

Looking for Activities to Try With Your Golden??

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As a multi-purpose breed, goldens really can do it all. Here's a small taste of some of the many activities you can try and a few suggestions for places you can go to watch the events or to find more information.

Obedience

Obedience training is necessary for all dogs and is beneficial to your entire family. Many golden owners choose to take obedience training with their dog to a whole new level by competing in obedience trials and earning obedience competition titles. The Canadian Kennel Club offers obedience trials and awards titles at several levels. The majority of the titles are awarded by gaining three qualifying scores at each level before progressing to the next. At the Master and Grand Master Obedience Trial Champion levels, points must be accumulated in both the Open and Utility rings.

While some people choose to start their dogs at the Pre-Novice level, all teams must begin at Novice (Companion Dog - CD). Dog and handler work both on-leash and off-leash for heeling, do a figure 8 around two people, allow the judge to examine the dog while the dog remains standing still, do a recall across the ring and finally demonstrate they can stay in a sit and a down across the ring from their owners.

The next level is Open (Companion Dog Excellent - CDX) where all exercises are performed with the dog off-leash. In addition to heeling, dogs retrieve a dumbbell once on the flat and once over a jump, drop on command on the recall, and perform the sit and down while the owner is out of the room or out of sight.

The last level is Utility (Utility Dog - UD). Again, all exercises are performed with the dog off-leash. At this level, the dog performs more complex tasks such as retrieving a dropped glove, selecting scented articles, crossing the ring to sit and face the handler to take jumps as directed and performing a signal exercise where everything is performed on signal only with no verbal commands allowed.

Following completion of the UD (Obedience Trial Champion) teams can go on to pursue the titles of Obedience Trial Champion Excellent, Master Obedience Trial Champion, and Grand Master Obedience Trial Champion.

Other, non-required, transitional levels are also available. They are Pre-Novice mentioned earlier and Novice Intermediate, which is a step between Novice and Open.

A new type of obedience, Rally, is now official and is tons of fun for both handlers and dogs. Rally is quite a bit more informal than regular obedience and handlers can talk to their dogs throughout the routine. It's a wonderful venue for both new dogs and new their trainers.

Agility

Agility is a dog sport in which a handler directs a dog through an obstacle course in a race for both time and accuracy. There are many organizations that offer agility titles for dogs. Even so, many people train their dogs in agility just for the enjoyment of developing teamwork with their dogs and the sheer fun of agility. Dog agility is a fun and exciting sport for both dogs and

people. It emphasizes teamwork where the handler directs the dog through tasks of climbing, jumping, and going over, under, around, and through various obstacles. In addition to giving the dog a better sense of balance, teaching him to be aware of where his body is and building confidence, agility keeps the dog physically fit.

Dog agility can be done for several reasons, including: fun, fitness, recreation, exhibition, or competition. In addition, it has also been used as a behaviour modification tool for a shy or timid dog in that it builds confidence and can eliminate shyness or fear of the unknown.

Agility is enjoyed by people of all ages and all kinds of dogs. Many clubs and organizations allow mixed-breed as well as pure-bred dogs, many also have junior handler programs as well as programs for senior handlers and veteran dogs. In Canada, agility is one of the fastest growing dog sports in the country.

At an agility trial, the courses are designed by the judges and the competitors only see the course on the day of the event. They are given a "walk-through" period before the event to learn the course and plan their strategy. Faults may be incurred for incorrect performance or taking obstacles out of order as well as for taking longer than the allowed time. Some obstacles your dog learns to navigate include the A-Frame, Teeter-totter, Open Tunnel, Collapsed Tunnel, Tire, Weave Poles, Pause Table, Dog Walk and various types of Jumps. Obstacles like the Aframe and Teeter-totter have "contact zones" at the beginning and the end where the dog is required to touch at least one paw (on the up, down or both depending on the organization) while on that obstacle.

In competition the dog does not usually wear a collar and the owner is not allowed to touch the dog or use food or toys as motivators, but the handler can talk or coax the dog through the course. The dog is not allowed to pass an obstacle he is supposed to go on and he is not allowed to go on any obstacle out of sequence, or he will loose points or be given a non-disqualifying score.

Field Competitions

Goldens can compete with other retriever breeds in all three areas of the Canadian Kennel Club field competitions: Working Certificates, Hunt Tests and Field Trials. In the Working Certificate and Hunt Test programs the dogs are competing against standard requirements, and providing that the dog completes the test successfully, the dog can pass the test. However, Field Trials are different. They are true competitions in the sense that dogs are scored according to their performance on each of the elements of the trial and the highest scoring, or "best dogs of the day," are placed in a first, second and third placement.

Working Certificate Program

The CKC Working Certificate Program is divided into three levels. Only one pass at each level is necessary to achieve the title. To pass the first level, Working Certificate (WC), a dog must retrieve two birds on land and two birds on the water. These are singles - only one bird is thrown at a time before the dog is sent to retrieve it. The marks are short, less than 75 yards on land in light cover and 25 to 40 yards on the water. Dogs can be restrained at the line. The WC is an instinct test and is well within the capabilities of most Goldens. Delivery to hand is not required at this level but the birds must be brought back close to the handler.

The Working Certificate Intermediate (WCI) is comprised of a land double (two birds are thrown

before the dog is sent, the dog must remember where both birds land and deliver the first one back to the handler before retrieving the second) in cover of about 75 yards in length. The dogs are off leash at all times and may not be physically restrained by the handler.

The dog must also complete an honour on land, which means that the dog must sit quietly and watch another dog retrieve. This is the downfall of many Golden Retrievers who feel that all retrieves should be theirs. Dogs who complete the land part successfully then do a double water retrieve of 40 to 50 yards in length.

The Working Certificate Excellent (WCX) is the highest title in this program. It is comprised of a land double, 50 to 100 yards in length, and a walk-up honour where the honouring dog accompanies the working dog on a short off-leash walk to a pre-determined spot before the first bird is thrown. In addition to the first two birds thrown, there are two blinds - one on land and one in the water of 50 yards in length. A blind is to simulate a hunting situation where a bird comes down that the dog did not see. The dog must go in the direction the handler sends him, stop on a whistle and change direction at the handler's command. The dog is not to just run out and hunt all over the field but must show control and obedience to the handler's instructions. There is also a water double of similar length to the WCI.

Hunt Test Program

The CKC Hunt Test program has three levels, Junior Hunter (JH) which requires three passes, Senior Hunter (SH) which requires four or five passes and Master Hunter (MH) which requires five or six passes. The lower number of passes is sufficient if the dog has the previous title (i.e., a JH would count as an SH leg and require only four passes at the SH level to title). The hunt tests are much more challenging than the Working Certificate program.

In Junior Hunter the dog must retrieve four single marks, two on land and two on the water. The dogs may be gently restrained and all birds must be delivered to hand. Marks are approximately 75 yards in length.

The Senior Hunter test is comprised of a land double, a water double, two blinds, one on land and one in the water, and a quartering test to find birds down in the field. Distances are usually in the 100 to 125 yard length. Dogs must be steady at all times.

Finally, the Master Hunter is comprised of a land and water triple, a land blind a water blind and a quarter to flush test. Distances are again 100 to 125 yards in length.

Hunt tests are much more complicated than the Working Certificate program. Cover is usually higher, the gunners are hidden and changes in terrain are used frequently. Tests are set up to more accurately simulate actual hunting conditions and shots are often fired from the line, not from the bird thrower in the field. Dogs are often run from a boat, duck calls are used and handlers must be in camouflage or dark clothing. These tests are a lot of fun. Handlers may be asked to sneak up hills or through cover carrying a gun with the dog crawling beside them (or in some cases, if they are out of control, running ahead of them). Decoys are used extensively and the tests are limited only by the judges' imagination.

Tracking

Tracking is a sport that any dog can do, but Golden Retrievers, and indeed most Sporting breeds, excel at

this sport due to their ability to find downed birds in all kinds of cover, usually by using their noses. Tracking is a great sport for young puppies who aren't ready for the rigours of competition but still need an outlet for their great intelligence. Puppies as young as four months easily catch on to "find it" and it's a great confidence builder for both dog and handler as the dog learns to do something on its own and the handler truly learns the meaning of the words "trust your dog."

There is no one-on-one competition involved, only a pass or fail, so there is little to no pressure during a tracking test (other than the pressure you put on yourself). The tracking fraternity is a small one, and all the other competitors are out there rooting for you and your dog.

A CKC Tracking Dog Test (TD) tests dog and handler over a 400-500 metre track which has been laid by a stranger to the dog. This track has a minimum of two turns and one glove laid at the end of the track. The track is no less than one half hour old and no older than two hours.

The TDX test is over a 900-1000 metre track which is at least three hours old, has a minimum of five turns and three articles. To make things even more difficult the track is crossed in two places by a second person. The dog is not to take these "cross-tracks." In case you were wondering, neither dog or handler is allowed to watch the track being laid...talk about "flying blind!"

Urban Tracking Tests, where the dog must follow a track in an urban environment, are also offered by the CKC.

As you can see, there are tons of activities that you can play in with your golden. Why not check a few of them out?