

DALMATIAN CLUB OF AMERICA

Topic: DALMATIAN ROAD TRIALS
From: Road Trial Committee (Peggy Ann Strupp)
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Peggy Strupp
1994 at the DCA nationals in San Rafael, CA

A Dalmatian "Road Trial" is a breed specific field trial designed to test the ability of a Dalmatian to "run with the horses". For more than three hundred years "coaching" has been the accepted role of the Dalmatian; the only breed of dog traditionally bred and trained to accompany horse-drawn vehicles. In a modern Road Trial, Dalmatians are judged in off-leash obedience exercises while the handler is on horseback or driving a carriage. Dogs that complete the "obedience exercises only" can earn the title of "Coaching Companion". Dogs that qualify in the obedience exercises and then complete a 12.5 or 25 mile endurance test can earn the title of "Road Dog" (12.5 miles: "R.D.") or "Road Dog Excellent" (25 miles: "R.D.X.").

Although the American Kennel Club supports the idea of a Dalmatian field trial, they do not award titles at this time. Road Trials are sanctioned and titles are awarded by the Dalmatian Club of America.

Road Trials were "revived" by DCA member Linda Myers in 1989. Since then, an average of one or two trials per year have been held, usually in conjunction with the DCA National show (location varies yearly), and sometimes in conjunction with a regional Dalmatian specialty show or other local club event. RD and RDX exhibitors may ride horse under saddle or drive carriage or cart when the trail allows. CC exhibitors may ride horse under saddle, may drive a cart or carriage, or may hire a driver to drive a horse & cart/carriage. A Road Trial "team" consists of the handler, horse, and dogs, and the handler may "run" up to 3 dogs on a team. Although teams of up to three dogs are allowed, most exhibitors compete with only one or two Dals. Rental horses are sometimes supplied on site by a separate contractor, or exhibitors may bring their own mount or horse & carriage.

Dogs that are entered in the Coaching Companion Test do not receive a vet check and are judged in the obedience exercises only. The Coaching Companion Test is pass/fail. A dog must receive a "pass" rating in each of 5 exercises to earn the title "CC". The CC exercises are: HOCK (dog follows horse in hock position for 200 yards), HOCK WITH DISTRACTION (dog remains in hock position as team passes another dog/handler on foot), RECALL (dog is allowed to run free, then commanded by handler to return, or "come"), STAY (dog is commanded by handler to SIT or DOWN; dog remains in that position for 1 minute), and CHANGE OF PACE (horse/handler begin at a walk or trot and increase speed over 100 yards; dog must increase speed enough to demonstrate a change of pace).

Dogs and horses that are entered in the RD or RDX classes are f checked by a veterinarian at the start of the trial. If they are deemed fit enough to compete, the dog/horse/handler team rides to a judging area. There, a mounted judge conducts and judges the following exercises: HOCK (dog follows horse in hock position for 200 yards), HOCK WITH DISTRACTION (dog remains in hock position as team passes another dog/handler on foot), RECALL (dog is allowed to run free, then commanded by handler to return, or "come"), STAY (dog is commanded by handler to SIT or DOWN; dog remains in that position for 1 minute), and SPEED exercise (horse/handler begin at a canter and increase speed to a hand gallop for about 100 yards; dog must demonstrate the ability for a fair amount of speed). Each of these "obedience" exercises is judged off-leash, handler on horseback or driving a cart. Each exercise is worth up to 100 points.

The team then continues on a marked trail for the endurance portion of the Trial. The dog is also "vetted-in" at least 2 more times, receiving a final vet score at the finish of up to 100 points. The horse is not judged. To "qualify" in the RD or RDX and earn the title, each dog must receive a score of 51-100 points in each of the judged exercises, pass each vet check, receive a vet score of 51-100 points, and complete the endurance portion of the ride within the allotted time (3 hours for RD, 6 hours for RDX).

The Road Trial Regulations are available online at the DCA website: www.thedca.org.

Peggy Ann Strupp is currently the chairman of the DCA Road Trial committee. For more information on Road Trials, you may contact her at pstrupp@gmail.com

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Peggy Ann Strupp competes in a Trial with (L) Ch Koira Redrk Radagast the Brown, CD, RD, RDX, and Ch Redrock's Harmony Cadence, CD, CC, RD, RDX.