

## THE HISTORY OF DOG OBEDIENCE IN NEW ZEALAND

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The origins of the dog training movement in New Zealand go back to the late 1940's. In 1949 the New Zealand Kennel Gazette published two articles on the training of German Shepherds, one entitled "Training the Alsatian" by Mr R. Lewis and another by Mr G. Jackson explaining the basic principles of obedience training for dogs

Prior to 1955 some enthusiasm for obedience work was shown, however, this was largely restricted to one breed, the German Shepherd. The New Zealand Kennel Club made provision within its rules and regulations for obedience trials for German Shepherds.

On 30th September 1954 an article appeared in the "Marlborough Express" concerning dog training in Blenheim, under the instruction of a Mr R Mac Gregor. Training classes were held every week and great interest was shown by the local residents.

In April 1955, as a result of a radio interview on training dogs, a small number of interested people formed a club for all breeds in Auckland. Mr and Mrs G.C. Randall, having recently arrived in New Zealand from Britain, headed this movement which led to the formation of the All Breeds Dog Training Club (Inc.), and they instructed dog handlers at several venues.

On February 11th 1956 the New Zealand Kennel Club Executive adopted a set of regulations for obedience tests for all breeds which followed closely along the lines of instruction already given to handlers by training clubs.

On June 13th 1958 Mrs C.M. Cooper, Mr G. Randall, Mr C. Wilson and Mr H.S. Wilson met in Wellington and drew up regulations for the control of obedience tests. However, due to the difficulty in arranging such meetings and the large volume of work still to be done, all the existing clubs of the period unanimously agreed to the formation of an obedience association within the framework of the New Zealand Kennel Club.

By September 1958 the register of recognised obedience clubs consisted of All Breeds Dog Training Club, Canterbury Obedience Club, Dunedin Canine Obedience Training Club, Hutt Valley Kennel Club and the Wellington District German Shepherd Dog Club.

The number of clubs had risen to 20 by 1964 and by a further 16 to 36 by 1973. On June 20th 1959 at the Annual General Conference of delegates to the N.Z.K.C. in Wellington, Mr M.K. McDermott, president of the N.Z.K.C., said that obedience should be given recognition and that the Executive Council had agreed to the establishment of an obedience subcommittee to handle obedience matters in New Zealand. The obedience sub-committee would be allowed to alter their own rules within the framework of the N.Z.K.C. rules and regulations and with the Executive Council's approval.

Those elected were Mrs C.N. Cooper, (Ashburton) Mr N.A. Brown (Christchurch), Mr C. Wilson (Levin) Miss J. Brodie (Hastings), Mr H.S. Wilson (Auckland) and Mr J. Duncan (Lower Hutt, Chairman). The sub-committee which was intended to be only an interim measure until a fully representative committee could be elected, was severely restricted by finance and it was not until 1961 that the N.Z.K.C. Executive approved a grant of £50 for the sub-committee greatly augmenting the existing funds which had consisted previously of only a few pounds; the net proceeds of Companion Dog tests. The sub-committee although financially handicapped, made steady progress in the administration of obedience, the regulations were recast, Companion Dog Tests arranged on a regular basis, a judges panel approved, and challenge certificates printed.

In April 1959 at the Cambridge Kennel Club's championship show, Mr H.S. Wilson obedience judge, awarded the first ever obedience challenge certificate in New Zealand. In 1959 obedience was held at the National Dog Show but this merely provided for an obedience demonstration,

however in 1960 obedience tests were included for the first time. In 1962 obedience entries at the National Dog Show had risen to 100 and at the 1973 National Dog Show entries totalled 198 thus indicating how firmly entrenched obedience is in New Zealand.

In 1959 the Napier and North Taranaki Canine Obedience Clubs became registered with the N.Z.K.C. By late 1959 dog obedience training existed in most parts of New Zealand although only 10 clubs or societies were actively engaged in obedience classes (7 in the North Island and 3 in the South Island). Many All-Breed clubs incorporated obedience tests with their championship shows as an added attraction.

However, along with the successes of new clubs, some existing clubs for one reason or another collapsed and went into recess e.g. the Dunedin Canine Obedience Training Club.

In 1960 the Makara and South Canterbury Canine Obedience Clubs became registered with the N.Z.K.C. while in March of the same year the first ever Companion Dog tests were held in New Zealand during March at Auckland, Levin and Ashburton. On May 28th of the same year the first ever South Island Championship Test C class was held at the Canterbury Canine Obedience club championship tests. 1960 also produced New Zealand's first ever obedience champion at the National Dog Show, Mr G. Shaw and his Welsh Corgi Ob.Ch. Cyric the Colonel were trained by the Hawkes Bay Obedience Club which held obedience classes each Sunday morning.

The Wellington Canine Obedience Club was formed on 22nd March 1961 although training classes had been held the previous month. Mrs C.M. Cooper was elected Patroness and Mr B. Surgenor the club's first senior instructor.

During the weekend 18-19th November 1961, members of obedience clubs throughout the North Island gathered together in Rotorua to take part in the first inter-provincial meeting organised by the Rotorua Obedience Club for Dogs. Approximately 70 people attended the meeting which comprised an instructor's course, a ribbon trial followed by normal training classes and a social evening.

During the weekend 17-18th February 1962, a meeting of interested people, held at Palmerston North, finalised proposals for the election of a committee on a zone basis, and proposed for the first time that expenses be refunded to all committee members.

Another meeting of obedience members was held in Hastings in 1963. Items considered were the proposed constitution of the obedience sub-committee and the relationship between the obedience section and other sections of the dog movement.

Meanwhile obedience members had also held meetings in the South Island to discuss aspects of dog training and obedience in general. At Ashburton on July 7th 1962 Mrs C.M. Cooper called all instructors together to take part in a refresher course.

During these early years the chairman of the obedience sub-committee was sometimes requested to attend Executive Council meetings to report on the progress made on obedience matters. The N.Z.K.C. Executive Council agreed that obedience should remain and develop within the framework of the N.Z.K.C. and under the overriding control of the N.Z.K.C. Executive Council.

In April 1963 the N.Z.K.C. Executive Council decided to define the status of obedience in relation to the N.Z.K.C. Upon motion being made and seconded it was unanimously resolved that in order to legalise the present position of obedience in New Zealand and to enable the obedience organisation to develop within the framework of the rules of the N.Z.K.C. that the following remit be put forward by the Executive Council at the Annual Conference: "The Executive Council shall have power to establish an elective committee for the direction of obedience within the rules and regulations of the Kennel Club and to delegate to such committee such of its powers as may be desirable for the day to day organisation and functioning of obedience in New Zealand".

At the Executive Council meeting of 2nd-3rd February 1964 it was unanimously resolved to set up the Obedience Committee and constitution with effect from 3 February 1964. The obedience sub-committee members continued as members of the new committee until fresh elections were held. Mr T.R. Rusbridge was elected as the Executive Council's representative on the Obedience Committee a position he held until 1975.

Earlier in 1963 the obedience sub-committee altered the Special Beginners test which at this stage included a retrieve, article to be supplied by the handler, 'total points being 100. The retrieve was eliminated and the total points reduced to 75. A recommendation by the Hutt Valley Kennel Centre at the 1963 Annual Conference to have the retrieve reinstated in the Special Beginners test was lost.

The growth in obedience continued Hawkes Bay Canine Obedience Club and the Southland Dog Obedience Club both held their first ever ribbon trials while Hawke's Bay and Wellington Canine Obedience Clubs also held their first ever championship shows in the same year.

In June 1965 obedience lost a valued member when Miss Jean Brodie died. She was Zone 2 representative on the Obedience Committee and had earlier been a member of the obedience sub-committee. Miss Brodie, an active obedience enthusiast, also prepared the obedience section of the N.Z.K.C. Gazette. This later function was assumed by Mrs M. Murray.

During the weekend 5-7th June 1965 at Levin, a national obedience meeting was held attracting obedience representatives from both North and South Islands. The meeting consisted of a Utility Dog trial demonstration and discussion and a practise of tests Novice to Test C. Finally an open forum for discussion of obedience matters was held. Previously meetings had been held, at Rotorua in 1963 and Hastings in 1964 but these meetings had not attracted members from the South Island because of the great distances involved.

On March 5th 1966 New Zealand sampled its first overseas obedience judge when Mr Ken Butler of England judged Tests A, B and C at the Ashburton Kennel Association championship tests. He drew a number of comments when he decided to judge the exercises in any order, something which had never been done before.

On June 18th 1966 at the Annual Conference of Delegates to the N.Z.K.C. a remit was finally passed which helped change the whole pattern of obedience in New Zealand. The remit provided for the setting up of a second register for dogs not otherwise eligible for registration. The new register was created for obedience dogs only and allowed crossbreeds, speyed bitches and castrated dogs to be admitted to obedience competition. The remit had a stormy passage but was finally passed with a handsome 23 to 7 majority.

1966 will be remembered for a long time by dog obedience people, for this was the year of the first ever National Dog Obedience Assembly, held by Zone 4 at Christchurch over 22-24 October. A memorandum was sent to all clubs early in 1966 by Mrs C.M. Cooper Chairwoman of the N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee. The following is an extract from that memorandum - "As you know, it has been the practise each year, to hold an obedience conference, in order to gather together as many interested people as possible for an interchange of ideas for the betterment of obedience in general. This year, Zone 4 has undertaken the responsibility for the conference and has prepared a most comprehensive and somewhat ambitious programme for Labour Weekend 1966. The gathering will include the following: Obedience conference and discussion, guidance and practical work for instructors and judges, an inter-zone obedience Competition, C.D. and U.D. tests. This is as you can see, a most ambitious programme, and one that will require the full support of the entire obedience fraternity of New Zealand. To assure full representation in the Inter-zone competition, which we hope will be an animal affair, subsidies are offered to all Zones to help with the expenses of sending full representative teams. These will be as follows: ZONE 1 £30, ZONE 2 £20, ZONE 3 £10, ZONE 4 NIL, ZONE 5 £6.

This is the biggest venture ever attempted by obedience in New Zealand and its success is entirely dependent on your support. Don't let us down."

The many months of hard work paid off however, as the Assembly was a great success, even the weather was kind when outdoor activities were in progress. The Working Committee comprised Mrs C.M. Cooper and Messrs R.H. Adcock (Committee Chairman), A. Carson, J. Edmonson, F. Heaysman, S.C. Isherwood, R. Rushbridge and E.H. Schofield (Secretary-Treasurer). The winner of the inter-zone competition was appropriately enough Zone 4 which won Tests A, B and C, and came second in Novice for a total of 19 points. Second was Zone 5 with 13 points and third Zone 3 with 12 points.

The National Dog Obedience Assembly has become an annual event and has been held in a different zone each year. This year's Assembly [1976] will be number 11.

On 23rd October 1967 at the second National Dog Obedience Assembly the first ever official Utility Dog trial was held. The judge, Mrs D. Randall, awarded the first ever title, U.D.X. in New Zealand to Mr R. Krauze and Ob.Ch. Rex of Riga C.D.X.

Meanwhile dog obedience was growing stronger and the number of clubs registered with the NZ.K.C. was increasing all the time. The Blenheim, Gisborne and Kawerau clubs all held their first ribbon trials in 1967-68, but in mid-1969 the Winton and North Shore obedience clubs went into recess.

### **Boundaries**

The 1969 National Show was a disappointment to obedience competitors as only Tests A and C. were held. This drew a protest from many people and the following year, Novice and Test B were re-instated. It was during 1969 that decoy cloths became mandatory in Tests, B and C.

In July 1969 two obedience personalities of high standing died. 'Mr J. Duncan, an obedience judge who helped establish obedience on a national basis, had acted as chairman of the obedience sub-committee from its inception in 1959 until 1962. Under his guidance companion dog tests had become established and judging became stabilised. Mr H.S. Wilson was a Test C judge and Zone 1 representative. He succeeded Mr J. Duncan as chairman of the obedience subcommittee from 1962 - 63 and then became chairman of the N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee from 1963 - 65.

The first competitive Utility Dog Trial was held at Gisborne in 1970. The winner was Mrs N. Dickson's, Ob.Ch Tillyochie Bruce C.D.X.

In 1970 the N.Z.K.C. obedience Committee, after much discussion, altered the regulations with respect to scent discrimination. Previously any extra command given to the dog while still in the scent area was penalised by the deduction of 10 points for each command given. This ruling was amended so that no points would be awarded if any command was given to the dog while in the scent area.

In 1971 on the recommendation of the Director/Secretary of the N.Z.K.C. the obedience Committee altered the Zone boundaries slightly to allow for a re-distribution of clubs and administrative responsibilities. At the same time, on the recommendation of Zone 4, Test C was altered by eliminating the Advanced Stand, Sit and Down worth 40 points and combining this with an extended heel free including fast, slow and advanced stand, sit and down worth 60 points, thus reducing the total points for Test C from 320 to 300.

1972 saw another breakthrough for obedience when Special Beginners was included both at the National Dog Show in August and the National Dog Obedience Assembly in October, thus all obedience tests were catered for at the two big events of each year. At the 1972 National Dog Show the Harold Wilson Memorial Trophy was competed for, for the first time. This trophy, which is donated annually by the All Breeds Dog Training Club of Auckland, is for the dog or bitch gaining the highest percentage points in any test at the National Dog Show.

In March of the same year, the first ever official Working Dog Trial was held at Gisborne under judge Mr F. Riley unfortunately all the dogs failed on this first attempt. In February 1973 at Rotorua, the second Working Dog Trial in New Zealand was held and on this occasion a number of handlers qualified their dogs.

The next major event in the obedience world was the introduction of the Rosen-Argus trophy for Test C dog of the year. The trophy is awarded annually to the handler whose dog wins Test C with the highest aggregate points over three Test C's under three different judges. The first winner of this trophy was Mrs I. Jackson with her dog Ob.Ch. Flick of Glenflag C.D.X.

In 1974 a proposal to restrict the number of entries in obedience at the National Dog Show in order to raise the standard of competition was defeated. The proposal specified that entries would be accepted only if the dogs had attained the following scores during the year; Special Beginners 70 points, Novice 90 points, Test A 135 points, Test B 215 points and Test C 280 points. In the same year it was decided that because of the large number of competitors entering obedience tests, the show manager could at his discretion permit the judge to divide the stay exercises into two or more classes.

In late 1974 Mrs D. Randall, newly elected chairwoman of the N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee and Zone 2 representative, died after a serious illness. Mrs Randall, who along with her husband, helped establish obedience in the Auckland region, was a Test C judge and a long standing obedience supporter.

In early January 1975 the obedience world lost another very valued member, Mrs Collene Cooper of Ashburton. Active in Gundog Trials, dog breeding and obedience work. She was an all breeds judge and also a Test C judge, N.Z.K.C. Executive member from 1956 - 69. member of Obedience Sub-Committee 1959 - 63, member of N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee 1963 - 71 and chairwoman 1965 -71. She was elected honorary life member of the New Zealand Kennel Club in 1967.

In 1975, on the request of the Wellington District German Shepherd League, the N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee resolved that obedience open trials be re-introduced and that they be run on the same basis as for breed open shows. A club, holding an obedience open trial would be allowed to award trophies for outright win only and cash prizes.

In the same year on a majority vote, the N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee approved of the idea of obedience judges joining the judges association in that only good could come from such an arrangement and that uniformity of judging would be improved.

1975 was a year in which the obedience fraternity took another giant step forward, when at the Annual Conference of delegates the N.Z.K.C. Executive Council was re-organised under a revised constitution, allowing one obedience representative onto the Council. Mr G. Randall Chairman of the N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee, was elected to be the obedience representative. The N.Z.K.C. Executive Council's representative on the Obedience Committee was considered unnecessary and this position was abolished. Mr T.R. Rushbridge had held this position since the inception of the N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee in 1963.

The appointment of judges to the official N.Z.K.C. obedience judges panel was altered with effect from 1 January 1976.

- (a) Ribbon Trial judges can judge, all classes at Ribbon Trials only.
- (b) After judging 3 ribbon trials judges may apply for promotion to the Open Trial Panel.
- (c) A judge must judge 3 ribbon or open trials before judging a championship Special Beginners or Novice.
- (d) No judge may judge a championship test unless he/she had judged that test 3 times at a ribbon or open trial.
- (e) No judge may judge a championship Test C unless he/she had judged 6 Test C ribbon or open trials.
- (f) Only Test C judges can award challenge certificates.

The N.Z.K.C. Obedience Committee being alarmed by the number of failings in Test C scent discrimination ruled that from 1976 the club conducting obedience tests should provide the scent cloths for Test C. (except the judges own cloth). In recognition of the increased costs being incurred by clubs the N.Z.K.C. permitted the deduction of a proportion of the obedience judges' expenses from the show levy payable by obedience clubs to the N.Z.K.C. as from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1976.

In 1958 five obedience clubs were recognised by the N.Z.K.C. In 1976, fifty-three clubs are recognised and of these thirty-three are specialist obedience clubs. This surely augers well, for the future of obedience in New Zealand.