

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the team managers, dog and handler partnerships and my ring party for coping so well with the significant changes to our sport that came into effect in January. There was a relatively short amount of time for everyone to adapt to these which added to the challenge, and excitement, of this year's Inter-Regional Rally Competition.

Secondly, I would like to thank the Kennel Club for the invitation, Richard Kebble for his guidance and support throughout, Sue Garner for being a link between myself and the teams, Our Dogs for their generous sponsorship of the competition, Flo Williams for supporting me with the presentations, and last, but in no means least, to my super ring party: Trudy Longhurst, Jo Stocks, Caroline Ward, Leanne Blades, Celia Carlill, Nikki Kirk, Claire Coughlan-Khan, John Khan and Gill Kebble. Gill stepped in at short notice due to an injury, thank you. All of you contributed to the huge success of this year's competition and it was lovely to see it being well supported: the encouragement from those watching around the ring certainly added to that special atmosphere that is Crufts.

I designed courses that I hoped would be of interest to both the audience and the competitors, whilst also enabling me to assess each team on exercises familiar to them and also some of the new exercises for 2019. Overall the teams coped very well with the Crufts atmosphere and handlers demonstrated positive relationships with their dogs. There were some superb, happy partnerships demonstrating their skills with some real 'wow!' moments.

Unlike an open rally trial the focus at Crufts is not upon achieving qualifying scores but upon achieving higher scores than the other dog/handler partnerships entered in the same level. This meant that adaptations were made to the standard scoring system and scoring criteria to enable teams to be placed in order of merit. Each dog/handler team gained points for their region based upon their placing within the level they were working. As we progressed through the day I had no idea how intense the competition for the overall winning region was! This reflects how close many of the teams were to each other and that there are strong dog/handler partnerships in all regions.

Overall Winners:

The overall winners were the Midlands, very competently lead by Julia Bodsworth and assisted by Helen Chetwynd and Karen Kendall. This team gained: 2x 1st, 2x 3rd, 1x 4th and 1x 5th.

Runners up were the North. I understand that their team leader, Julie Barrett, is retiring from her position after this year. What a wonderful retirement present your team produced for you. Julie was assisted by Sharon Dunn and Gail Holl. The team achieved: 1x 1st, 1x 2nd, 2x 3rd, 1x 4th and 1x 7th.

Level 1

The overall standard for this level was high with little to split the top five partnerships.

1st Chris Schwarz (Northern) with Summergreen Pumpkin Pie (Miniature Schnauzer). Bisley combined style, speed and accuracy with only minor losses of position to mark. Congratulations! (8 points)

2nd Mary Muxworthy (Wales) with Beverton Ted (Border Collie). Another accurate round with only time separating Ted from the 1st placed dog, Well Done! (6 points)

3rd Helen Williams (Midlands) with Accident Waiting To Happen (Crossbreed). Just one point between Splash and 1st. This dog demonstrated impressive body awareness as he manoeuvred around the course. Well Done! (5 points)

4th Suzanne Hall (South West) with Radically Blink (Small Munsterlander). Blink demonstrated good foundation skills that can be built upon as the team progress through the sport. A clear bonus, Well Done! (4 points)

Betty Straw (South East and East Anglia) with Dukeson I'm A Believer (Sheltland Sheepdog). Failure to sit and dipping on turns proved costly for this team. Ev'er has a well balanced heelwork position with little to mark on most exercises. Well Done! (3 points).

Chloe Powling (Scotland) with Jess Summertime Falls (English Springer Spaniel). Chloe's Sympathetic handling of Bella showed how much potential this team as. I hope they also enjoyed their experience in the YKC rally the following day.

Julienne Robinson (Northern Ireland) with Wee Man Bobby Magee (Crossbreed). What a character Bobby is! Julienne handled him superbly and it looked like they both thoroughly enjoyed their time in the big ring. Well Done! (1 point)

Level 2

Several of the dogs in this level experienced difficulty moving to the left, particularly on the "360 Degree Left (Turn)" exercise. However, all displayed stretches of flowing heelwork and there were some nice performances of the new exercise: "Sit - Send Around – Sit".

1st Katie Harvey (Wales) with Madgack Maple (Labrador Retriever). Katie set off at an incredible pace which helped to maintain Luna's attention. Most marks were lost on changes of direction, and a momentary stop during heelwork. Congratulations! (8 points).

2nd Janine Atkinson (Northern) with Tomszill Benita at Denlea (Polish Lowland Sheepdog). Janine and Breeze attacked the round with such determination, with Breeze getting stronger as the round progressed. One of the few partnerships who made use of the option to physically praise the dog at the end of a static exercise. Only time separated this team from 1st, Well Done! (6 points).

3rd Barbara Endersby (South East and East Anglia) with Lekoys Precious Peony (Rough Collie). A substitution to this team Phoebe put in a steady performance and held a fairly consistent heelwork position throughout. Only one mark separating this team from 1st. Well Done! (5 points)

4th Gloria Bonnell (Midlands) with Sandwick Centre Stage at Cinlock (Shetland Sheepdog). Dylan was well handled by Gloria who calmly encouraged him around the course. Well Done! (4 points).

Susan Wolf (South West) with Exmoor Dark Sky (English Springer Spaniel). Despite Ghillie struggling to fully concentrate on the task in hand this team still completed the round in a good time. Well Done! (3 points).

Lorraine Murtagh (Scotland) with Practically Perfect Inca (English Springer Spaniel). Lorraine's calm handling encouraged Inca around the course and kept her tail wagging, Well Done! (2 points)

Deborah Gooding (Northern Ireland) with Highhouse Red Fire (Labrador Retriever). I was thoroughly impressed by this handler. My heart went out to her when Bane struggled to cope with the atmosphere. Debbie kept calm and encouraged him around the course to ensure that she still collected a point for her team. Well Done!

Level 3

The overall standard in this class was good with all partnerships showing that they are capable of qualifying at this level at open trials. In general completion of the new "Down" exercise was good and partnerships negotiated the junction in the cone exercises neatly.

1st Sue Lang (Midlands) with Chelmarsh All The Way (Shetland Sheepdog). This partnership competed in this level last year and have made positive changes to their work over the last 12 months. Kete holds a super heelwork position and is neat and accurate in his work: just a couple of 'blips' to mark which resulted in the highest score of the competition. Congratulations! (8 points)

2nd Felicity Veazey (South West) with Janallan Bakari WDEx (Belgian Shepherd Dog (Groenendael)). Jet was unlucky to meet the winner today as he also put in a strong performance. He floated around the ring giving nothing to mark on the majority of exercises, Well Done! (6 points).

3rd Fran Mitchell (Northern) with Little Smokey (Crossbreed). Another strong performance at this level, this time from Smokey. Very impressive spatial awareness and neat work from this large dog with most marks being lost due to handler errors. Well Done! (5 points).

4th Sarah Maisey (South East and East Anglia) with Silken Bonnie Benji (Labrador Retriever). A steady round from this partnership ensured that Benji achieved a very respectable overall score. Well Done! (4 points).

Sally Sanford (Scotland) with Danehaven Midgell at Paludic (Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever). Zee Zee did well to concentrate in the big ring which was due to Sally's sympathetic handling. The bonus exercise, "Call Front - Back Up 3 steps" proved very costly for this team. Well Done! (3 points).

Ann Doubleday (Wales) with My Boy Wilson (German Shepherd Dog). Wilson is capable of producing nice work but it seemed that, unfortunately, he was affected by the atmosphere today. Well Done! (2 points)

Gareth Smyth (Northern Ireland) with Tippi May Hadron (Working Sheepdog). Gareth did well to try to contain Tippi's enthusiasm and to help him to focus on the task in hand. Another team for whom the bonus exercise was costly. Well Done! (1 point).

Level 4

Performance of the "Sit – Leave Dog – Down on Recall" and the bonus exercise: "Sit - Leave Dog - Turn – Stand", was variable in this class. As with the Level 3 class few handlers had the confidence to walk to the B sign on the "Sit - Leave dog - Call to heel whilst Moving" exercise before calling their dog. This was a shame, particularly as I had allowed over double the minimum distance to the next exercise sign. However, there was also some super work on display in this level.

1st Valerie Kelsey (South East and East Anglia) with Rooquis Typoni Maiden (Border Collie). A solid performance from this partnership with Valerie encouraging Tipi appropriately to ensure she completed exercises neatly. A clear bonus, Congratulations! (8 points)

2nd Debra Colling (South West) with As Beau (Working Sheepdog). Asbo held a consistent position for the majority of the round and responded quickly to Debra's cues. The down on recall exercise was the most costly exercise for this team today. Well Done! (6 points)

3rd Marie Miller (Midlands) with Stormlake's Jester (German Shepherd Dog). Marie did well to support Yogi to contain his excitement. The down on recall exercise and some minor loss of position accounted for the majority of points lost today. A textbook bonus from this team, meant they finished on the same score as 2nd, Well Done! (5 points)

4th Amanda Wark (Northern Ireland) with Smokin Joe Razor (Crossbreed). Amanda had a calm, relaxed handling style which suited Razor. The down on recall exercise was very costly for this team with them losing very little on other exercises. Following a nice "Sit – 90 Degree Pivot Left – Sit" exercise, Amanda was one of the few handlers who waited until she had reached the B sign of the "Sit - Leave dog - Call to Heel whilst Moving" exercise before calling her dog, Well Done! (4 points)

Mary Rayment (Wales) with Grizwold Lady of the Lake (German Spitz (Mittel)). Overall Krystal completed the course neatly. She was another who lost a lot of points on the down on recall exercise. Well Done! (3 points)

Karyn Thomson (Scotland) with Bailey Bongolight (Crossbreed). Bailey was determined to enjoy his time in the ring and I loved his enthusiasm. Karyn did well to contain his exuberance, however, this did cost him a lot of points. Another team who have shown huge progress since they represented their region in a lower level at this event last year and one of the few teams to achieve a clear down on recall exercise. Well Done! (2 points).

Denise Bryne (Northern) with Nanhoron Elsi Peabody (Welsh Collie). I really felt for this handler when there was a loss of momentum towards the end of the round. This honest dog had completed some very promising work and their overall mark was not far behind the other partnerships in this level. Well Done! (1 point)

Level 5

A complete course rebuild after lunch enabled a different pattern to be used. The new Level 3 "Loop Around Distractions" exercise was introduced at this level. Under one of the mesh covers was an empty Crufts dog bowl and under the second cover a fluffy toy in the shape of a West Highland White Terrier painted in the inter-regional team colours. As is often the case at this level the "Send Over Jump – Handler Runs By" exercise was costly for some partnerships with either the dog not taking the jump, or the handler crossing the running line. The "Moving Back Up" was also an exercise that dog/handler partnerships experienced difficulties with. Overall the linked exercises were completed neatly with some handlers choosing to remain where they were and others choosing to take the permitted pace forward between exercises. The stand exercises were also demonstrated to a good standard overall.

1st Amy Jackson (Scotland) with In A Minute Jess (Crossbreed). Amy's encouragement ensured that Jess maintained a happy bounce in her stride. A very good send over jump exercise and some nice pivot and stand work, partly due to Amy having spent time during the walk through considering the

optimal position for her to be in to complete each exercise. After the event I was advised that Jess will now be retired: what a way to end her rally career! Congratulations! (8 points)

2nd Adrian Dornford-Smith (Northern Ireland) with Int Ch & Ir Sh Ch FiveNinePlus Puntillitas Ir Jnr Ch, CJW'11, CW'16, AW(B) RL2.Ex (Spanish Water Dog). Stepping in at short notice Adrian and Lita are no strangers to the ring at Crufts. Adrian handled Lita sympathetically, encouraging her around the course, and ensuring that she remained happy and understood which behaviours he was asking of her. Another partnership who excel at the stand, walk around and retrieve exercises. Well Done! (6 points).

3rd Tracey Hall (Northern) with Krisusarn Fun and Games (Working Cocker Spaniel). A solid performance from this team. Zanta is a busy dog and Tracey worked hard to maintain her attention and to give her sufficient cues to complete the exercises. Once Zanta settled she produced some nice work and demonstrated super rear end awareness in her left turns and pivots. Well Done! (5 points).

4th Janet Auton (South West) with Mr Finny's Surprise (Labrador Retriever). Finn appeared slightly distracted by the atmosphere, but Janet's encouragement ensured that his tail kept wagging. Finn seemed to really enjoy the jump and down on recall exercises. The majority of points were lost due to Finn drifting out of position. Well Done! (4 points)

John Wykes (Midlands) with Dreaganta Red Rory of Tarnforce (Border Collie). As the round progressed Rory settled and became more consistent in both his position and in the completion of exercises. John was the only handler who chose the option of sitting his dog at heel before moving on from the "Stand - Leave Dog – Turn -Call to Heel" exercise: he did this nicely. Stepping over the running line on the jump proved to be a costly error for this team as they were only separated from 4th by time. Well Done! (3 points).

Shauna Booth (Wales) with Little Wizzard of Ashford (Working Sheepdog). Merlin seemed to struggle with the environment which was a shame. Shauna gave very clear cues which helped Merlin to show that he is capable of producing some nice work. One of the few teams to achieve a clear send over jump exercise. Well Done! (2 points).

David Moxon (South East and East Anglia) with Amberslade Kansas (Australian Shepherd). Yogi seemed overwhelmed by the environment. He showed glimpses of the excellent work that he is capable of but unfortunately, despite David's encouragement, he was unable to maintain this on the day. I really felt for both Shauna and David today. Well Done! (1 point).

Level 6

I included more new signs in Level 6 than in any other level and these partnerships did not disappoint. Some super performances with each partnership in this level having some real wow moments that could be enjoyed without the need to decide how to mark an error. Following the completion of the competition it became apparent to me that the results of the Level 6 rounds had the potential to alter the overall placings of the regional teams: well done to each of the handlers for holding their nerve under these circumstances. Congratulations: it certainly was very close between you all, with a couple of costly errors made by some partnerships significantly affecting their placing within this level.

1st Peta Braddock (Midlands) with Don't Touch The Tail (Border Collie). A steady and consistent round from this partnership with several clear exercises. Peta's encouragement ensured that Billie's tail wagged throughout and he was attentive to her cues. Take care to complete moving back up exercises properly. A lovely display of teamwork, Congratulations! (8 points)

2nd Sally Sanford (Scotland) with Erikachen Lasadoir at Paludic (Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever). Keen and flashy work from Lace and clear simultaneous physical and verbal cues from Sally put this partnership into a strong position with several clear exercises. Lace struggled with the "Moving Back Up" exercise but had sorted this out for the "Left Turn - Back Up" exercise. It was unfortunate that Lace spotted the mat being placed in the bonus exercise. Well Done! (6 points).

3rd Jenny Morris (South East and East Anglia) with Blackrobin Bob The Builder (Border Collie). Another beautiful display of teamwork from this partnership with some very neat work resulting in several clear exercises and careful back ups at heel. Be aware of additional body signals that you are giving as Bob appears to have a very sound understanding of the behaviours involved and I do not think that he needs them. Well Done! (5 points)

4th Janet Thickbroom (Northern) with Stillrockin Zumba (Working Sheepdog). Overall Zumba displayed beautiful heelwork and static positions. He generally combines speed with accuracy, particularly when changing between static positions. His performance of the new exercise "Down on the Move - Call to heel - Send around" was super. However, he occasionally hesitates, interrupting the flow of his heelwork, and more care needs to be taken during pace changes. It was a shame that he clipped the jump. Well Done! (4 points).

Yvonne Davies (Wales) with Cytas Aiming for the Top (Belgian Shepherd Malinois). Another partnership that put in a strong performance from Emma with several clear exercises. The new "Down on the Move - Recall to Heel - Send Around" exercise was costly for this partnership as was the handler starting the bonus exercise before the mat had been placed. Well Done! (3 points)

Marney Wells (South West) with Gnobulls Fire Cracker At Copyhold B-Ex RL6.Ex (Staffordshire Bull Terrier). There were some mouthwatering moments from Bodkin, such as his transitions between paces. However, the final score for this partnership reflects that, unfortunately, there were also some missed static positions. Well Done! (2 points)

Elizabeth Gibbon (Northern Ireland) with Auchencairn Mona Glen (Cairn Terrier). What a super dog Breeshey is. The jump sparked her interest and following that exercise she produced some lovely work. Only time separated her from the above team Well Done! (1 point).

Judge: Becky Collier