

# What Crystal Ball Are You Gazing Into?

By John Cox  
[dog-talk@comcast.net](mailto:dog-talk@comcast.net)

## The Rally Crystal Ball

There is a perception that Obedience is in trouble and needs some help. That point can be argued both ways, but for the sake of this article let's say it can use a little help. There have been innovative ideas and a few new programs introduced by the American Kennel Club (AKC) to help obedience; one such program is Rally.

I must "fess up" and eat my words publicly. When I first saw Rally I thought it was like watching paint dry and wondered what was the big deal? It looked like kindergarten obedience at best. I have come to realize it does have its merits (different strokes for different folks); it has helped the bottom line for obedience and that is a good thing. I sure would hate to think Rally was invented as a "shove 'em through and collect the money sport" but, in reality, bottom lines are important for clubs to continue offering the venues we enjoy.

As for the future, I would like to gaze into the Rally Crystal Ball and see it as a separate event of its own (**still to be held in conjunction with an obedience trial**) but not an event to be redesigned to bottle feed folks into obedience. The Rally ring is a great place to do something *different* with your dog and at the same time help the new dog gain ring experience for other venues down the line. Even the older dogs enjoy coming to the shows again and competing in an event such as Rally. I am now one of those showing my UDX Saint Bernard in Rally as an excuse for hanging out at the dog shows with him! Again, different strokes for different folks.

There is now a new *idea* being tossed around by the AKC. A dog that earns a Rally Excellent title (RE) will then qualify to enter a Rally Transition class (RT). Qualify five times in this class and you will have earned **one** CD leg. Only one CD leg for the CD title may be earned via this route. In reality, that Rally/CD leg requires one to qualify **fourteen (14)** times in Rally. Think about it; that is a lot of entry fees for a CD leg that does not represent what a CD title is all about. This is just a bit much, in my opinion.

Since when is **Novice** obedience so difficult? There are some things in life you need to put out a little effort (and not a lot of cash) to obtain. Obedience, by nature, is one sport that requires that effort. Let's face the fact that Obedience is not going to be everybody's cup of tea for a multitude of reasons. The traditional three CD legs are *not out of reach* for the masses and never were. Most of you reading this article did just fine without being bottle fed by a cash cow into Obedience with a so-called transition class between two different venues. Okay, I have *milke*d enough metaphors. Ask yourself: Do you want the CD title you earned watered down by this not-so-cheap transition Rally/CD leg being proposed? For a sport that has been going well since 1936, are we now changing it to satisfy a few people needing instant gratification to suit their perceived needs?

I think the RT class proposal is barking up the wrong tree for bringing folks into the venue of Obedience, if that is the intent. I say, let Rally be Rally and Obedience be Obedience! They ARE different venues, leave it that way.

**With that said, I do feel the RT class in itself is good idea as a new titling class as we all like the challenge to collect titles, but not a class to earn a CD Obedience leg!**

Rally and Obedience are both GREAT venues by themselves. The bottom line is if folks are so inclined after competing in Rally they will cross over and give Obedience a try. **Now that we have Rally, let's encourage clubs to offer more Pre-Novice non-regular obedience classes as the transition non-titling class to traditional Obedience. Of course, that class could use some improvements, but that is another article for another time.** So if we agree that obedience could use new ideas for a comeback, let's gaze into a different crystal ball for other ideas other than offering a Rally/CD leg in the future. Let's take a moment and ponder a crystal ball from the past.

## A Crystal Ball from the Past

This crystal ball may need a little dusting off and with time it could shine again. As I gaze into this sphere I see the great events of the past which helped Obedience grow--the "**Gaines**" events! For those new to our sport I will go into a little detail.

### What was a "Gaines" event?

Begun in Chicago in 1975, these exciting and prestigious obedience competitions quickly became very popular throughout the country. Each year, three Regional competitions were held (Western, Central and Eastern), followed by the national competition, The Classic, which took place in an even different area of the country. There were entry requirements for each competition in the Novice, Open, Utility and SuperDog divisions, and exhibitors were very anxious and determined to qualify to compete at the event in their part of the country, as well as travel great distances to compete, especially for The Classic. This meant that a large number of exhibitors nationwide diligently trained and worked towards their goal of qualifying to attend these competitions. Each event was hosted by a non-profit volunteer group, which received financial and other support from a dog food manufacturer--Gaines, Cycle, or Pup-Peroni (the name depended on mergers, etc.). These were considered "exhibitor's shows" and much was done to create a friendly, congenial atmosphere during the two days of competition. The events also promoted educated dog ownership, plus there was considerable media publicity which attracted large numbers of spectators to learn more about dog care, the benefits of an obedience trained dog, and responsible ownership.

### What happened to the Gaines events?

The events continued for 25 years, ending in 2000, with financial sponsorship, but when that support was withdrawn it became increasingly difficult for volunteer host clubs to raise enough funds to continue holding the competitions. Hoping to keep the events ongoing, J & J Dog Supplies and Max 200 sponsored the last competition. Considerable emphasis had always been placed on the hospitality extended to exhibitors, which was costly, as was rental of a large facility needed for the six rings (plus two additional warm-up rings). Without the substantial donation from a sponsor, host organizations were no longer willing or able to raise the considerable amount of money to maintain the quality and standards for which the "Gaines" events were so well known and their existence came to an end.

### Can the AKC Resurrect Similar Events?

Yes, the American Kennel Club did invent their "**Classic**" in 1995 and named it the **AKC National Obedience Invitational (NOI)**. To be invited to participate, each dog must be ranked within the top 10% of their breed. If there are less than 30 dogs within a breed that are eligible to be invited, the top three OTCH-pointed dogs will be invited. This ranking will include the top 25 dogs ranked nationwide among all breeds respectively. The NOI has one show a year (about 100 entries) at which it awards the title of National Obedience Champion (NOC) to the NOI winner. This event has turned out to be the show of shows for Obedience, but only for the Utility-titled dogs and it is held only once a year.

While the NOI is an excellent start to showcase Obedience, we should have other national/regional events to showcase the **Novice, Open and Utility teams** from around the country. In the past there was talk of having Regional NOIs with a different format but nothing has transpired, or the idea was tabled.

If we still agree Obedience is in need of a boost, we must then do more to promote Obedience on a **national level**. Regional events will *create and maintain interest in our sport* to the general public as well as the *majority* of exhibitors now showing. As we all know, the future of our sport lies with *new* novice handlers.

Now peer deeply into the crystal ball from the past. Although it is a little murky from within, I would like to dream of it clearing up so we could all foresee a future where there would be three AKC Regional Obedience events, plus a rotating NOI as the grand finale.

As I look into this crystal ball it is indeed clearing up and I also see an Eastern, Central, and Western Regional in this new future for AKC obedience. Each year the Regionals would relocate within their boundaries to become accessible to most fanciers over time. A team would have to qualify by earning three scores of 193 or better to enter their regional class(es). As these events started to take place, publicity would go to a grand scale. All levels of Obedience would be showcased at the Regionals and local interest would be inspired. Large numbers of obedience teams would have a reachable goal to enter a Regional and compete.

Quality obedience classes would spring up again to meet the demand and one of the class goals will be to aim towards the local Regional. New people will be welcomed into the sport, having been exposed to the local Regional and observing the obtainable goals. There is nothing like a reachable goal to inspire and promote a sport to the newcomers. Entries at the local AKC Obedience Trials would escalate in all classes as teams worked towards their Regional qualifying scores. Ahh..... in this now clear crystal ball the future looks good!

I also see dollar signs floating around in this crystal ball. How do we pay for such events? Sponsors sure would be a start. Also, we might want to look into what is being spent annually by the AKC to send four dogs, their handlers, and several of the AKC staff to England each year to compete in a non-related AKC event. How this use of AKC money promotes Obedience for the masses back home is something that escapes me. Crufts is interesting, but few reachable goals are set for the majority of exhibitors on this side of the ocean. IF money is an issue, and it usually is, maybe we might want to rethink and spend those overseas dollars here at home promoting our sport by offering regional events in which many can compete. We need to take a good hard look and re-prioritize OUR goals for this new future.

Yes, the future looks good, but only if we have national goals and we are willing to roll up our sleeves and do what it takes! Flapping our lips and doing nothing or inventing a RT/CD class will not get the job done in securing the future of Obedience. Regionals will be far more effective and will have a better trickle-down action to bring new handlers into our sport than offering a CD leg from a Rally class.

If you, too, are looking into this crystal ball and see a future for AKC Regional Obedience events, let Mr. Curt Curtis (AKC Director of Companion Dog Events) know how you feel. Now is the time to start the movement so roll up YOUR sleeves and get to work! We are the masses at this point in time and it is up to US to secure OUR sport's future. You may contact Mr. Curtis at [cac@akc.org](mailto:cac@akc.org) .

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