

## Weimaraners Rally: A Bridge to Obedience?

Recently I was at a performance event and overheard an exchange between two accomplished obedience competitors. They were in total agreement that the sport of rally was a terrible waste of time. In their opinion, rally was nothing more than a “giveaway” title, requiring little skill on the part of the dog or handler. Their conversation got me wondering about how rally fits into the whole scheme of AKC dog training activities. Is it a waste of time, or does rally provide for a need in the dog community? Are the required skills worthy of a titled, competitive activity? Let’s look at how the AKC defines rally for clues about its goals.

The AKC website describes rally as “the new dog sport that is taking the nation by storm, a successful steppingstone from the AKC Canine Good Citizen® program to the world of obedience or agility. Rally offers both the dogs and handlers an experience that is fun and energizing. Rally was designed with the traditional pet owner in mind, but it can still be very challenging for those who enjoy higher levels of competition.” It sounds as if rally is part of a methodical, step-by-step progression of dog training.

What about the statement that rally “is taking the nation by storm”? There may be some hyperbole in this choice of words, but there’s hard evidence that rally indeed accounts for a huge number of entries. The AKC’s statistics reveal almost 65,000 rally entries in 2011.

The AKC says rally “can still be very challenging for those who enjoy higher levels of competition,” and in fact at the Advanced and Excellent levels can approach the precision of obedience competition.

What a well-thought-out strategy: Introduce dog owners to the Canine Good Citizen test, progress to rally, and finally take the step to obedience. The AKC

should receive kudos for providing incrementally more demanding venues for dog training. It's like the old saying, "You must crawl before you can walk, and walk before you can run." From personal experience, I've seen people in the rally ring who would have been frightened away from competition if their debut had to be in obedience.

Rally, however, is less formal and therefore less intimidating. Titling at the Rally Novice level, while not necessarily a "piece of cake," seems to be an attainable goal for the average dog owner. We know that success builds confidence, so if people can train for rally, they just might be able to make the leap to the more exacting requirements of obedience competition.

To make the transition from rally to obedience even more seamless, in mid- 2012 the AKC added the optional titling Obedience class of Beginner Novice. This class is a popular bridge between the worlds of rally and obedience. To continue this trend of providing incrementally more challenging classes, in July 2013 more new optional titling classes will be available: the Pre- Novice class, Pre-Open class, and Pre- Utility class.

So, how do Weimaraner owners feel about rally? Has it helped you train your dog for other activities? Do you see rally as a worthwhile canine activity? Do you feel the sport is beneficial to our breed? I'd like to share your opinions on rally in a future column. Let me know about your experiences.

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