

History of Dog Obedience in the NZKC
(from the book "Dogsbody, The Story of the New Zealand Kennel Club" by Stewart Lusk, 1983)

"Whether it be for the house, the show-ring, the field or water, or the farm, or many other uses, the dog is capable of being put to and excelling in, careful and expert training in obedience - to the word of command - is essential."

"Anyone with a little intelligence can become an expert trainer of the dog. The chief qualifications are patience and a love for the pupil. There are far too many ill-behaved dogs in our cities and towns; it should be borne in mind that the best advertisement dog breeders can have is the trained dog."

So wrote Stan Rastall in the Year Book of the N.Z. Kennel Club, published in 1941. His article goes on to elaborate on training methods and procedures which he regarded as axiomatic, as indeed they are, for they are embodied in the Rules and Regulations and Procedures currently laid down by the Kennel Club for the conduct of Obedience. Because this Article contains so much wisdom it is reprinted hereunder as Appendix J.

During the early 1930's there had been much public controversy over the question of whether Alsatian - Shepherd dogs were inherently dangerous and vigorous attempts were made in political circles to have this breed banned altogether (as indeed occurred in Australia). The activities of the Kennel Club in this connection are another story which is told elsewhere in this history but the fears of Alsatian breeders and owners that public opinion might decide the campaign against the breed led to the first references to Obedience Training in the Kennel Club.

Under the heading "Obedience Test" the following appeared in the June 1930 issue of the "N.Z. Fancier:"

"As was only fitting the Obedience Test for Alsatis, held by the New Plymouth Kennel Club at its Show last week, went to a genuine working Alsatian in Mr W T Petersen's Luck of Windaliona. The time draws near when owners of working Alsatis will issue their challenge to the Working Collie World as forecast by Mr Griffen, the Hawkes Bay enthusiast. There is already a chance for any Kennel Club with sufficient of the "pep" referred to in an article elsewhere, to stage a "Working Alsatian Trial" apart entirely from the Obedience Tests which will doubtless be a prominent feature at most shows in the future."

In the Minutes of the Executive Council for March 1st 1932 the following appears:

"The N.Z. Council of Alsatian Clubs wrote outlining their objects in the conducting of Field Trials and Obedience Tests and wished the approval of the Kennel Club in regard to the Affix "Companion Dog Champion." To support their claim Messrs E Hanley and R A Nicol waited on the Executive in person and placed their views before the meeting. It was resolved, after discussion, on the motion of Mr Sinclair seconded by Mr Hunt, "that the Trials or Tests held by the Council be held under sanction of the Kennel Club, with the Council issuing their own certificates. The feeling of the meeting being to assist the Council as far as possible under Kennel Club Rules."

In the Minutes of the Executive Council for September 11th, 1933, it is recorded that a Club called the Gisborne Alsatian Trial Society sought permission "to use certain lettering after the names of dogs who were winners at the Society's Trials". Executive Council referred the matter to the National Council of Shepherd Dog Control.

All did not go smoothly for on October 20th, 1936, Executive Council Minutes record the following:

"Alsatis - the Secretary reported that a few weeks ago he was waited upon by Alsatian owners who desired to see if it was possible to allot points for Trials as obtained a few years ago under the National Council of Shepherd Dog Control, when it was possible for an Alsatian to become a Field Trial Champion. He explained that the Council which the Kennel Club had considered competent to hold Trials, had, through the disintegrating force amongst the Alsatianists themselves, gone out of existence and he did not think there was any possibility of the Kennel Club acknowledging any one particular Club to allot points for Trials and Working unless and until the whole of the Alsatian units throughout the Dominion joined together into one unit for National regulation on similar lines and in similar fashion as the Gun Dogs had done. Then their claims of having points allotted for Trials and Working may probably

be considered by the Executive. The Secretary's action in connection with this matter was endorsed."
(One more example of Stan Rastall - the power behind the throne).

The Executive decision was not accepted and the Wellington Club moved at the Annual meeting November 5th, 1937, the following motion:

"That the National Council for Alsatian Shepherd Dog' Control being defunct, the Wellington Alsatian Shepherd Dog Club, the only Alsatian Club affiliated with N.Z. Kennel Club be authorised to control Obedience Tests under the same conditions as applied in the case of the N.Z. National Control Board".
(Motion Lost).

The next reference to Obedience is in the Minutes of an Executive Council Meeting held in April 1949 where under the heading "Auckland All Breed Dog Training Club" the following appears:

"Moved and seconded that they be notified that they can form an All Breed Training Club over which this Club has no jurisdiction at the moment."

On the 18th August 1950 the Executive Council considered an application by a Society called "National Council for Shepherd Dog Control" for recognition by N.Z.K.C. with the same rights and privileges as the Dominion Gun Dog Trial Association. Its objective was to conduct Field Trials and Obedience Tests for German Shepherd Dogs "as provided for under the earlier regulations of N.Z.K.C."

This application was refused because it was felt that the new Society was untried and all the Kennel Club would do was to recognise the Club and see how it fared. Approval was given for it to function as a Specialist Club with the right to have affiliated Clubs for the purpose of conducting Field Trials and Obedience Tests for German Shepherd Dogs.

In 1952 there was however a serious split in the Auckland German Shepherd Dog Clubs; there were in fact two Clubs operating in Auckland at this time. Complaints came forward to the Executive Council from both Clubs against each other and the Executive Council refused to recognise either no doubt hoping that this would force the two factions together.

Up to this point then it will be seen that although it was realised that there was scope for Obedience there was as yet no solid base. At the Executive Council meeting held on 30th April, 1955, we find the first sign that something more satisfactory was beginning to appear. At that meeting correspondence was tabled from a new "All Breeds Dog Training Club" and the Secretary was instructed to write stating "we are pleased to hear of the formation of such a Club and wish them every success."

We now come forward to 1962. Shortly after I became President, I asked Mr H S Wilson then Chairman of the N.Z. Kennel Club Obedience Sub-Committee to write a history of Obedience for my guidance and for publication in the Kennel Gazette. Mr Wilson's article appeared in the November 1962 issue of the Gazette and was as follows:

There is no doubt now that Obedience Training has come to New Zealand to stay and a big step forward was taken earlier this year when the N.Z. Kennel Club adopted the Sub-Committee recommendation that personnel of the Committee should be elected in future, not appointed as in the past.

I think it will be of interest to all if we look back now while memory is good and some scant records are available to retrace the steps which have brought the movement to its present stage.

My own special interest goes back to the year 1955 when Mr and Mrs Gerald Randall (then but recently arrived from Britain) agreed to instruct a group of Aucklanders in the art of handling and training dogs. That the Randalls were not the first in New Zealand to undertake this work I am well aware and in this respect

I would refer to two articles which appeared in N.Z. Kennel Gazette, Vol.3, No. 12, dated 20th July 1949. Publication of this Gazette ceased many years ago but at that time was printed by the Cameo Press of Warkworth for the Proprietor, J Goldie Anderson.

The first of these two articles is headed "Training the Alsatian" by R Lewis, who wrote:

'Many people have said to me, 'If only my dog would come back to me when I called him I'd be quite happy'. Mr Lewis, in his article explains the first principles of teaching a dog to come when called and his methods are basically the same as those we are teaching now. He concludes his article as follows:

"Be content to make haste slowly and never lose your temper. If you feel your anger rising, stop the lesson and carry on with it later." The second item under "Alsatian News - Obedience Trials," refers to a lecture and discussion on "Training the Alsatian". The lecturer was Mr Geo. Jackson of Rotorua. For a time prior to 1955, N.Z.K.C. Rules and Regulations made provision for Obedience Trials for German Shepherds.

There is thus ample evidence that Obedience was being practised prior to 1955 but this evidence all points to restriction to one breed of dog and by mid-1955 enthusiasm appears to have waned. Training in Obedience work however had not been entirely discontinued among members of the Wellington District German Shepherd Club and the late Mr Ted Horan is the one who should perhaps be given most credit for this. Ted Bowen is another who took a very active part. Nevertheless I am inclined to believe we can give the Randalls credit for starting Obedience as we know it today for All Breeds. The Club formed in Auckland in 1955 proved progressive and tenacious in its efforts for official recognition but this was not easy.

On February 11th 1956 the Executive of the N.Z.K.C. adopted Regulations for Obedience Tests. These were published in the "N.Z. Dog World", March 1956. It was stated that the Tests were those of The Kennel Club (England) "with a few alterations to meet local conditions existing in the Dominion." These tests served to confirm the method the All Breeds Dog Training Club had been practising and I believe these were also similarly acceptable to the one or two other Clubs then established. In the "N.Z. Dog World", October 1956, the following article appears:

"Interest in Obedience Trials is increasing and to those making enquiries, it can only be said that those clubs who are fostering the trials should just continue as they are doing in the meantime. The Executive of the N.Z. Kennel Club have the matter in hand and it is their intention to issue regulations that will encourage and control this branch of the dog game.

On February 2nd, 1957 the Executive considered and approved Rules and Regulations for Obedience Trials but unfortunately the exercises for the Tests were changed considerably from those previously approved. I was never able to find out who produced these new exercises but it appeared they were an earlier set which had been discarded in Britain in favour of those that we had been working to since they were published in March 1956.

My Club immediately took up the matter with the N.Z.K.C. Executive and at the next Annual Conference of Delegates in June 1957 the president invited me to address delegates on this and other Obedience matters. Mr McDermott said the Executive wished only to help Obedience and I was asked to discuss the subject with Mr Rastall and let him know what we wanted. I said we were satisfied with the Tests as published in 1956. Fortunately these were adopted and with only a few minor amendments we still work them today. At this meeting I was approached by delegates who expressed an interest in Obedience, one of these being Mr C L Wilson of Levin. As a result of our discussions and following letters from other Clubs, a small party of members of All Breeds Dog Training Club of Auckland was arranged to make a trip to Hastings, Levin and Palmerston North. At each of these towns the visitors gave a demonstration and gave training assistance to local dog owners who paraded with their dogs. From this visit came the Clubs in these towns which are strong and flourishing today. At Hastings, the organisers were Jean Brodie and Tom Jobey; at Levin Cliff Wilson had assembled another band of enthusiasts, Cleve Allen and Bob Ramshaw took the lead at Palmerston North. Even in these early days it was apparent that any breed of dog could be trained - this was clearly exhibited by the work of the Auckland team which included a Golden Retriever (Honey), a German Shepherd (Stranger), a Labrador (Shep), a Cocker Spaniel (Bertie), a Samoyed (Toby) and a Maltese (Punch). Hutt Valley was also early in the field with a substantial number of dogs being trained by Ted Bowen and with Hec and Mrs Brown very much to the fore.

Mrs Cooper was the leader of the movement in the South Island and early in 1958, Ashburton and Canterbury Obedience Clubs were both away to a good start. Mrs Dorothy Miller and Bill Isherwood were among the first pupils at Christchurch and later took over as Senior Instructors. Mr and Mrs Godfrey were prominent at Timaru at about the same time and at New Plymouth a small group had also formed a training class.

The arrival in New Zealand of Sgt. Riley with the first Police dogs also helped to promote further interest. We were, however, still under a grave disadvantage; the N.Z.K.C. official view appeared to be one of

interest in the movement but nobody seemed to know quite where to place us. Although this situation was discouraging, we nevertheless resisted those who were advocating the establishment of Obedience as an organisation on its own, completely divorced from the N.Z.K.C.

Early in 1958, clubs were invited to send representatives to a meeting at Wellington. For a number of reasons some Clubs could not accept the invitation, but Mrs Cooper, Mr Cliff Wilson, Mr Randall and I met in the N.Z.K.C. Boardroom on June 13th, 1958 and drew up the Regulations for the Control of Obedience Tests. Later in the year I addressed a meeting of those interested and we discussed the question of our future and the advisability of organising as an Association of Obedience Clubs.

The delegates approved the proposal in principle and agreed to have the matter discussed by their respective Club committees. In due course they gave unanimous support for the formation of an Obedience Association within the framework of the N.Z.K.C. At the previous Annual General Conference of the N.Z.K.C. the Chairman had said the proposal was premature but a further approach was made to him stressing the fact that all Obedience Clubs supported the move. At the next Annual General Conference in June 1959, Mr McDermott said the Executive had agreed to an Obedience Sub-Committee to be set up under the Chairmanship of Mr John Duncan, and asked for the names of the personnel to be submitted for approval before the conclusion of the meeting. Fortunately most Obedience Clubs had representatives at the Conference and from these the following were selected; Mrs C M Cooper, Ashburton, Mr N A Brown, Christchurch, Miss J Brodie, Hastings, Mr C L Wilson, Levin, Mr H S Wilson, Auckland.

We were elated but all of us at the same time regarded this Committee as an interim one pending a more democratic method of selection. The greatest drawback was lack of money - to call representatives of all Clubs together to select a Committee was obviously going to tax severely the resources of the Clubs and there appeared to be no way of paying out of pocket expenses even for the members of the Sub-Committee. Because of this, meetings could not be held very frequently and progress was slow. The Sub-Committee has done, and still does, most of its work by correspondence and frequently this means "burning the midnight oil" — often in fact until much later. Nevertheless, progress was steady - the regulations were recast, Champion Dog Tests were arranged, a Judge's panel was approved, Challenge Certificates were printed, numerous other problems were considered and finally the document "Hints to Handlers" was completed and made available to all Clubs. Late in 1961 the N.Z.K.C. Executive approved a grant of £50 to the Sub-Committee and promised to consider the matter again after the Annual Conference. Apart from this the Sub-Committee had a fund of a few pounds, the nett proceeds of C D Tests.

At a meeting held at Palmerston North on Saturday and Sunday, 17th and 18th February, 1962, the proposals for the election of a Committee on a Zone basis were finalized and for the first time the expenses of the members were refunded to them. This can be regarded as yet another milestone marking the advance of Obedience. The N.Z.K.C. had promised to review the position in the new year and although the majority of the personnel are new the present Executive recently made a further grant of £50 to the Sub-Committee. It will be obvious that such an amount will not go very far but at least it will be a help. The Executive has also agreed to review the matter later. The President, Mr Lusk, and his Executive, have promised to review also the relationship between the Breed and Obedience Clubs and in response to Mr Lusk's request, draft proposals designed to have regard to the rights and responsibilities of both sections have been submitted to him. We await the Executive's decision. As the administrative side of Obedience has been steadily advancing, so also the practical side, but fortunately at a much more rapid pace. Today there are some 27 Obedience Clubs or sections active in New Zealand; from Kaitaia in the North to Invercargill in the South; of these, four are sections of All Breed Clubs affiliated to the N.Z.K.C. and 16 are associated. The remainder are newer clubs.

At the National Show of 1959, Obedience was first included; on this occasion by providing a Demonstration Team under the leadership of Mr Bowen of Wainuiomata. At the 1960 National, Obedience Tests were included for the first time and it seemed appropriate that a Challenge was won by Mr Shaw's Corgi, Cymric the Colonel, making his third and thus becoming the first Obedience Champion in the country. Again in 1961, Obedience Tests were an important part of the National and at the 1962 National at Auckland the total of 100 entries really shows that Obedience has reached a stage of considerable importance. As a further step forward, your Sub-Committee is preparing U D Tests and hopes soon to get these under way, but as tracking is included in the U D Tests some practical difficulties have still to be ironed out."

Before the new Executive took over in 1962 it had been apparent that Mr McDermott's Executive was inclined to favour the ultimate establishment of Obedience on the same basis as had occurred with the Dominion Gun Dog Trial Association in 1936. This view was not shared by the new Executive which felt that Obedience should be kept firmly within the Kennel Club organisation and this has continued to be Kennel Club policy down to the present time.

The Obedience Clubs grew vigorously after 1962 and have operated as a virtually independent division of the Kennel Club with their own elected Chairman and elected Committee subject only to the over-riding authority of the N.Z. Kennel Club Executive Council. For many years the Chairman of Obedience was appointed by the Executive Council and Mrs C M Cooper, a member of the Executive Council in her own right, served as Chairman for many years. The Constitution of the Kennel Club was altered in 1975 to provide for election of the Chairman by the Obedience Clubs and Mr Gerry Randall mentioned in Mr H S Wilson's History became the first elected Chairman. He was succeeded by Mrs Doreen Watson who held office for two years and she in turn was succeeded by Mrs Judith Mason who is currently Chairman. All these have served as full members of the Kennel Club Executive. The Obedience Committee and the Kennel Club Executive have encouraged the development of Obedience and the division is now organised so that it provides all forms of obedience training and obedience competition and there are currently sixty-six separate clubs catering for these activities.

When Obedience was first mooted there was a strong movement in the country which felt that obedience training and competition should be available for other than pure bred registered dogs. This was of course contrary to one of the basic objects of the Kennel Club and whenever this question was brought to the attention of the Executive Council by the Obedience Committee and its supporters, the Kennel Club Executive refused to support any change in the Rules. Mr John Duncan who was the first appointed Chairman of the Obedience Committee was a strong supporter of the admission of all dogs to Obedience, spoke in support of this proposal on more than one occasion at Annual Conferences and finally in 1965 as President, I obtained the consent of the Executive Council to test the feeling of the Kennel Club on this subject through the publication of a leading article in the Kennel Gazette. The following is the leading article which appeared in the May 1965 issue of the Kennel Gazette and which was written by me:

Should Obedience be Open to Non-Pedigree Dogs? —Obedience Tests in New Zealand are open only to pedigree dogs registered with the New Zealand Kennel Club and otherwise complying with the Show Regulations of the Club. Crossbred dogs cannot at present be registered in New Zealand, nor is it easy to obtain registration of apparently purebred dogs, the parentage of which cannot be proved.

Up to the present time the Executive Council of the Kennel Club with the support of delegates whenever the matter has been raised at the Kennel Club Conference has steadfastly refused to permit the entry of cross-bred dogs and this position has been accepted (albeit with strong reservations in many quarters) by the Obedience Division.

In the Annual Report of the Executive Council, which is published in this issue, it will be seen that the President has expressed some anxiety as to the progress made by Obedience during the past year, and has drawn attention to the rather unsatisfactory financial weakness of the Obedience Division. It is suggested by the President that everything possible should be done to encourage obedience, and it is interesting to see in the Order Paper for the Annual Conference that the Executive Council has provided a practical opportunity for delegates to do just this.

The Executive Council has proposed an alteration to the Kennel Club Rules under which a special register can be established for the registration of any dog not otherwise registrable - e.g. cross-breeds and dogs of uncertain pedigree - such registration to be available for obedience competition (including Obedience Champion status), but for no other purpose.

This proposal is clearly intended to stimulate interest in Obedience at Club level and if passed by delegates will do much to overcome the financial problems of the Obedience Division while, because of its restricted application, the proposal is unlikely to do any harm to the Kennel Club and its basic objects. A similar system has operated successfully in the United Kingdom for many years and there can be no doubt that if approved at the Conference in June it will prove equally successful in New Zealand."

The Kennel Club members had very mixed feelings on the subject of admission of non-pedigree dogs and it took a full year of lobbying before the delegates were ready to amend the Rules but this was done at the 1966 Annual Conference as is recorded in a further leading article in the Kennel Gazette published in July 1966 which reads as follows:

A New Look For Obedience - The most notable feature of this year's Kennel Club Conference was the passing (by a very substantial majority) of the Executive Council, Remits designed to set up a second Register for dogs not otherwise eligible for registration. This new Register is for Obedience only, but will open the door in selected cases to participation in Obedience fixtures of a number of dogs which were previously banned. Cross-breeds will now be admitted to Obedience on conditions (which will probably be strict) to be laid down by the Executive Council. Likewise, many obviously pure-bred dogs, the parentage of which could not be established for Show and breeding purposes can now play their full part in Obedience circles. In addition (under another amendment), spayed bitches, castrated dogs and monorchids and cryptorchids will now be admitted to Obedience. These changes are, of course, a very material departure from the strict principles supposedly established when the Kennel Club was founded and obviously some of the more conservative delegates at the Conference were not over-keen about endorsing the change. In the result, however, after the matter had been debated fully, and with some vigour in certain quarters, the new proposal received what could only be described as overwhelming support (23 - 7 on the main vote) and Obedience now has the green light to proceed as they have for a long time wished to do.

We wish them all the best in their new venture and we hope that they will have the support they deserve from all quarters in the Kennel world. After all, one of the main objects of Obedience is to ensure that there are as many well-behaved dogs about as possible - it has always been hard in these modern times to justify limiting the benefits of a full obedience training to the lucky ones who happen to be able to prove their blood is 'blue'."

It is interesting to speculate what might have happened in the early thirties if the Sheep Dog Trialists had been similarly accommodated - union with the Kennel Club? Perhaps it is still not too late.