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THE BARKING

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BULLETIN

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Earthdog – Natural Talents at Work, for Play

Trees rustle in the wind; everything is quiet in the forest for a moment. Craning her neck, she cautiously steps forward, using all her senses to gauge what is ahead. A rustle in the dark indicates something; she catches more of its scent and pushes on, listening intently. She focuses in the tunnel, assessing the situation. A dig to clear some earth, followed by another stop and listen, then another dig and suddenly she has reached the goal. “There’s the little animal,” she cries, as it braces itself, hissing at her from the protection of its cage. With a second yelp of joy, she tells her two-legged buddy above ground what she has found. Laughter from the spectators breaks out and her buddy shouts back with encouragement. The judge declares a “Pass - Well done!” Panting with excitement, she enjoys a big pat on the back from her master. It has been a good day out.



Perhaps this would be the story of a Terrier or Dachshund with their owner and other participants at an ‘Earthdog’ test. Earthdog is another family-friendly sport in the American Kennel Club world that is gaining in popularity, with 41% growth in entries in the last 5 years.

What does the Earthdog sport entail?

Earthdog is a ‘Performance Event’ in dog sports that gives Terriers – breeds like Parson Russells, Westies, Cairns, Border Terriers and many others – and Dachshunds the opportunity to test their natural hunting skills. These entail the dog wanting to pursue a ‘quarry’ (such as a rat or woodchuck) into burrows in the ground, where the dog ‘goes to ground’ to drive out the quarry. This activity dates from times when man needed more control over vermin to improve the environment and reduce the risk of disease carried by such creatures. The name ‘terrier’ is derived from the 15th century Anglo-French *terrere*, literally, earth dog, from the French word *terre* for earth, and from Latin *terra*.



Doug Ljungren, AVP of AKC Performance Events, commented: “Earthdog tests are family friendly, great for all ages and the dogs get to enjoy doing what they were born to do. Participating in such events encourages you to get out in the fresh air and enjoy the countryside with your dog.”



Participating dogs are judged in tests for their instinct to find the quarry using abilities for which they were bred. The goal is to follow a scent to find the quarry underground. Usually rats are used for the quarry as they are readily available. Rats are seldom seen by most people as valuable assets, but in Earthdog tests, the rat is an important member of the event and looked after with care. The rat is well protected in a cage that is behind dowel bars, so the dog does not come into contact with it.

How Do I Get Started?

All dogs six months of age or older from the eligible breeds may participate in Earthdog Events. Barbara Teigen, the AKC's Executive Field Representative for Earthdog, has some useful tips for getting started: "Use the AKC's [web site pages on Events](#) to find a local Earthdog event and contact the organizers." They will be able to tell you how to come and watch a test, perhaps with your own Terrier or Dachshund, and can tell you when they will be running a training class, which is very informal, before or after an event. That way, you can meet some other folks and find someone to act as your mentor, to show you the ropes of how to encourage your dog to join in the activities."

Can Any Terrier Try Earthdogs?

There are 25 different Terrier breeds that the AKC allows to participate in AKC Earthdog trials. For a full list, visit the AKC's web page here. http://www.akc.org/events/earthdog/eligible_breeds.cfm

Barbara Teigen points out that "many city-based owners are now finding that Earthdog tests are a great way to spend time in the country with their dog. If the dog has been indoors all week, this is a great way to allow him room to run, sniff, bark and dig and generally have a good time." Barbara explained that well-schooled earth dogs get used to the idea that barking and digging is something allowed at the events, and when they return home to the city, they know that controlled behavior is required again. "What's great is that at the tests, they can be dogs for a few hours and do what comes naturally to them!"



What About the Age of the Handler?

As with other Performance Events, the Earthdog sport is good for all ages. Barbara says: "These events are suitable for people of all ages who can manage some non-strenuous walking and maybe put their dogs close to the trail. Earthdog folks help each other out. Your dog either passes or fails the test at his level, so it is about encouraging him to do better, and not about being competitive. Great friendships and camaraderie are formed at such events. We also have many junior handlers getting involved."



Are There Titles?

Because Earthdog Tests are not competitive, there is no National Event. The dog passes or fails at the level where he is participating, based on his skill. The levels start at Introduction to Quarry and then step up in skill level to Junior Earthdog, Senior Earthdog and Master Earthdog. Some dogs are born with strong instincts to find a quarry, others need to be coached. Some dogs are very cautious and need to be encouraged to investigate the situation carefully, using their senses to figure out the potential dangers (they don't know the animal is behind bars) and to approach carefully but not hang back. Others might charge into a situation without investigating carefully, which is not a good thing either. So the schooling is to help your dog work out the best way to find a



quarry, and use his innate skills appropriately. Not all dogs are suited to it, as Barbara found out with one of her Dachshunds that is great at "obedience, agility, tracking – in all those things she excels and has 13 titles. But she does not like Earthdog work at all, it's just not her thing, whereas my two miniature wire-haired Dachshunds are natural hunters and love it!"

If you like the idea of enjoying leisure time in the country, making new friends and allowing your dog to get back to his roots and have some fun at something he was bred to do, then why not check out the [Earthdog events in your area](#) and contact the organizers to learn more?

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