

# PBGVs Invade the Agility Invitational!

**N**one of the PBGV contingent expected to win against the world-champion agility dogs at the 2010 Eukanuba American Kennel Club Agility Invitational, but it was sure fun trying. The excitement of running with the “big dogs” in front of hundreds of spectators is something that I will never forget.

Agility is the fastest-growing canine sport. Dogs run a challenging course of approximately 15 to 20 obstacles with their handler. There are two types of courses: Jumpers and Standard. Jumpers consists of jumps, tunnels and weave poles. Standard also includes an A-frame, dog walk and teeter-totter.

There were three handlers competing with PBGVs at the Invitationals this year: Jacqui O’Neill and MACH2 Dehra Picador CD RN OF (Gy), Megan Esherick and MACH Clancy’s Capsaicin Rush VCD1 RAE NF PCSH (Chili) and me, handling Wufwires French Cognac AX AXJ RE NF (Marcel.)

The top five agility dogs of the 167 recognized breeds in the United States are invited to compete in this prestigious event. This competition is also open to international agility competitors. To be eligible, dogs need to have qualifying runs in the AKC Excellent B level, which is the highest competitive level, and to have achieved at least one point at that level. Because PBGVs are a non-traditional breed doing agility, it gives them a chance to compete against the more traditional Border collies, Labrador retrievers, Shetland sheepdogs and Australian shepherds, breeds that normally



*Juliet Franzen and Marcel, Jacqui O’Neill and Gy, and Megan Esherick and Chili show off the ribbons won at the 2010 Eukanuba AKC Agility Invitational.*

dominate the National Agility Championships. In fact, it is very difficult for the more traditional breeds to be eligible for the Invitational because there are so many competing for the top five spots. Furthermore, only one dog of every breed becomes eligible to run in the finals, which gives the non-traditional dogs more opportunities to qualify.

There were 470 competitors from 40 states and one from Japan who came to Long Beach, Calif., to compete in the AKC’s Fifth Annual Agility Invitational. Out of the 470 dogs, 310 had their Masters Agility Championship (MACH) title, the highest level an agility dog can reach. Megan’s Chili has her MACH, and Jacqui’s Gy has his MACH 2 (achieving the MACH level requirements twice). Marcel had just recently reached the basic requirements to compete at the Invitationals and actually placed as the No. 6 PBGV agility dog. He had missed the first six months of the

qualifying period due to a broken foot. Because not all the dogs invited actually went, he was given the opportunity to go since he was the next eligible dog.

With all these very skilled athletes, it was intimidating to think of entering Marcel, who had a history of sometimes running well and sometimes entertaining the crowd. The first two years we entered agility competitions, my goal was for Marcel to stay in the ring and not run out halfway through. To even imagine we would have the opportunity to compete at the Invitational was beyond my wildest dreams. To say I was nervous was a gross understatement. But since



*From left: Megan Esherick with Chili; high-scoring PBGV Gy with his ribbons and medal; Jacqui O'Neill and Gy.*

we lived just a four-hour drive north of Long Beach, we decided we would take the plunge and actually enter the event. Both Megan and Jacqui had to fly across the United States with their dogs. This was the third trip to the Invitationals for Jacqui and Gy, although they have been invited every year. Megan has gone twice with Tigger, Chili's mother, and this was Chili's second time at the event.

My husband Robert, Marcel and I arrived Thursday at the Weston Hotel, the official hotel for the agility and obedience events. It was full of all different breeds of dogs, which was a fun experience in itself. Robert ran into the manager of the hotel in the elevator and she welcomed him to the Weston. She told him they had a staff meeting to remind everyone to treat the dogs with courtesy because, "Dogs are our guests; the people with them are only here because the dogs are here." How many hotels have that attitude regarding their canine guests? We settled into our room for the night dreaming of the agility competition that would start with a practice event on Friday.

Friday we met at the agility area, checked in and set up our dog crates. Marcel and Chili were crated next to each other, so Robert and I got a chance to meet up with Megan and her husband Dave as we set up. Megan told me why she liked to attend. "The invitational is one of my favorite events because it's a celebration of agility as an all-breed sport. Most people think of a few select breeds as being 'right' for agility, but I love to see really good dogs of less typical breeds, like bulldogs and great Danes. I suppose some would include our PBGVs as non-typical also. All of the dogs invited have earned qualifying scores at the highest level of AKC agility or they would not have been invited."

We had the opportunity to do a practice run to get our dogs (and us) acclimatized to the large arena with all the noise and excitement caused by more than 400 dogs. Even this was nerve-wracking to me, there for the first time, but I got through it and felt calmer after our run.

Saturday was the first day of the official runs. We did a Standard run first (jumps, teeter, A-frame, dog walk, weave poles and tunnels, minus a table to save time). All three PBGVs qualified in the first run of the day with a score of 100, which was a wonderful way to start. Scoring is slightly different than a regular AKC trial as 100 is the qualifying score. Five points are deducted for a knocked bar, refusal or wrong way. If a dog comes in over the time limit, three points are deducted for each second over. If you fail to correct your mistake (i.e. do not complete the course in the correct order), you receive a score of zero.

The second run on Saturday was Jumpers. Only Jacqui and Gy qualified with a score of 100. Marcel and I came in

with a score of 94 and Megan and Chili got 85. Marcel and Chili were just a little over the time limit, but otherwise clean.

Sunday started with a Jumpers run. Jacqui and Gy again came in with a qualifying score of 100. Marcel and I got 95 because his foot hit the broad jump (which we rarely see at AKC trials), and Megan and Chili got 94 for being two seconds over time. The last run was what they called a Hybrid run. It was mostly jumps, but with two obstacles: an A-frame and a teeter. Chili qualified with a score of 100. Gy knocked a bar for a score of 95, and Marcel got the lowest score of 53 because I sent him over the wrong jump after forgetting to do a front cross (a turn signifying a change of direction) and it went downhill from there. Yes, if Marcel had a better partner, he would have scored higher — but I don't think he cared!

In the 12-inch category with 83 dogs competing, Jacqui and Gy came in at No. 30, Megan and Chili were No. 53 and Marcel and I were No. 64. We were all delighted with the performance of our dogs. Marcel ran well for me without stopping to sniff or check out the ring crew — my worst fear!

Megan had this to say about Chili's performance: "Chili is an extremely soft dog, so the crowds and noise of this type of venue are not her favorite, but I was really happy with how she handled the weekend. We had some time faults on the Jumpers runs, but ran all four courses clean, which I was proud of. It's good to know that Chili trusts me enough to feel that she can run in an environment like the Invitational."

Jacqui and Gy earned the beautiful PBGV medallion for being in first place in our breed, which is an amazing feat considering he is 11-and-one-half years old. He consistently runs well under the time limits and seems to have no intention of retiring anytime soon from the sport he loves.

Jacqui and Gy have come in first place for all three years they have come to the Invitationals. When asked about her experience at the Invitational, Jacqui said, "I love going to the big events with Gy because, in his mind, everyone is there just to see him. He gets wound up by the crowd, the cheering and all the activities that are going on. I wasn't sure how he would do this year because I have put him in Preferred for competition (which allows him to jump at 8 inches), but he had to do 12 inches at the Invitational since that's the height he qualified in. However, he had a stellar performance, and I was thrilled!"

All three PBGV teams did a great job competing at the Invitationals and, best of all, everyone had a wonderful time. There is no way to describe the feeling of electricity and excitement of running alongside of some of the best agility dogs in the nation. ■

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