

Guidance for Securing the Pipe Tunnel – Methods and Practices

Background

The Kennel Club Regulation for the Pipe Tunnel is that the obstacle should have a diameter of a minimum of 609mm (2ft). At present many tunnels are secured with strapping (approximately two inches wide) or bungees, which when tightened reduce the diameter of the tunnel by sometimes up to two inches or more. As a result, a dog enters a 2ft diameter tunnel and then is faced with a reduced diameter part way in, which for a large dog could be head height (imagine being in a small cottage and forgetting to duck your head under the beam on the way out!)

Metal cradles are also often used under the tunnel to secure the straps or bungees, which in themselves present a potential risk to the dog in particular on exiting the tunnel. Since these cradles are usually wider than the tunnel they also present a risk as the handler runs past of catching a foot between the tunnel and cradle; this could also apply to a dog that just misses the entrance and catches a paw in the same gap.

As tunnels get older and less rigid, through wear and tear, they also present a problem of not being able to maintain their shape and diameter, with the entrance and exit often considerably less than 2ft because they sag into themselves.

There is also a difference in quality of tunnels used at agility shows, usually shown in the differing thickness of the wire coil supporting the plastic covering; heavier gauge wire is obviously more expensive, but holds the tunnel shape much better when being fixed down.

There is also a tendency to tighten any type of fixing as much as possible, hammering in stakes at all angles in an attempt to stop the tunnel moving in competition, yet it still moves. We need a slightly different mind-set; to secure the tunnel, but in a way to allow it to move with the dog's movement, and then come back to the original position. Anyone who has ever staked down a See-Saw will know what is meant here, the front feet are staked, leaving the back feet free to rise up as the dog puts the plank down, and then go back to the original position.

Having discussed this item with many people both at home and overseas one "method" that is very practical and presents less problems is the "saddle-bag" type of fixing. This involves a PVC type of material at least 24 inches wide to wrap over the tunnel and then fixed in position with stakes through the attached straps/eyelets close to the tunnel. These saddle bag fixings can also be made with a pocket/pouch that can be filled with sand, using a Velcro type fastener, for use at indoor venues when stakes cannot be used. It is probable that there are different variations of this "method", but as long as the same "practices" are followed then the result achieved should be uniform.

Suggested Good Practices:

1. Equipment hirers should be encouraged to inspect their tunnels regularly for wear and tear, firmness and shape. Maybe a “shelf-life” for tunnels could be discussed with hirers.
2. Using the Saddle-Bag type of fixing, at least 24 inches wide would mean that the tunnel is held across at least four of the wire stiffeners and, therefore, minimise the crushing effect of reducing the tunnel diameter.
3. Consider encouraging judges not to have such tight bends in the tunnel (matter for Judges' Working Party.) With tight bends the diameter is automatically reduced by the concertina effect of the plastic.
4. Good judges can still build an exciting challenging course with less severe bends in tunnels, and even with just straight tunnels.
5. Using the saddle-bag fixing it should be possible to stake the tunnel to the ground without pulling it down too tight, allowing a little movement by just holding the tunnel in position. When stakes are used they should be close to and in a perpendicular line to the tunnel, not allowing a gap-trap either side. Saddle-bag fixings should also have a flap attached that would cover the stakes when in position.
6. On a five metre tunnel, ideally four saddle-bag fixings would hold it in position.
7. It is quite common to use tunnels under the A-Ramp and Dog-Walk, in these cases we should encourage judges to ensure that no part of the tunnel is actually touching or might touch, any part of the contact equipment. A tunnel under the Dog-Walk for example is often placed up against the trestle, so as the dog negotiates the bend in the tunnel it could bang itself on a piece of wood that is on the outside. To be even safer, maybe we should look into foam edging strips for use on trestle legs.
8. We should discourage the use of metal cradles under the tunnel, and if needed, seek to design a better method, in conjunction with hirers, of securing the fixing to the ground. If metal plates are used, then plastic coated options should be considered, as used on the continent which would be an improvement.
9. We accept agility tunnels as used at present, and have done for 35 years, perhaps it is time to look at a tunnel made from different types of material. For example; a 2ft diameter rubber tunnel without a wire coil, but strong enough to hold its own shape when curved and without the concertina effect reducing the diameter which could be held in place with saddle-bags. The length of such a tunnel may present a problem, but shorter tunnels with appropriate joiners could solve this.

Mr J Gilbert