What You Need To Know Before Your First NADAC Trial

Part I: Steps to Take Before Your First Trial

First off, welcome to the North American Dog Agility Council, or NADAC! At NADAC, our mission is to welcome handler and dog teams from all backgrounds, breeds, and skill levels. The atmosphere at a NADAC trial is welcoming and encouraging so that every team can achieve their individual goals. Are you competitive with aspirations of going to Championships? Or do you simply want to play with your dog while hanging out with like-minded dog friends?

Let's get you started on your NADAC journey by getting ready for your first agility trial!

How To Register Your Dog

Healthy adult dogs who have been trained to reliably respond to commands and perform safely on the equipment are ready to compete at their first trial. The first step to preparing for your first NADAC trial is to register your dog. You cannot run your dog at a NADAC agility trial without registering them via the NADAC website.

Luckily, they make it easy with a simple form that also allows you to make your $25 payment. You will be asked for your dog's full name, call name, birthday, and breed. Once you have completed this form and paid the fee, you will shortly receive a registration number. This number will help keep track of your dog and their points in the NADAC Portal (We will go into more detail on the Portal in the next article!)

What's In A Name?

A full name is typically the one listed on your dog's official paperwork, like those issued by the American Kennel Club (AKC). However, NADAC doesn't require your dog to be registered with the AKC or any other kennel club to play agility. You can have fun choosing a registered name—it can be as simple or as creative as you'd like! The call name, on the other hand, is the name you use for your dog during everyday life and training.

Similarly, you don't need to know your dog's exact birthdate or breed to participate. Most of my dogs are rescues, so I've had to estimate their birthdays and list their breed as "All American." (or All Canadian for those in Canada)

How To Measure Your Dog

While registering your dog, you will also need to know the height at their withers (the highest point at the shoulders). You can check out the NADAC Rulebook for more information on measuring

Your dog's height will determine what their jump height will be. We will discuss jump heights in greater detail later.

Find Your First Trial!

Once your dog is over 15 months old and you have received their registration number, you are ready to attend your first trial. Head over to the NADAC calendar to find your nearest trial! Included in the trial information, you will see the date, club name, judge name, show contact, run order, and a link for the premium. Handlers need to complete the premium before sending it to the trial secretary. Most of the premium is pretty straightforward; however, there are some trickier bits that could throw off someone new to agility.

Below is a sample premium that includes the name of the agility club, trial address, and who to pay. You will need to fill out some personal information about you and your dog (including their new registration number), plus choose their classes and level (intro, novice, open, or elite). Pricing is per run, so total up the classes you want to enter and use the cost per run listed at the bottom of the premium to determine your weekend entry fee. We'll explain the details of the premium, like jump height, category, levels, and division, later in the article. Depending on the club, most premiums can be mailed or emailed to the secretary!

{{Trial Name}}, {{Trial Date}}, {{Trial Location}}

Make Checks Payable to: {{Check payee}}

Send entries to: {{Address for checks}}

Owner	Dog
Name	**Call Name**
Address	**NADAC Reg #**
City/State/Zip	**Date of Birth**
Phone	**Height at Withers**
Email	**Breed**
Handler, If not owner	**Permanent Height Card on file with NADAC?** Yes ☐ No ☐
Emergency Contact Name/Phone	

CATEGORY: PROFICIENT ☐ SKILLED ☐

DIVISION: STANDARD ☐ VET DOG ☐ VET HANDLER ☐ JUNIOR HANDLER ☐

I WANT MY DOG TO JUMP: ☐ 4 ☐ 8 ☐ 12 ☐ 16 ☐ 20

Class	Level				Day		
	Intro	Novice	Open	Elite	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Regular	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐
Chances	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐
Jumpers	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐
Touch n Go	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐
Tunnelers	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐
Weavers	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐
Grounders	☐	☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐
Gamblers		☐	☐	☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐	Rd 1 ☐ Rd 2 ☐

In consideration of the acceptance of this entry, I/we certify that I/we have knowledge of, and are familiar with, and agree to abide by, the Rules and Regulations of NADAC in effect at the time of this trial, and by any additional rules and regulations as approved by NADAC for this trial. I/we certify that the dog entered is not a hazard to persons or other dogs. I/we further agree to be bound by the "Agreement" printed on page 5 of this premium

Number of Total Runs Entered (all dogs): # _____

□ Runs = $ each = _____

□ Junior Handler = $ each = _____

□ Day of Show (after closing) $ each = _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED =_____

Owner/Exhibitor: _____Date_____

Parent or Legal Guardian of Junior Handler_____

Jumps Heights:

If you are new to the agility world or coming to us from a different venue, you might notice that NADAC encourages lower jump heights, prioritizing joint health in dogs. Your jump height is based on how tall your dog is. If they measure over 18 inches at the withers, they jump 16 inches *skilled* and 20 inches *proficient*. Page 3 of the handbook has a great chart to help you determine your dog's jump height!

NADAC does offer jump height exemptions for dogs with specific breed characteristics. These exemptions are considered on an individual basis. Breeds with achondroplasia, such as Corgis, or brachycephalic breeds, such as Pugs, may be eligible to jump 4 inches lower than their measured jump height. For example, a dog measured to jump at 12 inches could be allowed to jump at 8 inches with an approved exemption.

Before you compete, you will need to have your dog measured by a judge to receive a permanent height card. You do not need one to sign up for your first trial or if your dog is under the age of 2 years old. Click here to print out a height card application to bring with you for your first trial!

Skilled Or Proficient?

When filling out your trial premium, you'll need to choose between two *categories*: **Skilled** or **Proficient**. The only difference between them is the jump height—Proficient dogs jump 4 inches higher than Skilled dogs.

Many handlers who exclusively compete in NADAC choose the Skilled category. On the other hand, those who also compete in venues like AKC or UKI often select Proficient, as those organizations require higher jump heights.

Regardless of your future goals in agility, it's important to choose a jump height that best supports your dog's comfort and physical ability. Furthermore, if your 16-inch dog is older or recovering from an injury, consider entering them as FEO (For Exhibition Only, no points) and let them jump at just 4 inches!

Intro Or Novice?

NADAC offers four *levels*: **Elite**, **Open**, **Novice**, and **Intro**. As a new agility team, you will probably start with either Intro or Novice.

Intro is a great place for baby dogs to get comfortable in a busy trial atmosphere. There are no discriminations and the sequences are very beginner-friendly. The tallest jump height in Intro is

16 inches, but you can jump your dog at anything lower regardless of their height and still collect points. Dogs can compete in Intro classes at 15 months old, but cannot move up to Novice until they are 18 months old.

While Novice classes are also designed for young dogs, you will see trickier sequences, more weaves, and discriminations. However, even if your dog is the star of their agility training class, you should consider starting in Intro at your first trial. Trials can have an overwhelming and stressful atmosphere, and we want you and your pup to have a great time and be successful!

If they are nailing their Intro courses or earn a title, most clubs will be happy to move you up to Novice over the weekend.

What Is A Division?

There are four *divisions* in NADAC: **Standard**, **Vet Dog**, **Vet Handler**, or **Junior Handle**r. NADAC offers a separate division and lower jump heights for veteran dogs, junior handlers, or veteran handlers. (This is different from the Skilled and Proficient *categories).*

If your dog is over 7 years old, they can jump four inches lower than their official Skilled or Proficient jump height. You can continue to run your dog in the Standard division until they are 9 years old; then, you will have to enter as a vet dog.

Furthermore, if the handler is under the age of 18 (Junior Handler) OR over the age of 60 (Vet Handler), dogs can jump four inches lower than their official jump height.

What To Expect at the Trial

Now that you have registered your dog for their first agility trial, it is time to prepare for the show! Here is a list of common concerns new exhibitors might have before attending their first NADAC agility trial:

- **Crating**: Bring a crate for your dog to rest between runs. Depending on your personal preference, this might be a soft crate, wire crate, or hard crate. Some dogs prefer to crate in a car, while others are fine in the designated crating area. Personally, I have my dogs in covered wire crates. Don’t forget your own comfy folding chair so you can take a break too!

- **Briefing**: Before dogs begin running courses, the Trial Chair and Judge will give a general briefing with any information you might need as an exhibitor. This could include information about whether you can let your dog off-leash on the grounds, where to throw away poop bags, or if the run order has changed.

- **Courses**: NADAC trials have all the course maps for the weekend available to review on the first day of the trial. Where it is located will usually be mentioned in the briefing.

- **Volunteers**: Agility trials cannot run without volunteers, so please offer to help! Workers are needed for bar-setting, timers, scribes, and ring crew. NADAC is all about welcoming new people into our community, and any fellow competitor will be happy to show you how to do a job if they can!

- **The Judge**: While the term “judge” might sound intimidating, I promise they are friendly! They are there to not only judge runs, but also to ensure everyone competes safely and the trial runs smoothly. When they are not judging dogs, they are happy to answer any questions or measure your dog for an official height card.

NADAC is all about good sportsmanship and having fun with our dogs. If you need help or have questions, do not be afraid to reach out to the show contact before the trial. In Part II, we will talk about the actual event, and more of what to expect at your first NADAC agility trial!