

How To Enter The Trial Of Your Choice (Or At Least Make Your Best Try) By Mike Grab

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Entering trials can be daunting and you should be prepared to not make it into some of the popular trials, but here are some tips that may increase your chances of success.

Early Planning – Plan early and often. Go to the various websites and look at trial schedules. The CATS' Website has links to the sanctioning organizations and other sources of information. Make a tentative list of trials that interest you. Selection may be based on the sanctioning organization, host club, distance, dates, judges, sites, RV and camping availability, classes offered, and for some, all of the preceding decision factors. Remember, websites are sometimes not updated as often as they could be (particularly sites maintained by volunteers), so proceed with caution. The trial premium should be the most accurate information available since they are reviewed by the organizing committees and trial secretaries, and then approved by the sanctioning organization before posting and publication.

Make a calendar with the crucial dates, such as opening and closing dates. The MS Outlook email program has a calendar that allows you to enter important dates and the program will give you advance notification of approaching events. This is particularly useful for the important entry opening days. You can also purchase some agility specific software that will allow you to track trials, dates and other info.

Email – More and more clubs are doing business by email. This allows fast responses to questions, distribution of premiums, and quick notification of confirmations. While not required, email does speed up the information process. Most premiums will ask for your email address and the trial secretary may use the address to notify you of other club events in the future. So if you want the good news (you got in) or the bad news (sorry, it filled without you) quickly, then provide your email address.

Venue Differences – Each agility sanctioning organization (NADAC, AKC, CPE, DOCNA, USDAA, UKC, AAC, CKC, TDAA and others) has unique differences. Some teams compete in almost all venues (another name used for sanctioning organization) and other teams may focus on one or two venues. A companion article to this information last month gave some general differences in the venues.

Venue Requirements for Dog Registrations – All dogs competing in sanctioned trials must be registered with the sanctioning organization (not the host club). Trial premiums may contain registration forms or go to the sanctioning organization website. Follow the rules in the premium concerning registration and in most cases the completed form must be mailed to the sanctioning organization, not to the trial secretary. Some venues allow you to put "pending" in for the dog's number as long as you have the number by the trial date; others require the number on the trial entry form submission.

Read the Premium Carefully (including the fine print)! – In case you missed what I said...."READ THE PREMIUM CAREFULLY, INCLUDING THE FINE PRINT! Do I have to repeat that again?? Prior to each and every trial, there are entries rejected, not processed or returned to the handler due to incomplete or missing information, early arrivals, late arrivals, no payment or unsigned checks, no disclaimer signature, and a host of other issues. Even some well seasoned handlers screw up entries, so it's not just a novice problem. Read every page of the premium, including the front page.

Trial Limits – With the exception of USDAA, the sanctioning venues allow trial committees to establish a maximum number of agility runs at trials. 350 runs per day for each judge is a typical run limit. Limits allow clubs to manage the number of entries and plan the trial day schedule. USDAA does not allow limits and requires clubs to accept all entries that met the venue and premium eligibility requirements.

Postmark Date, Early Deliveries, First Arrived, Overnight Deliveries, Receipts, Hand Deliveries, Closing Dates!!!

Postmark Date – this form of entry acceptance is probably the most common. This method will base the priority of acceptance on the entry envelope postmark. You want a nice clear and legible postmark so you may want to go the post office window and have them stamp or print a label in front of you. An overnight delivery is not needed and most secretaries will wait about one week for all of the first day postmarks to arrive

before conducting draws or setting up an entry list. Most post offices do not use a time stamp (date only) on first class mail so the time of the postmark is not a determining factor.

Early Delivery of entries (arrival of entries at the trial secretary before the Entry Opening Date in the premium) is usually penalized and the details will be in the premium. This is definitely a case where *the early bird does not get the worm* and the penalty is often that early arrivals will be held for processing until after the first, second, and maybe even the third day entry arrivals are processed. This reduces your chance of getting into a trial with entry limits and will knock you out of a trial that fills on the first day. CATS always has at least one early arrival for a trial, so that proves not everyone reads or understands the premium,

First Arrived entry method is not common in New England but you may find this system in use for some AKC trials. The method will be defined in the premium but the postmark date is not used for acceptance. The first entries in the trial secretary's mailbox are processed first. Early entries are penalized (usually rejected) and the sender must guess what day the entry should be mailed and arrive on the opening day. Overnight deliveries (expensive) are commonly used for this system.

Overnight deliveries are expensive and usually are not a needed expense. If the trial is based on postmark date, then an overnight delivery is an extravagance. You may want to consider overnight or a guaranteed date of delivery for trials with the "first arrived" method of acceptance.

If you are sending certified, registered or certain types of overnight deliveries, make certain that you have specified that a signature is NOT required for delivery. This is usually stated on the entry form and secretaries will not always be home to sign for deliveries, thus you will miss an opening date for entry.

Hand deliveries were common in the past but more trial committees have imposed rules to prohibit hand deliveries, particularly for those trials using a postmark acceptance system. If someone is telling a story about the cardboard box on the secretary's front porch for hand delivery of entries, they are probably really dating themselves and their experience in agility.

USDAA is unique in that there are no entry limits. USDAA trials have an opening date for entries but most handlers pay the attention to the closing date since there is not a rush to make the opening date. The premium (all venues) will define the entry requirements including the last day and time that an entry will be accepted by the Trial Secretary.

Multiple Entries in the Same Envelope – The Trial Committee may limit the number of entries accepted in the same envelope and this information will be in the premium. If there is a draw, the trial secretary MAY keep the entire contents of the entry envelope together for the draw and all either make it in or do not. This is sometimes done to allow those who always travel together to be considered for entry together.

Workers Preference – Clubs with popular trials that usually fill (reach the maximum entry levels) may chose to reward handlers that volunteer in advance to work by offering them preferred entry acceptance. NADAC requires that only a reasonable number of entry spots be reserved for the workers and that other entry spots are offered to those who do not work. But it is fair to say that at trials with a worker preference system, volunteer workers have a much better chance of making it into the trial. The trial premium will usually state that a workers preference will be offered on the cover, second page, and/or on the worker volunteer form.

Random Draws – There are various systems for a random draw and the details are usually in the premium. The draw may include only the open day entry arrivals or may include all entries that arrive during a specific period beginning on the opening date. A workers preference may be part of the draw system.

Waiting Lists – For a trial that over-fills, a waiting list may be established for those who did not make it into the trial. There are always a few withdrawals for various reasons and those on the wait list will be given the opportunity to take any empty spots. The trial secretary will often send out an email to those who did not make it in and ask them if they want to be included on the list or just have their entries and checks destroyed.

Withdrawals and Refunds – Each premium will have the policy for withdrawals. Usually, all fees will be returned for any withdrawal prior to the entry closing date.

The policies for withdrawals after the closing date vary greatly. Many clubs will allow a partial refund for dogs that come into season if documentation from a vet is provided. Other clubs may include refunds for dogs that are injured if documentation is provided. There is usually a cutoff date for any requests and one week prior to the trial is fairly typical. CATS is one of the few clubs (and the first in the area) that allows partial entry

refunds for dogs or handlers that have been injured, but documentation must be provided and the request must be submitted in writing prior to the end of the trial.

Clubs usually are required pay sanctioning, secretary and judging fees based on the number of entries as of the closing date for the trial or in the trial catalog. Thus, only partial refunds for withdrawals are offered since the club must still pay the fees even if the dog is absent.

Check-In and Measurement – The premium will have specific information concerning check-in times, requirements, and measuring availability. The premium may allow you to mail a copy (not the original) of your permanent jump height card which saves you time. Early check-in (and occasionally measuring) on a Friday evening may be offered. Measuring is rarely ever allowed after the start of the trial so don't be late if you need to have your dog measured.

Other Premium Information – Parking restrictions, site requirements and camping rules are normally included in the premium. Camping and RV parking at the trial site typically requires a prepaid camp registration to accompany the trial entry. Also important are the rules concerning use of agility equipment at the site and any restrictions on training collars and training devices.

Judges and Title Requirements – Check the sanctioning organization rules about the number of different judges needed to complete a title. Some venues such as CPE and NADAC allow you to complete all qualifying legs for a title under the same judge. Other venues may specify that a certain number of legs must be under different judges. This may affect your decision to enter a trial.

Your Signature – Don't forget to sign the disclaimer that is part of the entry form. That's also a chance for you to double check the registration numbers and other information you provided on the form.

Confirmation Letters and Emails – Now you get to wait and hope to see a confirmation letter/email saying that you got into the trial. The confirmation will have plenty of information concerning trial details, so print it out and bring it along to the trial with your registration cards and other paperwork.

Have Fun!!!

