

# Activities you can do with your dog

*There's more to owning a dog than just walking your neighbourhood, playing a game and the odd trip to the beach. There's a whole world of dog activities out there for you and your dog to enjoy. The following is a brief introduction to just some of the fun things that you, your dog and your family can get involved with. Not only will your dog get to do some amazing things and meet new friends - so will you.*

## Agility & Jumping

Agility is a dog sport that involves a handler-dog team negotiating their way through an obstacle course. There are 3 levels in ANKC (Australian National Kennel Council) agility – novice, excellent and masters. Each level has increased difficulty and more obstacles. You will need to find an agility club near you to start basic agility training. Dogs need a basic level of obedience training to do agility, as they must be able to work off lead.

The best breeds for this sport are the working dogs but any breed or cross breed can compete, if they are registered with Dogs NSW. Agility is great fun, it's an active sport but literally anyone can do it.

Agility and jumping trials are held all year round – the details of trials and agility clubs are on the Dogs NSW website [www.dogsnsw.org.au](http://www.dogsnsw.org.au)

## Flyball

Flyball is a dog sport where teams compete for the fastest time. This sport is suited to ball focussed dogs, as they need to run and take a series of jumps to reach a panel with a lever that, when pressed by the dog, releases a ball. The dog then must get back to their handler before the next dog in their team runs.

The breeds most suited to this sport are the working dogs (Border Collies, Kelpies, Cattle dogs) and gun dogs (Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Weimaraners, German Short Haired Pointers) plus other breeds of dogs that tend to be ball focussed, eg Staffordshire Bull Terriers, German Shepherds and even Pugs.

## Tracking

Tracking is a scent-based activity where dogs are trained to follow a scent trail. Once trained, they can compete in trials where the degree of difficulty and length of trail increases at the higher levels. These dogs can go on to be search and rescue dogs. For tracking, the dog wears a harness - typically leather – and has a 10-metre-long line attached. Scented items called 'articles' are placed along the trail. When the dog finds these items, they must 'indicate' they have found something by sitting, dropping or standing still until the handler picks up the item.

The best breeds for tracking are the hounds, gun dogs and working dogs, eg, Beagles, Bloodhounds, Vizslas, German Shepherds, Brittany Spaniels, Golden Retrievers and Border Collies.

In Sydney, the Tracking Club of NSW trains once per month during the colder months (May-August) on a Sunday 8.30 am till 3 pm.

## Lure Coursing

Lure coursing is a chasing activity for those dogs that have a high prey drive or instinct to chase. An irregular shaped course is set up using pulleys, spindles and rope. Plastic bags are tied to the end of the rope, and it is pulled to simulate prey fleeing. Dogs need to work off lead and attempt to catch the lure.

Any breed of dog can try lure coursing; however, Sight hounds are most suited to this activity, eg. Whippets, Greyhounds, Salukis and Afghans, but all breeds can and do enjoy the chase.

The Afghan Hound Club of NSW runs lure coursing training days at Erskine Park on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month from 8.30 am.

## Sledding

In NSW there are limited opportunities to take dogs into the snow, as most snow areas are also National Parks, from which dogs are prohibited. Sledding is done on dirt tracks - usually fire trails - and instead of sleds, the dogs pull modified bicycles and 3 wheeled rigs. Competitions only take place when temperatures fall below 15°C.

The breeds most suited to sledding are Siberian Huskies and Alaskan Malamutes. Both breeds are natural pullers and need little coaxing or training to do so. Any medium to large breed can give it a try or be trained to pull though.

Each year, the Siberian Husky Club of NSW (SHCNSW) holds an introductory sledding weekend for people that want to try sledding. All equipment and instruction is supplied by the Club, but owners need to bring their own dog and bicycle helmet. The Siberian Husky Club of NSW runs sledding competitions every year from April till September at Belanglo or Wingello State Forests, about 1-2 hours south of Sydney.

## Doggy Dancing

"Dances with Dogs" is where an owner and dog teamwork through a routine choreographed to music so that it looks like they are literally dancing. There are workshops available for this relatively new dog activity. People interested should keep an eye on the Dogs NSW website for workshop announcements [www.dogsnew.org.au](http://www.dogsnew.org.au).

Any breed of dog can participate in this activity. Those with purebred dogs like Poodles (miniature), Australian Shepherds, Shetland Sheepdogs, Border Collies, etc are currently the most common participants, but any breed or mixed breed can get involved.

## Earth Dog

Earth Dog is an activity designed to simulate dogs to hunt, chase 'quarry' and 'go to ground' as they traditionally did when hunting fox, badger and otters. Today dogs can engage safely in this activity via constructed tunnels ranging from 3 - 15 metres and earn titles in competitions.

The best breeds to use include Dachshunds and a variety of terriers, including Australian, Silky, Bedlington, Cairn, Border, Fox, Jack Russell, West Highland White and several others. Both pure bred dogs and mixed breed terrier types can enter. Pure bred dogs must be registered on the main or limited register, while mixed breed dogs must be on the associate register (see the Dogs NSW website for membership details and how to register your dog).

Training days and trials are run at Erskine Park and are listed on the Dogs NSW website [www.dogsnsw.org.au](http://www.dogsnsw.org.au).

## **Endurance**

Endurance is a long-distance event for all dogs who are registered with Dogs NSW. The dogs must run over a 20 km distance with 2 breaks of 15 minutes where they are checked by a vet to ensure that they are fit to continue. The entire test usually takes 2 – 3 hours. The handler can ride a bike or jog with the dog. Dogs remain on lead for the duration of the test. After the 20 km run, the dogs must also complete a simple obedience test before they are awarded their endurance title.

All breeds can do the endurance test provided they have a good level of fitness. People usually begin training their dogs in March and do the test in August each year.

Tests are done in winter only at Erskine Park and are listed on the Dogs NSW website [www.dogsnsw.org.au](http://www.dogsnsw.org.au).

## **Herding**

Herding involves training your dog to work stock – usually sheep. The dog and handler must learn to work together as a very close team to move the stock around a yard. The dog has to learn various signals to know when to move forward, stop, go around the stock, push the stock, go left, go right, etc.

The breeds most suitable are those with herding origins (Group 5 Working Dogs) eg Border Collies, rough and smooth Collies, Bearded Collies, German Shepherds, Corgis, Kelpies, Cattle Dogs, etc. Mixed breeds can also do herding provided that they are a working dog mix.

The ANKC (Australian National Kennel Council) has a herding program and runs training days every Saturday at Erskine Park from March till October and hold trials once per month on weekends. Details are on Dogs NSW website [www.dogsnsw.org.au](http://www.dogsnsw.org.au).

## **Gun dogs/ Retrieving trials**

Gundog trials are held under real hunting conditions and divided into 3 groups. Pointers and Setters – they must point the game, wait till the handler approaches then flush the game so the handler can shoot it. The dog then points again or retrieves the dead game. Utility Gundogs – these dogs point and then retrieve the game on land or in water. Spaniels and Retrievers – these dogs flush out game so it can be shot and then retrieve it when asked. Retrieving trials are conducted at varying degrees of difficulty or levels. An item is shot from a mechanical thrower, the dogs must hunt for and retrieve the 'game' and return it to the handler.

Trials are held all year round, are published on the Dogs NSW website [www.dogsnsw.org.au](http://www.dogsnsw.org.au) and held in varying locations all over NSW.

Only purebred Gundogs (Group 3 breeds) e.g. all the spaniels, retrievers, pointers, setters, etc may enter these trials and dogs must be registered with Dogs NSW.

## **New Sports: Scent Work / NoseWork and Trick Dogs**

More information to come – In the meantime, ask us!