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Starters' League Final

A Three Star agility team ?

It was a beautiful morning, a slight frost at 0530hrs when I got up to walk Merryn before we set off. It was Sunday 17th April 2016 and we were heading for Monmouth, to the Golden Valley open agility show, which was hosting the 3 Counties starters league final.

We had once again made it to the final, having drawn one and won three of the winter league matches. Our league rivals had been Golden Valley and Tuffley. The team was again flying. That's not to say it was all plain sailing. The first year of competition (2013), for the now more experience team members, saw us all eliminated in our first match and came an overall 7th from 8 teams. The second year (2014) we scraped by to win the final by 2 points. Further improvements were made for the 2015 final where we flew in to the winning spot. What would this year hold? Personally I wanted the hat trick – but was that too much pressure?

The starters league is a bit like baseball leagues in north America. The teams are split randomly into two separate leagues, let's call them the American league and the National league. The winners of each league compete for the top spot in the final – the "World Series"! Well, for Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. And this year it was Wye Valley we were up against.

I arrived in Monmouth at 0800hrs. Naturally nervous – but there was more at stake: Merryn's breeder, from Newtown, Mid Wales, was coming to watch. And she was bringing two of Merryn's nieces - whom we'd never met before. Now Merryn's a great dog, but atypical of a Welsh Springer Spaniel. Whilst she very much enjoys her agility, she just can't be bothered with anything else – except food. We wanted to make a good impression so I was hoping she'd put in a good performance in the match.

The team spirit was growing. Everyone was nervous but helping each other, holding leads, walking the course, working out the best way to make the turns or tackle the contacts, and cheering each other over the finish line. We had a fab team again this year formed of 10 pairs (handlers and dogs) from those that had competed in the league matches:

- Faye and Marley
- Fiona and May
- John and Jet
- Jude and Argo
- Mike and Merryn
- Sophie and Bindi
- Sue and Bear
- Susie and Dixie
- Val and Rosie

But someone was missing. Chops wasn't feeling well and Mike had to pull him out at the last minute. We were a pair down. In stepped Julie's daughter Georgie, and Bella, already a member of the team and thankfully at the show to step in. Kylee our team captain was on hand trying to calm us all down, telling us not to worry if we made a mistake and to just go out there and have fun.

The big change from last year was us, the team. Instead of the rag tag bunch of "have-a-go handlers" we now had a uniform. Everyone was wearing it. We were a proper team. Our new logo's blue fleeces, hoodies and polo shirts looked the business. Wye Valley were in florescent yellow. Not high viz, more Forest Green Rovers!

The final is in 3 sections (like all the league matches): agility, jumping and a team relay. Having walked the agility course it did not appear to be too bad, but there are always traps, things we hadn't spotted, unexpected things the dogs might see and like to examine or try. There was a wall, with wooden bricks, an 'A' frame, a dog walk, see-saw, two tunnels, some weaves and lots of jumps. As Merryn is classified as a medium dog, we had the luxury of watching the rest of the team (large dogs) go first. The two teams take it in turns – giving me a chance to see how the dogs were doing and identify the traps. What hadn't we spotted? Overall, it wasn't going too well. Some handlers got lost and went the wrong way through the course. Some dogs were knocking over the jumps. I was wondering if our team's luck had gone.

It was then time to get Merryn on the starting line. This is when the nerves really begin to kick in. Would I remember the course, would I send Merryn the wrong way, or get in her way? There was no sign of Merryn's breeder so I didn't have to worry about that. And off we went. She hit a jump – I thought we'd messed up and it wasn't until afterwards that I was told that the pole landed back in its cups. No penalty. But she did knock over the final jump. Damn it.

Starters' League Final contd...

The competition is scored by a qualified judge and recorded by the ring party who operate the ring. As such we were not sure how the points were going. Our own record suggested that at the end of the Agility section South Cotswold were ahead. Just?

The next round, the jumping course, was being erected and I spotted the breeder. It was lovely to see her and her two dogs – Merryn wasn't bothered!



The team walked the course, over and over again. We needed to concentrate. I wasn't sure about one part and discussed the pros and cons with John. I figured I'd stick to my plan, run down the left of the weaves and get in a blind turn before heading off right to the tunnel. It worked. Merryn and I went clear. Fantastic. As before the team did OK. It wasn't the best and we were picking up penalties here and there. Had the team done enough?

As our own scoring developed we calculated we possibly had a 16 point lead over the first two rounds. A good margin, but not enough. The winner of the third round receives 16 points – so if we lost that round, the team relay, we would be in a dead heat with Wye Valley. No one knew what would happen then – a play off, sudden death, golden weaves? Maybe even 'contacts' (I figured that would be the agility equivalent of penalties). And so, no pressure, we had to win!

The relay course was set up and we walked the course. We practised our hand-overs and size changes. The relay is run as a team. Each dog runs consecutively, as one finishes, the next goes straight away with a baton exchange. The overall team time, and value of any penalties, decides the score. Then 16 or 0 points are awarded to the teams.

Ali, our trainer, was at the show judging in another ring. She popped over in between classes, whilst we were stressing over the relay. She said we'd win. We weren't so sure. What's more, she also trained Wye Valley and we were sure she'd said the same thing to them!

Our team was first to go. As before, it wasn't our best performance – but relay is not our strength. With the exception of the last league match, where we won the relay with no penalties, we had never won a relay round in 4 years of competition. And history was with us. We lost the relay, it was a dead heat.

So what next? No one knew. Would it be the number of eliminations, the total penalty points? The judge conferred. The uncertainty lasted an age. Had we won or had we lost? Then rumours started to fly – it was suspected that we had won on the basis of winning the first round – the agility round. As rumours became reality and it was confirmed that South Cotswold had won the 2016 Starters League Final. For the third time. The hat trick. Yippee.

The presentation came later in the day and even then there were rumours flying about a changed decision. It was a great moment as individual team members collected their place rosettes for each round. Merryn got a 3rd place in the agility despite thumping that last jump. We, South Cotswold, were all then called up to receive our Starters' League winners rosettes and the winners shield. It was now official. Amazing. We would have the first 3 engravings on the shield, as a new shield had been started in 2014.

Starters' League Final contd...



We clapped Wye Valley as they collected their runners up rosettes, they had put up tough competition and not really lost (that's not to say that we hadn't won). This was our closest final yet – we had scraped it by the skin of our teeth.

There just remained the trophy for the overall league's top scoring dog to be handed out, followed by the runners-up trophy. The trophy for the dog that had scored most points during all the league matches was awarded to the missing Mike and Chops. Susie and Dixie had finished second in the League and won the runners-up trophy. More proof that the team deserved to win!

Merryn entered two open classes throughout the rest of the day, and whilst not placed, did well. Her breeder went home proud of her kennel. As for Merryn, she was rewarded with a dried pig's ear when we got home. Lovely.

Clearly thanks must be made as we would never have achieved this feat without our past and present captains and trainers. Our Agility trainers Jeanette, Jill, Julie, Titch, Caroline and Simon and, our present trainer Ali, under whose guidance we improved so much over the last 2 years. Thank you all. I should also note the early years for Merryn, where we went through puppy training with the club, and then Superdog, earning the KC Good Citizen bronze, silver and gold along the way. Maybe that's why she's so placid and laid back? So thanks to Pat, Susie and Jill for the patience too!



So Brazil have five stars on their shirt. I wanted to follow in their footsteps and now have the three stars on mine. I am sure South Cotswold can help me reach my goal and I'll be watching in the future seasons. To help this along, I have joined Sue and Jude in the captaincy for the 2016-17 season. We look forward to welcoming you along – even if only for you to watch and support us on those cold winter matches!

And as for a three star agility team - only by recent league finals results. The team and club are certainly five star.
★★★★★

See you in the league.

Socks!

At Exeter Show I parked up in Bridget, my motorhome, beside Liz my friend on one side and a couple I didn't know on the other.

I spent the first evening, Friday, with Liz in her motorhome - and she commented on my Christmas socks. Shame to waste using them, I said, even though it was the end of May.

Back in Bridget later, I got my clothes out ready for the next day and realised I'd forgotten enough spare socks. I knew Liz would notice if I wore the same ones for 3 days (Yuck! So would I!) so I weighed up my options: the result being that I immediately washed the Christmas socks in washing-up liquid. Note to self—it takes an immense amount of rinsing to get the soap out. I was worried that if it rained my feet would start to froth spontaneously, something out of a Roald Dahl story.

The next day I wore my fluorescent yellow-with-bright-pink socks (pretty noticeable, to say the least) and put the Christmas ones out to dry on my garden fence; apologising to my other neighbour about them hanging out like some sort of optimistic early Christmas offering. I got them in before the thunderstorm struck, nicely dry and warmed by the sun.

The following morning I slipped into my clothes and shoved one foot into a sock—Arggh! Something alien in the toe, please don't let it be a spider! However, on investigation, I discovered - - - a sweetie! The other sock also had a sweetie in it. Father Christmas had arrived early, amazing!!

I burst out laughing at the silliness of it all and when everyone was up and about I was able to thank 'Santa' in shorts, the man from next door, the funniest moment of the weekend. I told him that, although I didn't know his name, he would forever be Santa in Shorts to me.

Open Obedience Show

This was held on Saturday 14th May at Nympsfield.

Friday afternoon set-up was not only rain free, but also wind free - quite unusual for Nympsfield at this time of year! Our usual band of volunteers turned out to put up the ring ropes and parking ropes and stay ring ropes and generally ropes all over the place. With the lack of wind, we were able to put the judges' tents up, which was brilliant because it takes up valuable time on Saturday morning when there are so many other things to put in place.

Saturday dawned dry and we were up and at it by 6am. All was pretty well in place as the competitors started to arrive. Husbands called in to take on parking attendant duties; not always the simplest of jobs as many people want to save spaces for friends, which messes up the system as parking is quite tight for space.

The show started and, with the exception of one problem that needed a bit of tactful management, ran without hitch. The day remained fine, bit by bit the classes finished and we were able to take down everything that had been put up the previous day.

As Pat and I drove out I looked back at a clear space, back to as it was and ready for the cricket - it could all have been a dream.

Ten Teams Rally

This took place near Patchway Common, Bristol.

Our team consisted of:

Bridget and Bear, Val and Rosie and Angie and Lexi in Special Beginners;

Joyce and Kari, Val and Cindy and Jill and Pip in Novice;

Val and Cindy and Susie and Dixie in A;

Susie and Dixie in B.

Of these, only Val and Susie actually compete in obedience - they both had to work two classes, due to others' illnesses. All the others are either agility or working trials dogs and kindly gave up their time for the club. Everyone worked really well in a stiflingly hot afternoon and we came a very creditable 5th.

Where's Dixie?

Leading up to the above events, Liz Steele was working like one possessed to organise and order new club clothing for all competitors. I was in charge of distribution when it arrived.

One evening at agility, my lesson finished and I had clothing for some people who had come in for the next class. So we went out to the Land Rover for sorting and trying on, which took a bit of time as not everything was the right size. Having finished, they went in to their class and I went to shut the rear door of the Land Rover.

Cato was lying there like a good soul - but she was definitely on her own.....Dixie? I usually attach her lead to the tow-bar if she's out, but obviously that wasn't the case. Fiona and Angie realised I couldn't find her and started to look, closely followed by Caroline and Simon Coventry. Angie went into the fields calling, I looked into the indoor school and called her, the next class was taking place at the far end. I searched outbuildings and stables, calling, asking anyone I saw if they'd seen her. The others scoured the immediate environs, up towards the road, anywhere a dog may have wandered off to. We called and called, looked into the indoor school and called again. It was so unlike Dixie - unless we're on a walk with loads of smells and stuff! Could she have seen a rabbit or pheasant and set off in hot pursuit while I was dealing with the clothing?

Probably 10-15 minutes had passed and I was getting really worried, particularly as she had her agility collar on with no ID tag, so quick return would be impossible. Plus it was beginning to get fairly dark.

Then, the door of the indoor school was opened by Michele - and accompanying her was Dixie! The second class had noticed her waiting for me to come back, and as time lengthened and I didn't, eventually Michele came out to see if I'd somehow left without her. The good girl had done a long, long stay, and no amount of anyone calling her name would make her move; she knew she had to wait until I returned to her side.

So the good news of the story is that she's learnt how to be a really good stay dog! Not sure why she hasn't packed her spotted hanky and gone off to find a better owner, but luckily for me she hasn't got round to that yet.

The downside is that I COMPLETELY let her down by absolutely forgetting where I'd left the poor thing! Hugs all round at a happy ending, me driving home wondering just how I could have had such a mental blank about something so dear to me - and everyone else breathing a sigh of relief and also wondering how I could be so stupid! Needless to say, from that moment on, everyone reminds me to hold tight to my lead at the end of my agility class! Please keep on reminding me, I'm a slow learner!

Update on Dorothy's memorial

In the last issue we reported on our planned memorial to Dorothy Blair; a leaf on the copper Beech tree in the reception of the new local RSPCA kennels.

Caroline James asked for an update on progress, and she received this reply from Sarah Frost, the head of Fundraising and Communications.

"I am pleased to report that the building works have now been completed. We are currently recruiting for staff to run the Centre and still need to kit it out before it will be ready to take animals. We are hoping to officially open the Centre at the end of September. We are hoping that the Beech Tree will be in place for the Opening. It would be lovely show your members the Beech Tree and commemorate Dorothy Blair's donation which has helped us make the Centre a reality.

May I keep you updated on progress so we can set a date for the visit? "

So watch this space everybody.....

Superdog class Competition

Hello, my name is Winnie and I have been asked by the trainers of the Superdog Class to write a little piece about the Competition which they organised for us, but first let me tell you something about myself. I am a Labradoodle aged about 7 and in November 2014 I came to Nailsworth to be with the Beale Family. The Labrador Rescue Society had arranged this, as I had been neglected by my previous family and put up for adoption.

In February 2015 my new mum took me for the first time to the Good Dog Class, which I was not happy about. I had been very much a loner, and to be confronted by some very vocal dogs was very daunting, and I did not like going one bit. Gradually over the next few weeks I got used to being with the other dogs and even passed the Good Citizen Test and was promoted to the Super Dog Class.

So back to the Competition. Friday 10th June arrived and at 6.30pm we got ready to go to dog training. Why are we going this early I thought and why are we dragging my second best bed up Butchers Hill to the Town Hall? On entering the Town Hall I took a double take. Two lines of chairs blocked our way into the main Hall and in the middle I could see a circle of coloured plastic blocks. What is going on? Susie then took centre stage and started to talk about the evening as it would pan out. There was a lot of chatter amongst the mums and dads and I could sense this was not going to be our usual class as some were actually drinking tea and eating biscuits. There was a new lady standing in the middle with a pad and pencil, what was she doing I wondered. At 6.45pm the class, or so I thought, started. It would consist of 3 separate classes, with each of us taking it in turns to do our exercises on our own. This was going to be a bit strange as everybody would be watching.



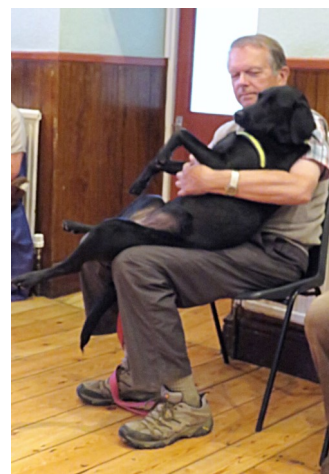
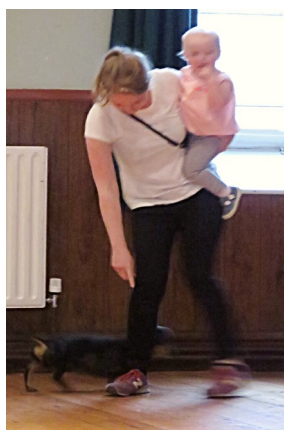
I soon realised that this was a competition between all of my friends at Superdog, and the competitive streak soon kicked in. The exercises were as we had been practising in Superdog Class; recalls, heel work, go to bed, (that's why my bed was brought!) leave it take it. When it was our turn, mum and I really enjoyed parading around in front of my friends and hoped that we did not let ourselves down.

After the competition had finished, rosettes were handed out and we all had our photo taken.

Winnie on her second best bed!

All in all it was a lovely evening and I would like to thank Susie, Pat, Angie and Liz and the lady with the pad and pencil (that was Liz Davis, our judge for the evening) for organising the event and hope that we can have another Competition Evening again soon.

continued.....



Open Door Display 2016

THE TEAM :

ELLIE: AIRDALE TERRIER 6 AND A HALF YEARS OLD, OWNED BY LINDA HINTON

DIXIE: GERMAN SHEPHERD 5 YEARS OLD, OWNED BY SUSIE THOMSON

PIP: AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD/COLLIE CROSS 9 YEARS OLD, OWNED BY JILL SIMS BUT WORKED BY LIZ STEELE

LOTTIE: BLUE ROAN COCKER SPANIEL, OWNED BY DOREEN HOSKIN

NUTMEG: WORKING BEARDED COLLIE X JACK RUSSELL 14 MONTHS OLD, OWNED BY JILL SIMS

ABBIE: YELLOW LABRADOR 3 YEARS OLD, OWNED BY VAL AND GORDON SCOTT

The weather was kind again this year and the display outside on the lawn of the tabernacle in Dursley with the audience sat around the edge of the lawn. Most of the display went to plan but as usual the recall with distractions; toys and bowls with food in, proved to be tempting for most dogs and the audience found this very amusing.

When the demonstration had been completed the audience had an opportunity to stroke and talk to the dogs and both the audience and the dogs enjoyed the experience.

The display which is an annual event gives everyone involved a real pleasure and is a very worthwhile occasion.

We look forward to next year !



Lottie and Ellie

continued.....



Pip and Nutmeg



Dixie

Good Citizen Scheme

Club Contacts for The Good Citizen Dog Scheme:

Obedience —Please contact Pat Jones for more details — Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards.

Agility —Please contact Julie Bearder, julie@bearder.co.uk who is happy to liaise with Pat to set up Bronze classes for agility dogs .

Congratulations to the dogs & handlers who recently achieved the Gold Good Citizen Award : Pancho, owned by Jill Sims, and Abbie, owned by Val and Gordon Scott.

We value your contributions: Remember, this is your newsletter.

Please feel free to submit doggie stories, photos, news & views.

These can be emailed to the editor at : liz.steele@btinternet.com

TROPHIES AWARDED at the AGM for 2015/6

Tryfan Trophy (Personality dog) :	Daisy, JR / Jo Payne	Seeka memorial (Superdog Achievement):	Indie, C spaniel,
Shepherd Boy Cup (Crossbreed):	Winnie, Labradoodle		Janet Taylor
	Daphne Beale	Crumble Cup:	Ben, Emma
Tansy Tangles Cup (Gundog):	Charlie, Springer,	Agility 'A' frame:	Rosie, Val Cousins
	Claire Uzzell	Barnaby Challenge Cup (Agility) :	Arjo,
Pastoral Cup:	Cindy, B.C. Val Long		Judith Clay Davis
Terrier Cup:	Chuck, JR,	Agility: Best League dog and handler:	Chops, Mike
	Virginia Lugard-Brayne	BC/WSD Plate:	Ben, Emma Lane
Mickey memorial (Open Show):	Cindy, Val Long	Agility Cup: Most improved in Simon's class:	Daisy, Jo Payne
Multi-crossbreed Cup:	Pancho, Jill Sims	Dorothy's Trophy for Outstanding service to Club :	
Rio Cup (Advanced obedience):	Dixie,		Liz Steele
	Susie Thomson		

Club Officials

Chairman	Obedience Trainers	Agility Information	
Susie Thomson	Susie Thomson	Julie Bearder	
(01453 835045)	Pat Jones Jill Sims	(01453 827829)	
Secretary	Angie Swann		
Pat Jones (01453 860696)	Liz Davis	Agility Trainers	
Treasurer	Obedience Helpers	Julie Bearder	Pete Gibbons
Angie Swann	Doreen Hoskin	Caroline Coventry	Michele Phillips
Newsletter	Liz Steele	Simon Coventry	Alison Edgington
Liz Steele (01453 833235)			