

NORTH OF ENGLAND RAT SOCIETY

Agility Judging Manual



2015

Agility judging

Agility is a regular and important part of NERS shows. It offers the chance to celebrate the rat and owner bond via the rats completing an obstacle course with the owner's guidance and support. As such, agility is about much more than just the speed the course is completed and it is judged against the following aspects;

- **Speed:** The completion speed of the course is awarded a score reflecting the time from when the rat is placed on the table to completion of the final obstacle.
- **Accuracy:** This represents how well the rat completes the obstacles.
- **Teamwork:** This refers to how well the human and rat interact on the day, and should reward behaviours where the rat looks to the owner for guidance and follows cues, as well as encouraging good handling and relationship.

Who can judge?

You can register on the training scheme if you have entered agility on a minimum of two occasions. An experienced agility judge will talk you through the process and be on hand to answer any questions. For the assessment session you will be given the option to co-judge or to judge on your own.

Agility judging is an excellent way to get involved in the show day whilst taking up less time than many other jobs such as stewarding. It is also a good way to get used to the pressures of judging in a less charged environment.

Setting up the course

Your first task is to set up the agility course and assign a number of points to each. The course should consist of 5-6 obstacles, with most obstacles worth a maximum of 2 points and one or two for 3 points if they are particularly difficult or you want to add a bit of a twist.

The club will provide an agility set, however if you have an item you think would make an interesting "wild card" obstacle, you can add it as long as it is safe for all sizes of rats. It is up to you in which obstacles to use and their order and orientation, but it is a good idea to finish with something that has a definite completion such as a jump.

The course can be laid out in a straight line or U-shape, as long as it is clear where the start and finish are and the route that should be followed. You should also take into account where the owner will be moving around the table. Try to vary the obstacles so that different types are next to each other. Be mindful of putting obstacles too close to the edge.

The agility table(s) should be placed in a suitable location, away from any exits and in a quiet part of the room if possible. You should give the obstacles a quick wipe before starting. They should also be wiped between rats if there are obvious scent mark streaks or poos.

Preparation

When judging agility it is useful to have a "timer". This is a person who will start the timer (usually a stop watch facility on their phone) when the rat is placed on the table and let you know the time the rat when the rat has completed the course. The timer is also responsible for declaring "time out" when the maximum time is reached. Most judges find that they are too busy watching the teams to also keep track of the time. There are usually plenty of people who are prepared to help as timers. It is your responsibility to find someone to do this for you.

You will need to collect the agility paperwork from the show sec. This consists of critiques, a points sheet, and a challenge sheet. Before judging starts you may wish to take a photo of the course or make a note of the obstacles you have used, alongside the points you have assigned to each. Please also record the maximum number of points available for your course. This will be useful when you come to write up your report.

Starting judging

Agility judging usually takes place around lunch time to fit in with when the pet and varieties judges are taking their break. As NERS allow entries in more than one section, most of the rats

entered in agility will be entered in one or more of the other sections. To preserve anonymity, the owner should ask the steward if they can get their rat for agility. The steward will also know if the judge will need the rat imminently or if it can be removed from the bench. Some of the agility competitors may also be stewarding or have other jobs so you will need to be flexible in terms of when rats and their owners are available.

Approach the first person on your list and see if they are free and able to get their rats. If not, move onto the next person. Once you have an owner and their first rat, you should explain where they should start, the order of the course, the scoring criteria, and the maximum time available. If it is a new exhibitor you should also explain about the level of contact they are allowed to make with their rat, that treats are not permitted, and that they can stop at any time if they think their rat has had enough.

If a rat appears unwell, it is your responsibility to investigate this and withdraw the rat as appropriate. You can seek a second opinion if needed. If a rat appears excessively stressed and fearful on the table, the owner may need to be advised to terminate the run.

You will need to make sure that the audience knows to be quiet and that no one stands too close to the table or otherwise distract the rats.

Judging speed (up to 5 points)

Speed is judged by the time taken for the rat to complete the course, or run out of available time. There is a maximum of 5 points available to rats that finish in the fastest time bracket. Any rat that does not finish in the allotted time will not score any speed points.

The number of points to be awarded for each time bracket:

Points	Completing the course within...
5 points	30 seconds
4 points	45 seconds
3.5 points	60 seconds (1 minute)
3 points	70 seconds
2.5 points	80 seconds
2 points	90 seconds (1 ½ minutes)
1.5 points	100 seconds
1 point	120 seconds (2 minutes)
0 points	Over 2 minutes – "Time out"

Judging accuracy (number of points depending on obstacles used)

Accuracy is judged based on the number of points you assigned each obstacle (mostly 2 point obstacles with the occasional 3 point obstacle). The points are awarded as follows;

- Full points – fully completing the obstacle
- 1 point – a good attempt, such as completing half of the weaving posts, jumping off the A-frame half way, or going under a jump
- 0 points – refusing entirely, having to be physically removed from the obstacle, if the rat is manually "driven" over the obstacle, or the owner decided to skip it.

You can award up to 2 bonus points to rats that complete all the obstacles.

Judging teamwork (up to 5 points)

This is the most subjective aspect to agility judging. It is your interpretation of how the rat and owner teamwork comes across on the day, although a good run with excellent collaboration tends to be obvious to anyone who is watching. It is important to note that even the most well bonded rat can ignore its owner on the agility table when there are so many smells and sounds



competing for their attention, so it is not a true reflection of their bond. However, agility is about rewarding the team and you can only reward what you see on the day.

The highest teamwork scores should be given to rats that clearly look to their human for guidance and make an effort to follow, even if they get it wrong. It should reflect the owner being sensitive and respectful, and not interfering with the rat such as pushing it around the course or give excessive corrections. Light taps to the body of the rat to help keep focus are acceptable, as is gentle verbal instruction and support.

- 5 points – Excellent interaction between owner and rat, with rat being responsive to instruction. Verbal cues, light or no taps.
- 4 points – Very good interaction between owner and rat, with rat often being responsive to instruction. Some taps and cues.
- 3 points – Good interaction between owner and rat, with rat sometimes being responsive to instruction. Taps and cues with minor interference.
- 2 points – Some interaction between owner and rat, with rat not really responding to instruction and occasional interference.
- 1 point – Very basic tactile manoeuvring of the rat by their owner, with or without some verbal instruction and excessive interference.

It is permissible for owners to grab the rat to prevent a dash-off; this does not count as interference. The rat should either be returned to the same spot for another attempt, or the owner can choose to forego a particular obstacle for a zero mark.

Sometimes a buck will be very interested in a particular spot and stop to sniff it very carefully. In this case if several attempts have been made to gain the attention of the rat, the owner is allowed to move the rat on from the obstacle for a zero mark. Please give the obstacle a wipe before the next rat.

Writing critiques

It is useful to write the critique as the rat goes. Some judges list headings for Speed, Accuracy and Teamwork on the critique, leaving a couple of lines space between each. You may wish to prepopulate this for all of the critiques before judging begins.

Some judges write freeform notes on a pad during the judging and then transfer it over to the critiques after judging has finished. This allows you to think a little bit more about what you would like to comment on.

1. As the rat completes each obstacle, note down the points against **Accuracy**. Mark an X if the rat refuses or scores 0 on an obstacle. This gives you something which will look like "2,2,1,X,1,3". Add on any bonus points. You should also add a comment about how the rat did (for example if they liked a particular obstacle, or were more interested in the crowd than the course).
2. When the rat has completed the course, record the time against **Speed** and write down the assigned point score against the time.
3. Add a **Teamwork** comment, noting how well the rat responded to their owner. Make sure you keep it as positive as possible to reflect the fact that most agility entrants very much love their rats and a poor performance on the day does not mean they aren't well bonded at home. For instance, rather than "Rat ignored its owner" write something like "Bobby was far more interested in sniffing the A-frame than listen to his owner today" or "Didn't pay much attention today, too busy exploring!" Assign a teamwork score out of 5.

General comments can be along the lines of "Very quick little buck, clearly enjoyed himself", "Thoroughly sniffed each obstacle", etc.

Placing the challenge

Agility is a simple competition in that there is only one challenge and three special awards.



Add up the total score for each section and write this on the right side of the critique. It will help if you circle or underline these. Then add together all the scores and clearly record the final score on the critique.

Sort your critiques into points order and award to top 4 rats the top 4 places in the agility challenge.

Where two or more rats have the same score, it is at the judge's discretion whether you decide that the accuracy, speed or teamwork score should be the deciding factor. You will need to detail your decision in the report.

Place	Award	NERS championship points
1 st place	Agility winner rosette	4 points
2 nd place	Prize card	3 points
3 rd place	Prize card	2 points
4 th place	Prize card	1 point

Special awards

These awards have prize cards and rosettes:

- **Fastest** – This is for the rat that completed the course in the fastest time. If no rats complete the course fully, it should go to whoever completed the most obstacles in the time limit. If two rats are on the same time, give it to the most accurate rat in that time.
- **Most Accurate** – This is awarded to the rat with the highest accuracy score. If two or more rats are on the same score, either choose the rat that did it fastest, or the rat you felt did the obstacles the best.
- **Best Teamwork** – You will usually have more than one rat/owner team on the same teamwork score. The award is given to the team that impressed you the most, even if one with the same teamwork score did better in terms of speed or accuracy – this is awarded to the teamwork or relationship that made you feel warm and fuzzy.

At your discretion you can also award other specials in the form of prize cards. This could be for rats who exhibit particularly ratty/amusing behaviour, e.g. jumping across the top of the weaving posts, completing the course in reverse, climbing its owner's clothes to sit on their shoulder, etc.

When you have finished

Collect the prize cards and rosettes from the show sec and write everything out. Once finished, return everything to the show sec including the paperwork, most importantly the challenge sheet. You may wish to take a photo of this to facilitate your report writing.

Separate the critiques and put the original into piles for the owners. You should take the carbon copies home as you will need them for your report.

Wipe down the agility set and pack it into its bag.