



## Obreedience Competition

I would welcome a discussion with OLC members, around the OLC supporting the Obreedience Competition, which currently does not have its own working party/council/committee, and therefore potentially lacks some support and promotion as a competition.

History: a few years ago the Kennel Club came up with the idea of Obreedience. Which is an obedience competition for teams of pure-bred dogs, with the emphasis initially on those breeds which were not normally associated with obedience.

As the competition evolved (from the original idea and demos at Crufts), these teams would compete at heats throughout the year, and accumulate points on the back of their performances, and the final would then be held at Crufts, for the 10 (+/-) best - with some restrictions - only one team of a particular breed, and only up to 3 teams from a breed group. There were less than 10 teams at this year's Crufts final due to the Breed group restriction.

Although some breed groups were less well represented than others, before the pandemic the competition thrived, interest was growing, and it was developing as a sport in its own right.

Also prior to the pandemic, there were concerns raised that Obedience show societies hadn't embraced the Obreedience competition, and most of the heats were being held at Rally and Breed shows instead. The competition not only brings in extra revenue for those societies holding heats (at £20/£25 per team), but it also of course, exposes competitors to the sport of the hosting society and therefore potentially brings in new competitors to that sport. This situation has now been rectified – with 10 or 11 heats (out of 17) this year being held at Obedience shows – the others spread between Rally and Breed, and with one 'standalone' heat.

In coming back after the pandemic however, there has been a markedly reduced number of teams competing - dropping from roughly 17 pre pandemic, to approx. 7 - for much of this season (although there are 13 on the points table now, but 2 teams no longer exist, and 3 are relatively new. Of note 6 of those 13 teams are from the gundog group and only 3 can qualify for the final) – many heats (5 of them during the Summer) only having 4 or 5 teams, and these low number of entries are causing some obedience societies to question whether it's worth bothering to put on another heat (information gathered from comments made by show societies on FB).

The drop in numbers of teams, has been affected by the pandemic and a natural aging/retirement of dogs during that period, and new teams have been slow in coming forward. However, it has also been partially caused by the current rules around qualifying for the final at Crufts. Qualifying requires the accumulation of points from heats throughout the year – which means those teams having the time and the finances to travel to all the heats across the country (at a time when fuel is becoming more and more expensive), or indeed, enrolling enough members under one team name so that they can send a different 4 team members to cover heats in different areas of the country – (the original rule was that teams started out with a team of 6 at the beginning of the qualifying period, and had to stick to that team of 6 – and at some point, it was changed to an unlimited number of individuals).

Whilst the qualifying rules sound fine in themselves, it does mean that those teams that are from a popular breed group, realise well before the end of the qualifying period for the Crufts final, that they have no chance in qualifying, and choose not to 'waste' their money in entering the heats in the latter part of the season. This then has the knock on effects that those that do attend manage to acquire a lot of points, not necessarily with a good performance, and also that show societies holding heats towards the end of the season, will then think twice about holding a heat in the future.

It would seem the right time to review the rules, in order to try and support the competition.



Perhaps encouraging show societies that held their 1<sup>st</sup> heat this year and didn't get many entries, to hold another heat next year.

Perhaps – giving some sort of award/s or accolade for the top teams from the heats (team with the most points, team with the best average, team that have attended the most heats) - in addition to the invite to the Crufts final – as that invite doesn't always take the best teams. To try and encourage teams to continue entering heats even if the final is beyond their reach.

Perhaps looking at the teams with the best scores from 5 (or 10) heats being invited to Crufts – there are few teams that would accumulate 5 (or 10) wins – max points, so there will always be the opportunity for teams to improve a total score – there has been one team that have attended all 12 heats that have been added to the points table so far, then 10, 9 and 8 x 2 (another 4 sets of results from heats held since August, are yet to be added to the table).

Perhaps lifting the restriction on the number of teams from each breed group.

Judge's training also needs consideration. At the moment qualified judges from Obedience and from Rally, are able to judge the competition, even with no previous experience of the Obreedience competition itself (and societies struggle to get judges for the heats, so I don't think that should be changed) – but there is a huge variation in opinion – which then necessitates a 'judge's briefing' to be scheduled prior to every heat – this really should not be required.

I'm presuming that it doesn't come under the remit of the OLC – despite being based on Obedience exercises and exercises from the GCDTS, I think it just has the support of the Activities team - but if not, should it, or is there some other way in which those of us passionate about Obreedience can support the Activities team?

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