

Course Design - Part Two

Level 1 A level 1 course may be the most basic course in Rally, but it still requires careful thought and consideration. A minimum of 10 and a maximum of 12 exercises, with no more than 6 static positions.

This is usually going to be in a ring 10 X 10m or an 8 X 12m, occasionally the ring will be larger depending on space. In general, indoor venues will offer smaller rings as space is limited.

It is most helpful if show secretaries can let you have a detailed plan of the layout of rings; their size and the location of entrances. Quite important if you want to include the serpentine and/or the figure 8 as the length used by the cones required is 4.5m, minimum. That leaves a mere 3.5m to play with if the width is 8m or 5.5m on a 10m width. If we take the former, it doesn't allow enough space to have much more than the serpentine and a turn. So potentially, a starting exercise or a finishing exercise, unless we pop it along the longer side, where we could comfortably put it in between 2 turns.

If we want to use both the serpentine and the figure 8 then we need 2 sets of cones and therefore more space. Food for thought - at this level I would suggest using just one of these exercises, but the choice is yours. The important thing to remember is if you have to follow it with a turn, it is best to avoid an about turn (exercises 7 & 8), as you can't reuse the cones. As turns should be accurate, and within an approximate diameter of 18 inches (S regs (B) 1 e), you shouldn't be placing your next line of exercises from an about turn less than 2 metres over but parallel to the previous line. My preference in this instance would be for 2 left or right turn exercises.

In total there are 22 exercises to choose from, of which 9 are turning exercises, of these 8 are directional turning exercises, and I include exercise 21 (Figure 8) as such. Exercise 10 (360 Right) is a turning exercise but not directional

Currently, 10 exercises have one or more static positions, of which 2 are turns (exercises 19 & 20). Five of these exercises have only one static position (exercises 1, 11, 12, 19 & 20); 4 have two static positions (exercises 2, 3, 13 & 14), which leaves one exercise (4) with 3 static positions. Guess which exercise is probably used the least.

Exercises that are frequently used are 15, 16 & 18, and as a consequence exercise 17 is often used. Now, if you, as a judge, are going to use exercise 18, the moving side step right, at least make sure you stand in a position to see the handler track over. They should not have to do a big mega side step so that you can see it, as a competitor was told earlier this year. A step is a step, and as long as the handler moves diagonally over with that first step with their right leg, their left will have to follow. Executed well it is poetry in motion, and hardly noticeable. More importantly, it is the position on the course and the exercise sign itself that can cause a problem, particularly if it follows an about turn, as the exercise sign can impede getting to the turn in the first place. Try designing a course of just 10 exercises with no more than 2 static positions, not using exercises 15, 16 & 18. It can be done!

The guide line is to start the course with a moving exercise, but this is the choice of the Judge. I am sure that there are plenty of handlers and dogs that would prefer to start with a static exercise, as it gives the handler an opportunity to engage with the dog. If you think about it, the first things we teach our dogs are static positions, unless we are an avid 'breed-shower', who doesn't like their dog to sit. So, lets experiment a bit and mix it up and observe.