



Agility Expert Articles

We can beat the best when we get it right!

EUROPEAN OPEN AGILITY CHAMPIONSHIPS 2010

The European open is an international agility event held yearly and run under FCI rules rather than KC rules as agility is in England. This year it was held in the Czech republic.

Qualifying for the event started in 2009: Special classes are held throughout the year at various KC run shows and the top 10 dogs out of these classes gain points. The top 60 or so large dogs with the most points are then invited to the tryouts which were held in June 2010. These tryouts consist of 4 runs and are run under FCI rules with European style courses which are generally a lot different to what we would see week-in week-out in UK. So I always take a very different approach to my training in the weeks running up to the qualifiers.

European courses are generally more spread out then our courses so they are faster with a lot more obstacle discrimination and very hard weave entries. We get a lot of print outs of courses that the judges have previously set up so we set a lot of these out to practice on. I only have 1 tunnel though so I have to change the courses a lot from what they are on the diagram which doesn't help matters!

June arrives....qualifying day! The top 16 large dogs will be invited to go to represent GB. Unlike the World Championships, WSD's can also try out for the EO's so pretty much every good dog and handler from GB was there trying out. The qualifiers work on a points system again, so first place will get the most points down to a certain amount.....not 100% sure how it exactly works, but you need as many points as possible!

First run was a jumping course, not too hard so I went for a 'clear' as Dobby can be a bit prone to knocking the odd pole when he's over excited (he's not always the easiest dog to control) and we came 2nd to Dave Alderson and Rocky, an

extremely fast and powerful dog. So that gave us a good start on the points with only 1 dog ahead of us.

The next 3 runs were all agility courses: Dobby worked fantastic all day, he made it all feel easy and we won the next 2 runs putting us way about everyone else on points so that the final run didn't matter - he had enough points to qualify whatever happened in the final run. He was also clear in the final run but I had not needed to push it and I think we came in the top 3 somewhere.

So the top 16 large dogs were announced that had qualified for the EO's 2010 - I think the best team GB had ever taken. My team consisted of Linda Hutchinson and Kiz (I think the most talented dog in the country right now), Lucy Osbourne and Ben (again a very consistent talented dog with a brilliant handler) and Dave Alderson and Rocky (the dog that beat me in the jumping run). A brilliant team that if we actually managed to get round the courses, would be, I think unbeatable!

So now the hard bit....arranging everything to get to Czech! A VERY long drive, 800 miles each way. It's far too expensive to fly the dogs so we have to drive and the KC don't pay any more so it's all self funding and gets quite expensive. The diesel, hotel, Channel tunnel etc.... Luckily the KC arrange it all so we just have to pay. I chose to drive with a friend of mine in my van rather than take the coach with the squad as I don't like the cramped conditions for me or Dobby and I thought he would be much more relaxed in his own space.

July arrives....we leave for Czech on the Wednesday morning and arrive at the hotel Thursday afternoon (only getting lost 3 or 4 times!)....the whole country is like a sauna and we don't have air con in the rooms! The first day was hideous, we couldn't get comfortable, the dogs couldn't get comfortable but luckily we had no agility. Fridayit rained! But at least it wasn't the horrible temperature it was the day before. Friday morning we had team practice on their equipment which is very different to ours, plastic light poles, metal and rubber contacts and wider weaves. Dobby decided he had been far too hot and stressed the day before and now was over excited, so he had an upset tummy. He must have had bad belly ache as he stopped training and wouldn't even play with his toy....Luckily the team

vet was on hand with some medication to make him feel better! We then had the opening ceremony that evening, not the most exciting event, but it has to be done!

Saturday morning, the individual day, its pouring!! There is no way the ground will hold up all day so luckily we were one of the first countries in the agility class. There is a jumping run and an agility run. The top 20 dogs I think from each class automatically qualify for the final run and also the top handler and dog from each country not to get into the top 20 also go through to the final.

Dobby had a fantastic run in his agility and went on to win the class so he was in the Final. However, his jumping run was not so good...The ground was terrible and I kind of gave up knowing I already had a place in the final so the jumping run wasn't important to us. The weather got worse and worse, the agility class by the end was just a lake of mud, we were very lucky to run as early as we did! The final was postponed to the next day as it was running on so late!

Sunday, the team day. The weather had improved and we didn't get any rain, the ground was still bad but they had moved the rings onto fresh grass so nowhere near as slippery. Again 2 runs but this time no final. Our team didn't get off to a great start in the jumping, Dob was eliminated as he decided to take a tunnel instead of a jump, 2 more eliminations and I think Dave with Rocky was either clear or had 5 faults.

The agility run was better for most of us, Dobby had 2 poles down which I was a bit annoyed about - I have to constantly work on his jumping as he can be quite lazy. Kiz and Rocky had gorgeous clear runs and Ben just skipped his dog walk contact. But over all we didn't do great in the teams. People have asked me why we didn't do better, we had a fantastic team. My answer is that yes, we can train over these style of courses but we never have any pressure. Our courses are so different to these and the Europeans see these courses at every show so are used to them. We never have to attack them under pressure and when we do we are likely to mess up. When we go clear we do very well.....but it's getting the clears that is not so easy for us!

So the 'Individual' Final was held on the Sunday afternoon. Dobby had a lot of points so was last dog to run out of about 70 which is never good for me. I like to run early and get it done so having to wait around really stresses me out....something I need to work on. The course was not easy, in fact, very hard. It had an awful entry onto the dog walk, and a lot of obstacle discrimination and you also needed to be able to work your dog at a distance. Dobby started off well but had a slight wide turn out of a tunnel, so I started rushing, not a good idea with Dobs (just seems to make him crazier), and put him at the wall wrong so he took it out! My fault, but I only learn from my mistakes, hopefully we'll do better next year.

The drive home was uneventful enough, just a looong way, and lots of time to think about what if! Haha!

So in all it was a very fun weekend, we won a massive class proving that we can beat the best when we get it right, we just need a bit of luck on the day! Now to go and train for the World Championships being held in Germany in October! Fingers crossed.

Dave and Dobby

(posted 26/08/2010)
