through the Levels to Level 6, he either performed well or he was very naughty, usually the latter, but that's why he had a fan base they loved to see him showing off and being mischievous especially when there was a camera around! He was also in the Rally demonstration team at Crufts in 2014 where he could show off as much as he wished.

I have been a qualified Rally judge since 2016, I judge all Levels 1 - 6 and I have been the Crufts Northern Rally Inter-Regional Team manager since April 2019. I was asked by Julie Barrett in 2016 if I would like to be one of the assistant managers for the Northern Team, I was in this role for three years before taking on the managers position. My first year in the 'job' was a brilliant one, we managed to compete at Crufts in 2020 before lock down and I am delighted to say that the Northern Team won.

I often see comments online asking what Rally is, how do you start, where can I find trainers, what do I need, where are the shows and so on? So I decided to write a beginners guide to Rally. This is not a training book (I will add a few little pointers), this will show you what KC Rally is all about, there are other types of Rally but I am concentrating just on Kennel Club Rally. This book is an easy to follow guide and will give you some idea of how you can get started, what Rally is about, what happens at a competition, what you need and whether Rally is for you and your dog(s).

Chapter 1

What is Rally?

Rally is a fun inclusive dog sport open to all handlers and their dogs, pedigree or non-pedigree, large or small, young or old, an activity which is less physically demanding than agility and less formal than obedience. Rally also promotes a bond between the handler and dog, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing teams develop into a partnership and of course enjoying the sport of Rally.

In Rally the handler and dog follow a course that has been designed and set out by a judge, the signs are numbered, and the handler and dog complete each exercise in the correct order before they move on to the next. The course is walked without the dog so that the handler can see which signs are being used and the direction they are going in. The 'walk through' is open for a maximum of 30 minutes; some handlers walk the course once, some will need to walk it a few times. The handler and dog (team) start with 200 points and as they move around the course points are deducted rather than gained. The bonus exercise is worth an extra 10 points if executed correctly so 210 points will be the highest amount of points that can be scored. The rounds are also timed but this will be discussed later. The judge will have a scribe with them in the ring. The scribe will write down any deductions given by the judge; they will let the competitor know when to begin but they won't give instructions whilst the handler and dog are competing. Rally is all about working for yourself rather than the winning. The aim is to improve on your performance or scores, whether practising or competing.

Levels 1 & 2 are done on lead so they appeal to a wide range of pet owners or dog handlers. The exercises are a good foundation to other dog sports like obedience or agility but Rally can also be used to have fun with your dog whilst training. Rally is ideal for the older dogs that have retired from competition through injury or because they are

Chapter 2

Level 1 Signs/ Exercises

Level 1 signs/exercises are the basic exercises we would ask our dogs to do on a daily basis and can be used in all Levels. The commands used are sit, stand and down; plus there are also turns, recalls, different paces and heel work between exercises to learn and practise.

Heel work is performed with the dog on the handlers left, the dog works in a consistent position but unlike obedience, the dog can be within an arms length away from the handler. The lead must be loose at all times, a tight lead will be marked as a fault in competition. The dog must wear a buckle or snap collar when competing so it's a good idea to get them used to this if practising at home. If at a show, the dog must work on the left unless the handler has a physical disability. If this is the case then an Exercise Modification Request form must be completed before the competition, this then gives the judge time to adjust their course if needed.



**An example of 'heel work'
performed by Caroline & Darcy**

The handler should teach the dog the basic commands before practising Rally. Voice commands can be given with hand signals as long as they are simultaneous, this is classed as a single command, but the hand signals are used separately they will be classed as additional commands and will be marked as a fault when competing. Handlers can talk to and praise their dogs throughout the course, they will not be penalised.

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