



**Association Inc**  
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**INTRODUCTION  
TO SHEEPDOG TRIALING  
IN TASMANIA  
A LEARNERS GUIDE**

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# INTRODUCTION TO SHEEPDOG TRIALING IN TASMANIA A LEARNERS GUIDE

## 1. The Basics

The main objectives are to promote good workmanship within the sport and to complete the set course within the allocated time losing the least amount of points as possible doing so.

*What is good workmanship?*

Good workmanship would be characterized by a high standard of dog control and humane sheep handling practices, while exercising good stock sense.

This can be achieved by dedication to providing your dog/s with good health and suitable training. The sport of Sheepdog trialing requires much patience and persistence, as it is a very specialised and skilful art that will take many years to master for most people. But it is also very rewarding when you realise that all of your persistence has paid off and you can successfully train and trial competitively.

## 2. The Course

Each competitor is allowed 15 minutes at most trials to complete the course (12 mins at some trials). The course consists of six sections, including four obstacles. Each section is allocated a points value. If you fail to complete any part of the course then you will lose the points allocated to those sections. Each competitor starts with a perfect score of 100 and points are deducted from there. (Refer to attached scorecard)

- First is the Cast. You will cast your dog to the opposite end of the arena where he will head the sheep off and begin to draw them towards you at the workers peg.
- Second is the Pull. When your dog picks the sheep up and lifts them towards you, he must then try to pull the sheep towards you at the workers starting peg in a straight line, within 5 meters each side of an imaginary line drawn from the position in which the sheep were picked up from.

- Third. You must bring the sheep around you on your left hand side at the workers peg. The sheep must cross the point of balance that is marked by a peg 10 metres directly behind the workers peg. If the sheep cross the point of balance from the workers right hand side, you must then unwind the sheep around the workers peg before you can proceed to the first obstacle, the Gap. From this point on the sheep must remain on your right hand side within 10 metres. When you reach each obstacle, you must stand at the peg beside the obstacle and you can't move from that position until you have successfully negotiated that obstacle. When working the trial you are not at any time allowed to assist your dog in any way, other than command by word of mouth or whistle. You are permitted to carry a stick as long as it is no more than 18 inches long, and is not used unfairly to assist you. To complete the Gap, you must put the 3 sheep through the small gap between the two gates together, and from the direction in which you approached the obstacle.
- Fourth is the Race. Remembering that when you leave the peg at the first obstacle, you must keep the sheep on your right hand side within 10 meters and you must walk in a direct line to the workers peg at the next obstacle. You can't stop walking until you reach that peg. Once there, your dog must guide the sheep into the mouth of the Race and then force them through. The Race can be a difficult obstacle at many trials, and sometimes your dog may be required to nip the sheep on the nose if they stick the dog up. Your dog is allowed to nip the sheep if it is in a proper forcing manner. The dog must not hold on, and will be disqualified if the judge believes that the bite is unnecessary or vicious.
- Fifth is the Bridge. The Bridge is considered to be the most difficult obstacle, as you are required to force the sheep up an incline and off the end of the bridge.
- Finally is the Finish Pen, where you must pen the sheep by steering them into a small opening on one corner of the obstacle.

When the sheep are in the pen, the judge will blow the siren and the run will be complete.

### **3. The Golden Rules**

- The dog must never cross between you and the sheep. The main objective of a heading dog is to work the sheep to you. If the dog crosses between you and the sheep then effectively he is driving the sheep away from you, which is not what we expect from him. PENALTY – DISQUALIFICATION
- The sheep must remain on course. Points are deducted if they stray off course at any stage. One point for the first 10 metres off course, and two points for every 10 metres thereafter. At obstacles, if one or more sheep protrude past the end of a wing you will lose 1 point, half way past an obstacle 2 points, and past the end 3 points.
- There are many other rules that are all listed in the rulebook, but if you remember to stick to the golden rules, the others will be learnt in time.

### **4. Selecting and training a dog**

When you first start to compete in sheepdog trials it is advisable to try and purchase a dog that has been started and trialed before. Because there is so much to learn, it makes the whole learning process a lot easier if you have a dog that has seen the course before and knows what is required. Such a dog will teach you more than any one person ever could. The first dog doesn't need to be a young dog! In fact, the best dog to begin with would be a dog almost due for retirement that maybe has a year or two left in him. Many handlers will sell a dog at this stage of their career to replace them with a younger up and coming potential. The first dog doesn't need to be an ex champion, as long as it is trained and controllable.

Once you become more confident working your first dog, you might like to consider buying a pup to train. The two most important things to consider when you buy a pup are

- Always choose a pup from proven trial bloodlines. This will greatly improve your chances of training a pup suitable for sheepdog trialing
- Secondly, always choose the pup that you like the most. Never buy a pup that you don't like. If you don't bond with the pup straight away then you most probably never will.

## 5. How do I train my Trial Dog?

The most important thing that you must do with him is to play with him and spend time with him. A special bond must exist between you and your dog. As far as working him is concerned, you need only spend five to ten minutes per day on sheep. Let him use his natural ability to work the sheep, don't try to put too much command on him, but always remain in control. If your dog isn't controllable when you work him, try putting him in a small pen, preferably round, where you can maintain control of any situation. Once he is working to your command in the round pen, graduate him to a small paddock. Once your dog is under control it is important to go through basic training methods to prepare him for competition trialing. They are

- Work on the sides. Your dog must cover both sides, and you must put commands on both sides in order to gain the control needed to head the sheep when they break. To achieve this, you need to work quiet sheep in an area where you can maintain control of the situation. If you want to send him to the left, you raise your right hand and command him to GET OVER while walking to your left around the sheep. Alternatively, if you want to send him to the right, you raise your left hand and command him to COME RIGHT while walking to your right around the sheep. The dog will naturally go to the head of the sheep to balance them on you. This is called heading.
- Teach your dog to hold balance equally on both sides. To do this walk beside a fence and have your dog walk quietly behind the sheep and to naturally cover any breaks on the open side that the sheep try to make. Make sure that you change direction so that the dog works both sides competently. This replicates walking from obstacle to obstacle in a trial.
- Don't be concerned about obstacle work. Obstacle work tends to fire up your dog in most cases and just the occasional run on a trial course is enough obstacle work for any dog. The most important aspect of obstacle work is the fact that your dog needs to drive the sheep away from you through the obstacle instead of towards you, as they naturally tend to want to do. To train for this you are best to work sheep through gates and in and out of holding pens at home.
- Cast and Pull. This is a very important part of sheepdog trialing. If you can't master this then you will never get anywhere! Don't expect a young inexperienced dog to do this straight away, as it takes some time to teach. To begin with you need to sit your dog down in the paddock and then walk  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way up to six quiet sheep. Then cast your dog and insure that he goes behind the sheep and doesn't over run. Always stop him behind the sheep at 12 O Clock to you. Gradually increase the length of the cast and shorten the distance that you walk toward the sheep at the beginning. Persistence will pay off.

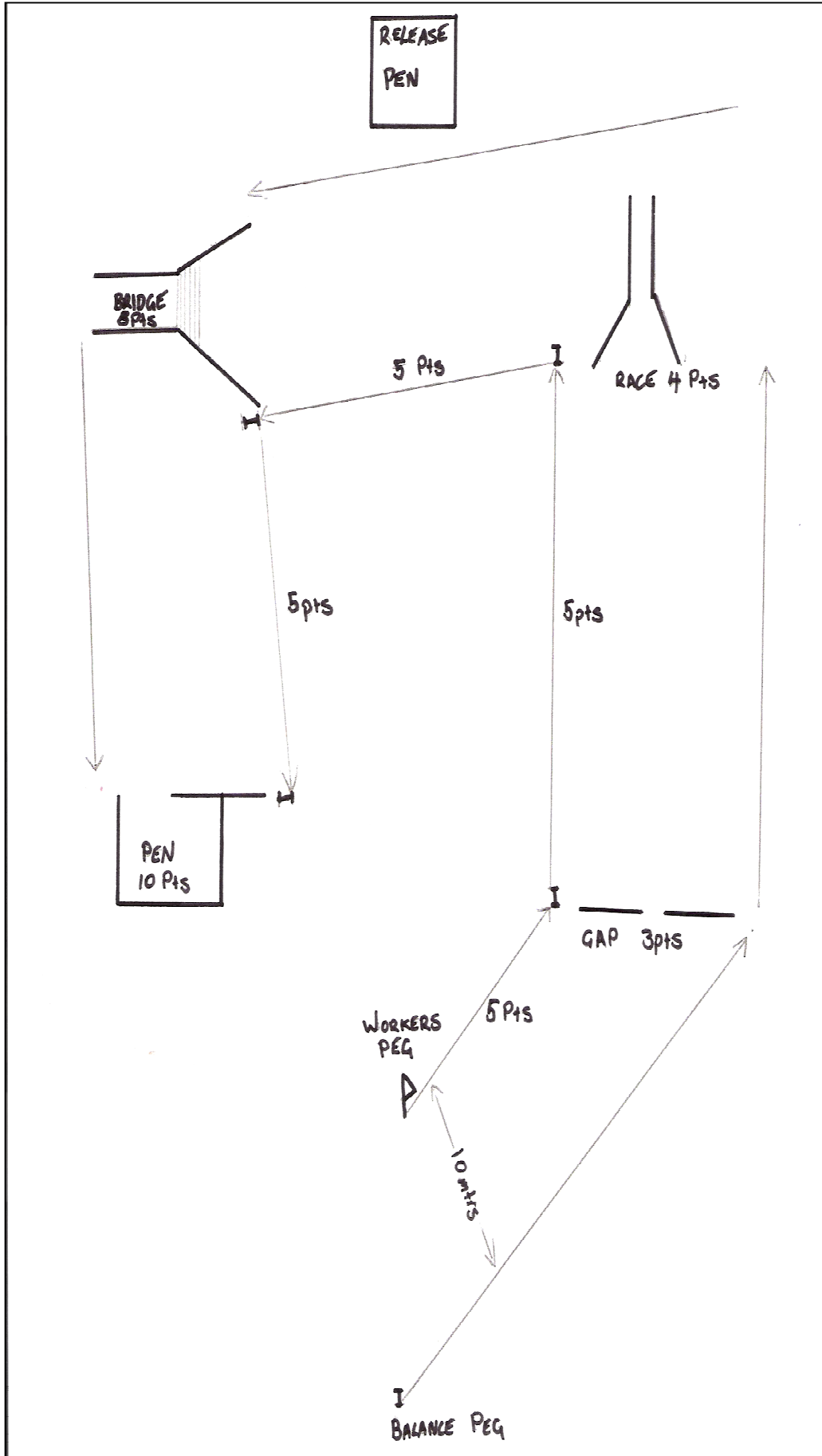
- General Obedience is extremely important. You need to teach you dog to come to you on command to sit and stay when required and normal social skills. The introduction to sheep work is much easier with an obedient dog.
- Apart from the above-mentioned general training that you would do with all trial dogs, there may be certain areas that you need to concentrate on depending on the type of dog that you have and any faults or tendencies he may have. It is important to seek the advice of an experienced handler when confronted with problems in your dog to be given the best advice on how to fix the fault through smart training.

## 6. What will it all cost?

Like all sports there are many expenses. In sheepdog trialing you need to buy a dog, feed him and travel to destinations all around Tasmania to compete.

- To purchase a Pup you should expect to pay around \$300 for a six week old.
- A started young dog under 12 months you should expect to pay around \$500 - \$1000
- For a fully trained young to medium aged dog you should expect to pay anywhere from \$500 - \$5000. (When available)
- Entry fees for most trials will be between \$5 and \$10 per dog.
- Cop Rice Working Dog Food is approximately \$29 for a 20kg Bag that is ideal for trial dogs as it is fully digestible and high in protein.





THE TASMANIAN WORKING SHEEP DOG  
ASSOCIATION INC.

**JUDGE'S SHEET**    *Date*    /    /

Name of Worker .....

Name of Dog .....

|                |            | Dog's<br>Score | POINTS LOST |
|----------------|------------|----------------|-------------|
| CAST           | 12         |                |             |
| APPROACH       | 5          |                |             |
| PULL           | 8          |                |             |
| GENERAL WORK   | 30         |                |             |
|                |            |                |             |
| PEG TO GATE    | 5          |                |             |
| GATE           | 3          |                |             |
| GATE TO RACE   | 5          |                |             |
| RACE           | 4          |                |             |
| RACE TO BRIDGE | 5          |                |             |
| BRIDGE         | 8          |                |             |
| BRIDGE TO PEN  | 5          |                |             |
| PEN            | 10         |                |             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>100</b> |                |             |

REMARKS

Judge's Signature .....

Steward's Signature .....