

*"It's not the winner who is the most popular, but he who makes the odd blunder."*

Quoted from the Thelwel Riding Academy.

Must haves for a trial:

1. Toilet paper for just in case there isn't any in the porta potty.
2. Wet naps for easy clean up.
3. Purell
4. Baggies for the pooches land mines
5. Food for you and your canine companion
6. Drinks (Jack Daniels is the best for nerves)
7. Water for dog
8. Dog dishes
9. First aid kit for human and dog
10. Crate
11. Chair
12. Tent
13. Cover for crate
14. Book or a personal DVD player cuz you'll be there all day even if you're only entered in 3 classes
15. Chocolate
16. Leash
17. Coffee
18. Warm clothes for those chilly mornings plus rain gear and something to peel down to when it turns HOT
19. Pepto Bismal for just in case
20. Benedryl in case of allergies
21. Camera so someone can get you on film as you trip over your dog trying to do a front cross to impress your instructor.
22. Money so you can buy all the photos of you and your dog from the photographer that's at the event
23. Towel
24. Proper jump card
25. Your dog
26. Sense of humor

You've taken classes right through starters level, sent in your entry on time and now you're off to your first trial. You have packed your vehicle to the roof with everything need; tent, crate, cooler, dog(s) you name it. You double check to make sure you didn't forget something and off you go. You get about halfway to the show grounds and realize you forgot your dogs' favorite squeaky toy, no problem there are vendors at the event that might have some squeaky toys.

You get to the event and find a great place to set up your tent and when you pull it out you realize it's a two person operation and you didn't bring a person with you. No problem, just grab somebody who's walking by or really look like your struggling with it to play upon someone sympathies. Someone will be glad to help you. Now that you're set up and Fido is in his crate, get him out because you have to get him measured. I hope you remembered your jump card. Check in is pretty easy but getting Fido measured is a disaster. First he crouches, then stands up straight but then decides to lean out, and finally he insists on sitting and licking the volunteers' hand. After 20 minutes and thirty biscuits later he decides to stand normal and allows the volunteer to measure him.

Next are the judges briefing and the walk through. Beware of people running around with their arms out because you might get whacked in the head or a full body tackles by someone running towards you and not paying attention. Great way to meet the love your life.... Be sure to follow the cones so you know where you're going, this will help you when you run it for real. Also watch others as they walk the course because they can be rather entertaining. After walk through check in with the gate steward so they know you're there. Take a peek as to how far down the list you are, you might be able to take a nap before you run.

You're now 10 dogs away from your turn, take Fido out for a stroll because you don't want to get eliminated for elimination and while you're at it make sure you go too.

The gate steward is calling you, don't keep them waiting and let them know you are there and ready. Make sure you don't have any toys or treats with you or you could get disqualified. When you are on the starting line watch the timer and wait for him/her to tell you to go, don't wait for the judge, it's not their job. As you lead out check to make sure Fido isn't following you, if he is RUN because the time has started. Fido goes sailing over the jump and now it's onto the dog walk and does that like it's nobody's business and gets his contact. You're surprised because last week in class that became an issue but anyway you high tail it to the next obstacle which is the tunnel and swoosh goes Fido into the tunnel but the little bugger only goes in halfway and comes back out the way he entered, meantime you're at the other end wondering where he is. You call him and get to the A frame and he goes up but then stops at the top to see if anyone is playing Frisbee somewhere, then comes down and sits on the contact and after you take a second to realize that's something new, you move on because you still have to finish the course. Again Fido sails over another jump, zips through a tunnel, over the broad jump then cruises to the see saw in the meantime you sound like Tigger on acid trying to get your

commands out and your arms are flapping in the breeze. You think Fido is going to do the see saw but instead he gets a 1/4 of the way up, stops, and then jumps off. Again this is something new because he never misses the see saw in class. After that it's on to the chute where he gets tangled and takes the fabric with him and the judge gives you the ok to get him out but too late because you are already getting him out. Once he's out you make a mad dash to the finish line even though during the wrestling match with the chute the timer blew the whistle. You give your dog pats and treats and play with him because you're happy that you survived your first run.

The rest of the runs were ok but you know you'll never forget your first one. At this point you're probably tired, sunburned and have a pounding headache because you forgot your aspirin and sunscreen. As you're heading home you look at your 4 legged partner who's asleep in the passenger seat and realize it was worth it and you can't wait for your next trial.

Closing thoughts that were given to me by an instructor; *"If you're working your dog on something and it's not going well, go back to what your dog does best."* Wise words to remember for the next class.