

Report for the Kennel Gazette on the European Open Agility Championships 2012

The European Open Agility Championships this year were held in Kristianstad, Sweden over the weekend of the 28th-29th July 2012.

This competition is open to all dogs, pedigree and non-pedigree alike, and although it is called the European Open it is open to all countries of the world. This year there were nearly 750 dogs entered, from 27 countries, including Brazil and Japan and for the first time Venezuela.

The Kennel Club entered a team of 17 dogs and 16 handlers, all of whom had to qualify via a rigorous and demanding selection process. Amongst this total there were 9 large dogs, 6 medium dogs and 2 small dogs as no more than 50% of our team could be large. Unfortunately two of the selected dogs had to withdraw through injury which resulted in a very last minute call-up for Di Poingdestre and Blue, the first person from Jersey to represent Agility Team GB at the European Open.

Accompanying the team this year was Graham Partridge as International Agility Teams Manager; Dave Jolly as Team Coach; Rachel Mowbray as team vet and we were also fortunate to have the voluntary services of Emma Fretwell as chiropractor for dogs and handlers, whose skills and services were utilised and much appreciated.

Due to this event clashing with the Olympics, all members of the team and dogs travelled on a double decker coach organised by the Kennel Club. Leaving on the Tuesday morning before the event we stopped overnight in a hotel in Germany before arriving in Sweden on Wednesday evening. It was a long journey but it gave everybody the chance to get to know each other just a bit better and the dogs coped brilliantly as to them it was just travelling to another show.

We travelled via Euro Tunnel who had very kindly opted to support our team by providing free travel for dogs together with a substantial discount for team members. If you are thinking of taking your dogs abroad then I would definitely recommend the Euro Tunnel as it is very quick and easy with the added benefit that you can remain with your dogs the whole way.

As we had travelled to Sweden on the Wednesday we had a free day before the event when we managed to arrange a visit to a local Agility Club where we had a morning's practice which was fantastic and gave us all a chance to blow away the cobwebs of our long coach journey.

The Friday before the event is allocated to registration, where we had our pet passports inspected, vet checks and official practice and we were allocated a practice time of 24 minutes which we had to share with the Canadian team of three dogs, so it was important that we were well organised. It was not so much about training but acclimatising dogs and handlers to the conditions and the equipment that we would be using on the competition days.

This event is held under FCI rules and equipment specifications, which do not differ greatly from ours but do have a frame tyre but we had prepared well before arriving in Sweden so this presented no real problems, and as many shows in Great Britain now also use rubberised contact equipment we are now well used to this surface.

This practice was also invaluable as two of the four competition rings were on artificial grass and this let the dogs running on the surface get acclimatised to it.

On the Friday evening there was an opening ceremony and this year all the teams gathered in a local square and then paraded through the town to the sports centre where the event was being held which gave the event a great start and advertised itself to the local community.

The competition started in earnest at 8am on the Saturday morning, with the individual competition where each member of the Team competed over an Agility and a Jumping Round, the top 25 large dogs and the top 15 small and medium dogs from each of these rounds plus the top placed member of each Country in each of the three height categories qualified for the Individual Finals which were held in the evening.

We had a very successful day considering there were some very challenging courses and competition from some of the best dogs in the world and a number of the team qualified for the evening's finals .which did not finish until late evening with the last final, the Large, being held on the artificial grass under floodlights.

In the individual finals we were represented by:

David Russell and Caeyn (Small)

Amanda Hampson and Rogue (Medium)

Neil Ellis and Chester (Medium)

Anthony Clarke with Gas and Ruby (Large)

Lee Gibson and Scott (Large)

Leslie Osborne and Fizz (Large)

Unfortunately none of the team ended up on the podium but it is an extremely pressurised situation and every one of our team performed extremely well in the face of the very best in the world; on another day we could easily have had podium finishes in each height category. The standard of these finals was breathtaking and certainly in the large was some of the best agility I have ever witnessed.

Sunday was again an early start for the team event; this was divided into 2 height categories, Large and a combined Medium and Small Team. Each member of each team ran Agility and a Jumping round and points were awarded based on where you finished. The points accrued by each team member were added together and the top 10 teams with the most points went through to the team final.

Sunday morning saw some excellent performances from the whole team and we were delighted that our Large Great Britain team Red had finished 3rd overall thereby qualifying them for the finals and earning them a Bronze Medal.

The final took the form of four dogs running their own course in one large ring (45 x 45 m) – there were 36 pieces of equipment in total which produced an extremely exciting spectacle and although we acquitted ourselves well we finished outside of the top three.

Team GB Red comprised
Leslie Osborne with Fizz (Border Collie)
Anthony Clarke with Gas (Border Collie)
Katie Long with Copper (Working Sheepdog)
Ian Jackson with Bobbie (Border Collie).

Sunday evening saw the closing and prize giving ceremony and the handing over of the European Open flag to next year's host Belgium.

Due to the finals finishing late the team meal took place on the overnight stop in Germany on our way home where each member was presented with a certificate by the Kennel Club recognising that together with their dog they had represented Great Britain and the Kennel Club at the 2012 European Open, and without exception they represented GB Agility with distinction, 100% dedication and tremendous team spirit. I thank each one of them for their support and cooperation which made my job so easy and pleasurable.

The cost of travelling to and staying in Europe with a dog is considerable and therefore we are grateful for the continued support of the Kennel Club, which makes a considerable contribution in money and resources to both the International Teams, which is unparalleled in Europe by other Kennel Clubs.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our other sponsors, Doggy Jumps by Polyjumps, the official equipment suppliers to Team GB, and Eurotunnel, the Kennel Club's preferred cross-channel partner.

In addition there are a few other people who must be thanked:
Liz Pollock of Premier Show jumps for allowing use of their premises as a meeting point and storage of our vehicles, to Zoe Tharmasingam from the Kennel Club for all her hard work in organising and administering, to Rachel Mowbray as team vet for her voluntary work in looking after the team and Pet Passport issues and lastly to the travelling supporters and grooms for all their support and encouragement and in particular Mr. Prawn.

My special thanks must go to Dave Jolly as team coach, for the fantastic job he did, not only in preparing the team for International Competition and the time that entails, but for his help and support for me as team manager.

This was my last year managing the European Team as I am stepping down. It has been an honour to lead the British Team and I have enjoyed every single minute of it, particularly meeting like minded people from all over the world who enjoy the fantastic experience of Dog Agility.

Graham Partridge

Kennel Club International Agility Teams Manager

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