



BMDCA Info Series

Bernese Mountain Dogs & Rally

2023 #26

Introduction ► AKC Rally®, originally known as Rally Obedience, was designed with the pet owner in mind. It was conceived over a decade ago as a bridge between AKC's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) and Obedience. Many of the Rally exercises are based on skills that are used to train for Obedience. As participation in the sport has grown steadily over the years, new classes as well as more complex and challenging exercises have been added. Rally has become a popular companion event for both beginner and experienced handlers and dogs.

Rally is all about teamwork. The handler and dog work side-by-side covering the course at their own brisk pace. "Unlimited communication from the handler to the dog is to be encouraged and not penalized. While touching isn't allowed, you can use verbal commands, clap your hands, pat your legs and use hand signals to praise and encourage your dog."

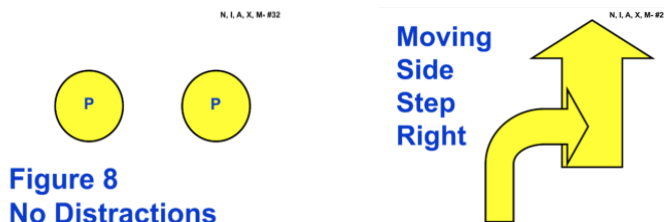
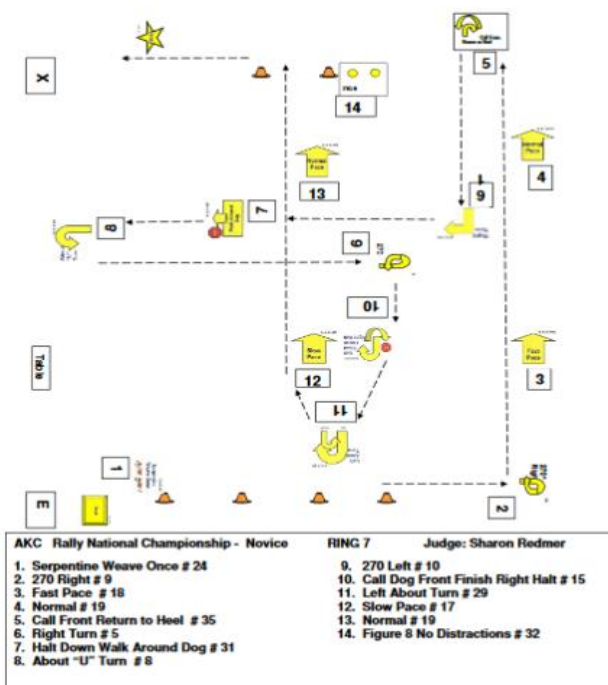
"Scoring in Rally is less rigorous than in other competitions like traditional obedience or agility. You begin with a perfect score of 100, with points deducted along with way. If you retain a score of at least 70 points, you will qualify toward earning a title. As you qualify the required number of times, you will move onto the next level." (<https://www.akc.org/sports/rally/get-started/>)

Dog Eligibility Requirements ► To compete, your dog must meet these requirements:

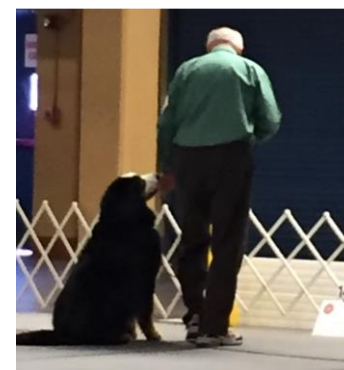
- be six months or older;
- have an AKC number - AKC registration, Purebred Alternative Listing (PAL), or Foundation Stock Service® (FSS)
- neutered males and spayed females are eligible but females in season are not;
- deaf dogs are eligible but blind dogs are not;
- "No dog can compete if it is taped or bandaged or in any way has anything attached to it for medical purposes." (AKC)

Rally Course ► A Rally course consists of a path between the start and finish lines with consecutively numbered stations along the way. Each sign indicates the station number as well as the exercise to be performed at that station. Every course is uniquely designed by the judge. Handlers may be provided course maps, if available, before the class starts. There is a handler-only walk-through period prior to the class so that they can become familiar with the course before navigating it with their dogs.

A sample AKC Novice course map (from AKC website – see References & Resources section) and two signs that can be used in all class levels follow.



Rally rules allow the handler to interact with their dog verbally and with hand gestures throughout the course, with just a few exceptions and modifications for the more advanced classes. Many handlers feel this style of competition keeps them more relaxed and connected with their dogs. This enhanced ability to interact with the dog makes Rally an ideal sport for the inexperienced dog and handler or for the older dog



11-year-old Berner with 79-year-old handler competing in Rally Advanced.

that may have retired from other types of competition but still wants to be in the game. The maximum jump height in Rally is 16 inches and the maximum length of the broad jump is 32 inches. No more than two jumps can be used in any course.

How to Train for Rally ► As in all training, Rally should be fun and motivating for the dog as well as the handler. The training process is about perfecting communication skills and relationship building with your canine companion. Whether you intend to compete or not the training itself gives your working dog a job to do! Treats, toys, petting, and verbal praise are all tools that can be used to reward your dog for desired behaviors.

As in obedience, the heel position is the foundation for ring exercises. You can start working on this with a very young puppy. Just use short sessions, lots of treats, and make it feel like a play session. With a dog that is older, or already has some basic training, the idea is still the same—make it feel like a play session! Randomize exercises in order to keep it fun and always plan to end the training session before your dog loses interest. Training sessions are a great way to keep your working dog engaged regardless of whether you intend to enter trials.

Where to Start ► Start at home by teaching the dog to focus attention on the handler and working simple commands such as sit, down, heel, and stay. Once the dog figures out that this is a really fun way to earn treats, which typically happens rather quickly, you can progress to more complicated exercises. Much of the early training can be done without any equipment but ring equipment is minimal and would consist of cones, signs and sign holders, and one or two jumps. Many kennel clubs and private instructors offer classes. Books and videos are also available for self-training.

AKC Rally Classes and Titles ► Classes follow a progression from simpler exercises to more complex courses. Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Excellent titles all require three qualifying scores under at least two different judges to earn the title for that level. The Rally team then moves to the next class.

Novice is the entry level class for Rally. All exercises are performed on leash. There are 10 to 15 stations and no jumps. The title earned is Rally Novice (RN).

Intermediate class has 12 to 17 stations, no jumps, and all exercises are performed on leash. The title earned is Rally Intermediate (RI). The RN title must be earned before this class can be entered.

Advanced class has 12 to 17 stations, including one jump, and all exercises are performed off leash. The title earned is Rally Advanced (RA). The RN title must be earned before this class can be entered. The RI title is not required.

Excellent class has 15 to 20 stations and the dog must jump twice. All exercises are performed off leash. The title earned is Rally Excellent (RE).

After completing the RE title, the team may work towards the Rally Advanced Excellent (RAE) title by accumulating qualifying scores in Advanced B and Excellent B classes. To earn the title the team must qualify in both classes at ten separate trials.

Master class is open to dogs that have completed the RE title. Courses must have 15 to 20 stations, one required jump, and all exercises are performed off leash. To earn the Rally Master (RM) title requires 10 qualifying scores under at least two different judges.

Rally Championship (RACH): Dogs that have earned the RM are eligible to begin earning points towards a RACH. Consult

the Rally Regulations for details.

AKC Non-Regular Rally Classes ►

These classes are not titling classes and may not be offered at trials in your area.

Rally pairs involves one handler working two dogs at once, with no jumps included.

Rally team consists of four handlers, each with a different dog, running the course individually and with a combined total score.

Concluding Thoughts ► Rally is a fun and rewarding activity for young and older alike – dogs and humans. Through teamwork, you and your dog can share great enjoyment and unlock each other's potential. As Charles Darwin said, "It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) that those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed." The rewards of Rally are many regardless of whether you compete, including helping to develop your dog's general obedience in and outside of your home.

References & Resources ►

AKC Rally Resources - <https://www.akc.org/sports/rally/rally-resource-center/>

AKC Rally Regulations -

http://images.akc.org/pdf/AKC1193_ROR001_1217_WEB.pdf

AKC Rally Signs & Descriptions -

<http://images.akc.org/pdf/events/2017-rev-rally-minisignswdescriptions-1-2018.pdf>

Complete Set of Rally Signs –

http://cdn.akc.org/Rally/2017_AKC_Rally_Signs_Set_05-16-17_web.pdf

AKC Rally Maps - <https://www.akc.org/sports/rally/events/akc-rally-national-championship/past-events/2015-akc-rally-national-championship-results-and-course-maps/>

AKC Rally videos -

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOmnrKKiM2kcaowV13SXeVQ/featured>

AKC video and chart of rally signs - <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/sports/how-to-watch-akc-rally/>

