

Can Dogs Fly?

Story by Mary Martin, Photos by Fly By Night



You bet they can fly! Just ask any Flyball dog and they will tell you they can fly higher, run faster and carry their ball better than any other dog out there! So now you ask, “Just what is this Flyball thing?”

Flyball is a high speed, highly competitive relay race for dogs. Nicknamed “drag racing for dogs,” races are actually timed to the thousandth (yes, that’s 0.000) of a second and our start lights are just like the lights used on drag strips. Also, just like the drag races between two cars, the teams race each other, head to head, but unlike the cars, these dogs are relay racing on teams of four dogs. It’s controlled chaos, with eight dogs taking their turn at the tracks, flying past each other at top speeds and all barking their encouragements to each other.

Who can compete? Just about any person and any dog can compete in Flyball. Tall dogs, short dogs, purebreds and mixes are all welcome. Flyball is a family sport and you will often see children with their parents and even grandparents watching the fun. We welcome junior handlers on our teams where they learn dog handling as well as team work. Tournaments often become a social event with lasting friendships for dogs and their handlers. It also provides a great excuse to have a potluck or BBQ. It is a party for dog lovers and their dogs.

How does it work?

Flyball can either be held outside on grass

or inside on mats. The Flyball track is a straight 51 feet long, with 4 jumps or hurdles along the track. At the far end, there is a Flyball box which is designed so that the dog steps on a trigger, releasing a ball for the dog to catch and return to their handler. Each dog is trained to run the 51 feet, over each jump, make a banking or “swimmer’s” turn off the box, trigger and grab the ball and return over all four jumps. Once one dog returns, the second dog races out for their ball (over all the jumps), then the third dog, then the fourth dog in relay, passing each other at the start line. The height of the jumps is set according to the height of the smallest dog on the team, so small dogs are welcome. Most competition teams can race all 4 dogs in under 24 seconds.

The sport of Flyball began forming in the late 1960s and early 1970s in California and the first Flyball tournament was held in 1983. Flyball has continued to grow each year and now there are over 400 active clubs and 6,500 competing dogs in the North American Flyball Association (NAFA). United Flyball League International (U-FLI) is another governing association for Flyball in North America and Canada. You can race year round from the west coast to the east coast. The largest regularly held tournament is the North American Flyball Championship, Can-Am, which is held at the Indiana State Fairgrounds in Indianapolis in October.

Flyball came to Colorado about 10 years ago and now Wyoming and New Mexico are all a part of NAFA’s Region 19. Tour-

naments are hosted by clubs around the three states as well as all around the U.S. and Canada. You can travel out-of-state or just compete close to home. There are nearly a dozen teams spread throughout the three states and many of them teach Flyball to new members.

If you think your dog would like to “fly,” you might want to check out the sport of Flyball! For more information on Flyball tournaments, clubs or classes:

Get Involved in Flyball:

Region 19 Flyball
www.flyballdogs.com/region19

United Flyball League International
www.u-fl.com

North American Flyball Assn.
www.flyball.org

Mary Martin and her husband Matt are actively involved in the Rocky Mountain Flyball Club and Denver Speed Demons Club with their dogs.

