

Crufts 2022 – Inter-Regional Rally Competition Report

I was honoured and delighted to Judge the Inter-Regional Rally Competition at Crufts 2022. Generally, the standard of the competitors was very high though there were some signs that the scarcity of competitions over the last couple of years has told. Also, a number of teams had competitors drop out due to Covid or other reasons meaning that many people were competing one or even two levels above their current qualification. Nonetheless, they mostly managed very well.

The variety of breeds competing also speaks for the diversity you find in Rally with dogs as varied in size as a Chihuahua cross and a Bernese Mountain Dog as well as three terrier breeds giving good performances in Level 6. There were also several dogs that had been rescued from various situations. It speaks to the commitment to training of the handlers and the bond that Rally helps build up that they performed very well.

The event ran very smoothly. We managed to push through the levels with time to spare despite quite tight timing. I have to congratulate the Team Captains for ensuring their competitors were present and ready to enter the ring at the appropriate times. Running the Obreedience during the lunchtime break worked well too and I have to thank them too for getting through their order well inside their allotted time and for leaving the ring in good condition for Level 5 and 6 to continue.

The smooth running of the Rally competition was of course down to the hard work and professionalism of my ring party – Martin Robinson for greeting and getting the competitors into the collecting ring and ready to work and Alison Davidson for bringing them out and arranging transfer of the scribe sheets. John Wykes and Leanne Ward very efficiently and precisely laid the courses at every change over. My walkaround around was only necessary to check that everything was laid as it should be, and it invariably was. Kates Wykes was a great scribe steering me out of the way of the competitors when necessary. Credit to her and Claire Price who was able to interpret my decisions. The final member of the team was John Davidson, who was the timekeeper. We didn't have a single stopwatch error and we did need the timings to decide a couple of the levels. I should also mention Berit Aherne who was intended to be part of the party but, unfortunately, tested positive for COVID a few days before and wasn't able to come which disappointed her greatly. I know we managed without you Berit, but you would still have been a big help on the day.

Finally, I'd like to thank Richard Kebble, the Chief Steward of the event for looking after us so well and Rachel Bradley for keeping us all in order and helping us keep to the timetable.

Now a rundown of the levels.

Level 1

Ceri Wall and Betty, her crossbreed, opened the competition for Wales. Betty is a lovely happy dog and performed well, but unfortunately found rather too many tantalizing smells.

She was followed by Denise Budd and Sage, her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel for the South and Southwest team. Sage is another happy dog, but she seemed rather distracted which led to some tight leads but managed a good bonus at the end.

Betty Straw then went with Lacey, her Sheltie, representing the South East and East Anglia. They had a good round but with Lacey needing a few too many additional cues to keep her on track, but she did a cracking call front forward.

Diane Hodgett followed for Northern Ireland and Isle of Man with Yum Yum (I love the name), her Shih Tzu. They worked nicely, but with some additional cues and the occasional tight lead which is always a risk with a small dog.

Katie Bloor and Squid, her crossbreed got the best score in this level for the Midlands. Katie and Squid worked very nicely with some excellent attention and some smart turns, well done.

Maureen Taylor and Basher, her crossbreed came next for Scotland. It was an excellent round with nice call fronts, just spoiled a little bit by a spell of over enthusiastic jumping on the sit RT forward, but at least he was enjoying himself!

Fran Mitchell and Yogi Bear, her Labrador, finished up Level 1 for the North. It was another excellent score and started brilliantly with the first seven signs pretty much perfect, but then a few errors crept in, but still a very good round overall.

Level 2

Kahla Delahay and Trevor, her Staffordshire Bull Terrier opened for Wales. Trevor needs some work on his left turns, but I know he's come a long way and otherwise worked really well.

Terri Mellow and Tank, her Papillon followed for the South and Southwest. Good round with some very nice work.

Next, we had Loraine Gardner with Lily, her Pembroke Corgi for the Southeast and East Anglia team. Lily is lovely eager dog with great attention and that tail didn't stop wagging the whole time. It was a really good round apart from a couple of failures to sit/stand which were expensive.

Diane Jones followed Loraine with Lola, her working Cocker Spaniel for Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. She had a generally good round but with a few too many lacks of attention – I think Lola thought she recognised someone in the crowd.

Glenis Charles and Gamble, her Golden Retriever, followed for the Midlands. It was shame about the sit-stand but otherwise an excellent round.

Vycki Brock came next with Vinnie, her German Spitz (Mittel). This is not a breed I've seen competing before, but a lovely enthusiastic dog. Vinnie did pretty much everything he was asked to, but you just need to make sure you keep him a bit closer to you and give him time to change positions.

Wendy Rolfe and Molli, her Cocker Spaniel, went for the North with a really good round with very little to mark. They got the best score in Level 2, well done!

Level 3

Chrissy Harrison and Sky, her crossbreed opened for the Wales team. Chrissy and Sky provided a very smart, crisp round. They had the equal top score in L3 and the best time.

Sandra Smith and Billy, her Pug cross followed for the South and Southwest team. Billy had a bout of 'backwards sneezing' before the start which probably didn't help him be very engaged, so well-done to Sandra to get him round so well. There was some very good work in there and a nice bonus.

Next we had Sonya Wright and Eddie, her Chihuahua Jack Russell cross for the Southeast and East Anglia team. It was a great round and Eddie certainly got the crowd going. They had equal top score in L3 but sadly lost out on top spot on time.

Nikki Golding and Alfie, her Border Collie for Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. Alfie generally worked nicely but some exercises weren't undertaken correctly which was a bit expensive.

Next came Lizzie Lang and Yogi, her crossbreed for the Midlands. Yogi is a lovely enthusiastic dog. His enthusiasm got him in the wrong place sometimes, but well done, it wasn't a bad performance at all.

Lorraine Murtagh and Inca, her Springer Spaniel, were the L3 competitor for Scotland. Inca worked really well apart from a few lapses of attention particularly on the spiral, but Lorraine did a good job getting her attention back.

Abbie Spink and Buddy, her Staffordshire Bull Terrier, rounded off Level 3 for the Northern team. They generally had a really nice round with good handling by Abbie. Buddy worked really well. The faults were few but, unfortunately, expensive.

Level 4

First, we had Nerys Thomas and Mina, her Welsh Sheep Dog, for Wales. Mina generally had a really good round. It was just a shame about the bonus.

Mary Cocking and Freya, her Siberian Husky, followed for the South and Southwest team. Freya was a little distracted, but despite this, worked well, though you need to work on that bonus.

David Moxon and Boo Boo, his Border Collie came next for the Southeast and East Anglia. Some good work and you got the bonus, but just make sure you get the signs right (moving sidestep).

Up for Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, we had Louise Boomer and Charlie, her Collie Cross. Charlie worked well with gusto, though it's a shame he seemed to spot someone in the audience he knew, but well done for staying calm and getting him back.

Next we had Briar Dunn and Bramble, his Golden Retriever, for the Midlands team. There was super work from you both and Bramble gave great attention. They got the best score in L4.

Sharon Dean and Gus, her Labrador, followed for Scotland. Gus initially found lots of appealing smells especially around the distractions but, once he got going, he worked nicely.

Rounding up L4 for the North we had Barbara Whittaker and Leroy, her Border Collie. Leroy is a lovely steady dog with great attention. There was plenty of good handling, but just make sure you get your signs right. Good performance overall.

Level 5

Opening for Wales we had Rachel Marshall and Merlin, her Bernese Mountain Dog. It wasn't the best start, I'm so sorry! I do feel for you and I would have loved to have seen the largest dog we had work.

Then we had Jean Young and Susie, her Westie, for the South and Southwest team. It was a good attempt but, unfortunately, Susie wasn't very well engaged on the day.

Christine Dunning and Flora, her Sheltie, went next for the Southeast and East Anglia. They had an excellent round with very few errors. Flora is a lovely willing dog. You were equal top on points, but unfortunately lost out on time.

For Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, we had Mandy Quay and Tweed, her Crossbreed. They had a really good round. It was a shame about the bonus – you did the hard one (with the stand) perfectly, it's just a shame it wasn't the right one.

Katie Lynn and Hocus, her Working Sheepdog, followed for the Midlands. They had an excellent round, and didn't he think he was a good boy when he finished (he was!).

Amy Jackson and Duke, her Crossbreed, came next for Scotland. Duke is a nice happy dog and they had a generally a good round. It's a shame he moved on the bonus, but a good effort.

The last competitor in L5 was Sara Davies and Lexi, her German Shepherd, for the North. They had good round with scarcely much to mark apart from a couple of lacks of attention. They got equal top score and the best time. Well done!

Level 6

Katie Girdler and Eli, her Working Sheepdog, started Level 6 for Wales. They had an excellent round with Eli giving great attention. They had equal best score and the best time in L6.

Next we had Anne Uglow and Ziggy, her Border Collie, for the South and Southwest team. Ziggy is a nice, happy dog and had a generally good round apart from a few OPs, Well Done!

Frances Killeen and Keena, her Crossbreed (lurcher), competed next for the Southeast and East Anglia. It's lovely to see a sighthound doing Rally. It was a shame she seemed to be a bit distracted by the noise, but she did a beautiful bonus.

Then came Liz Gibbon and Breeshey, her Cairn Terrier, for Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. There was lovely precise working from both dog and handler except, maybe, on the 270 Left. It's great to see a terrier working at the highest level – that's the beauty of Rally

Jo Syson and Merlin, her Border Terrier, followed for the Midlands. They had good round with only a few little mistakes and a good bonus. Nice to see another terrier in L6.

For Scotland we had Sally Sanford and Lace, her Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever. Lace worked beautifully, though it was a shame about missing the jump. They had equal best score in L6 but lost out on time.

Our final competitor of the day was Patricia Preston and Gale, her Border Collie, going for the Northern team. They had a good round, with not a lot to mark apart the fail to sit at the jump. You were only one point off the leaders in L6, well done!

For those of you who like statistics

In the 42 dogs competing, we had dogs from 22 different breeds. The largest group was the crossbreeds. The largest pedigree group was the Border Collies.

We had 12 from the Pastoral Group, 9 from the Gundog Group, 5 from Terrier Group and 2 each from the Toy, Working and Utility Groups. Finally we had 10 Crossbreeds which, of course, spanned all sorts from Eddie, the Chihuahua/Jack Russell Cross through various Staffie and Collie crosses to Keena, the Lurcher.

I enjoyed my day in the spotlight and I hope all the competitors did too. Hopefully, we provided a good showcase for Rally. Judging by the comments on the YouTube channel people were impressed by the training and skill of both handlers and dogs. Well done to all that were involved!