



Dogged Pursuit: My Year of Competing Dusty, the World's Least Likely Agility Dog

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Best in Show meets *Marley and Me* in the hilarious (mis)adventures of an unlikely duo competing for glory on the pro dog circuit

An urban intellectual and a scruffy, disobedient Sheltie team up to conquer the Canine Agility pro-circuit in this hysterical account of the quest for glory in the competitive dog world. A cousin to the popular best-in-breed show, agility competitions resemble doggie boot camp: dogs scamper across teeter-totters, jump tires, and scoot down tunnels-without leashed guidance from a human. Taking home ribbons requires a focused handler and a cooperative dog.

Robert Rodi is a self-proclaimed Blue-stater who prefers fine wine and Italian literature (in *Italian*) to SUVs and suburban sprawl. His dog Dusty's scrawny build and skittish personality make him an unnatural competitor. Nevertheless, Rodi recounts a year filled with victories, failures, and hysterical personalities, and the loving bond between one man and his bug-eyed dog.

Dogged Pursuit: My Year of Competing Dusty, the World's Least Likely Agility Dog Details

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From Reader Review Dogged Pursuit: My Year of Competing Dusty, the World's Least Likely Agility Dog for online ebook

Misa212 says

I suspect that the people out there (in here?) who do agility because their *dog* finds it as rewarding as they do will also have to set aside the many icky, clasping-head-in-anguish moments that this book describes. This book is not a how-to-train-your-dog book in any sense, which is a huge relief. I am disappointed that during the many instances of problems catalogued here that the author didn't stop and do serious re-examination of his relationship with his dog, and then re-approach the whole thing....far, far away from any Agility obstacles. That never happened, and my enjoyment in reading went from kinda low to nonexistent. Yikes.

Miriam Hoffman says

As the owner of two rescued Shelties, this book was especially close to my heart. My dog Lucy actually came from the Illinois Sheltie Rescue, the same place this dog came from. A wonderful quick read about what we do to our dogs thinking that they are more like us than they really are and what we can learn once we get over that notion. The book made me want to enroll my dogs in agility classes and get another dog.

Melki says

This was, beyond doubt, the only sport I'd ever seen in which one member of the winning team congratulated the other by licking his face.

When my current dog entered my life, I was stunned at how easy he was to train. He was not only willing to do my bidding, he was *eager*! The thought of attempting dog agility competitions briefly crossed my mind. I pictured Randy leaping hurdles and weaving around posts. He would have been good at it. Unfortunately, taking part in the trials would have required too much time spent in the car - an activity enjoyed by neither my dog or myself.

Oh, yeah, and then there's the fact that I'm incredibly LAZY.

Robert Rodi had been competing in events with his Shetland sheepdog, Carmen, when she developed hip problems. After realizing he missed the excitement, not to mention the *exercise* involved in agility trials, he decided to try again with another dog - an odd-looking, rescued Sheltie named Dusty. His book recounts, from the beginning, all the ups and downs of their relationship with each other and with agility competitions.

Things do not always go well for the pair.

Dusty's so distracted on the course that we're whistled off after tackling just two obstacles. He won't look at me, won't listen to me, keeps running the perimeter of the ring and smiling at spectators, like a member of the royal family on walkabout. I actually have to pick him up and tote him off the course

under my arm. We pass right by a big trash can, and, boy, am I tempted to lighten my load.

There's not a whole lot of meat to this book, and I wouldn't recommend it to non-dog lovers, but the author's breezy tone and self-deprecating comments make reading this one great fun. There are some terrific lines here, including this bit about what happens when Rodi sits down for a moment to read:

... when a woman sidles up to me and begins to talk.

I've always found this a bit irritating --- this assumption, which pretty much everyone in our postliterate society seems to make, that the act of reading is something we undertake only out of boredom and from which we are desperate to be rescued by any interruption whatsoever . . .

Then there's this beautiful paragraph:

And that's when I start watching him, in a way I'm never able to when I'm running beside him. And yes it's true he's not a fast dog, nor is he poetry in motion or an unstoppable juggernaut or anything like that. He's a little wad of scruff with a scrap of determination, that's all. But there are times -- when he's right at the apex of a jump, with his forelegs stretched before him and his hind feet still recoiling from the launch; or when he's plunging through the tire, the velocity streaking the fur on his face and splaying his cheeks into a smile; or when he's loping across the dog walk, his head low and his tail erect -- that he seems suddenly beautiful, suddenly graceful, suddenly powerful. They're just split-second images, flashes, nothing more, but they have the startling effect of drop-kicking me into profound emotion. In this setting, I'm seeing him for the first time as separate from me - not just physically, in the sense that I'm not out there with him, but as an entirely separate entity. And it occurs to me that I really do love the little guy. For all his peculiarities and pathologies, he has such tremendous dignity. The blood of wolves runs in his veins, the race memory of primeval packs that took down mastodons, the pedigree of canine legions who sprinted alongside the armies of Alexander. I can see all this in him, and I'm aware as never before that as fiercely loyal as he may be, he doesn't disappear when I'm not there. In fact, outside my shadow he seems to grow larger -- as does his integrity, his *honor*.

If you have a dog, if you *love* a dog, I hope you someday get to experience a moment like this.

Dusty and his family

Michelle says

The title of the book is somewhat misleading; Dusty, while having some challenges in competing in agility, is by no means the world's least likely agility dog. While he may be the product of poor breeding and a rescue, he is a sheltie, and from the descriptions throughout the book, seems quite competent at basic agility skills. The problem seems to lie more with the expectations of his handler, the author. We see that the author is aloof and a bit of a fish out of water when it comes to interacting with his training school compatriots and fellow competitors, and it becomes obvious that his own insecurities are the root of many of Dusty's issues. While I am not an expert in agility by any means, having worked my dogs in both obedience and rally and assisted in teaching, we know that the vast majority of problems are with the "big H" and not the "little D". The author's style and attitude unfortunately come across in a somewhat egocentric way, and what could be a

heartfelt memoir on their ups and downs of training and competing comes across in a more negative fashion.

For someone looking for a primer on agility, I would suggest that you look elsewhere. This book glosses over the months of training necessary to safely and effectively train the team to compete. This book is more of a memoir about the author's experiences and some self discovery than about the sport itself.

Trish says

Rodi is completely crazy, but he does get a laugh every chapter or so. This is a good read for other crazy people who entertain the idea that your dog may *like* to get out and run an obstacle course every day or so. Also a good book for those with short attention spans or schedules broken into short segments. You can read to a laugh and put it down on a high note every couple pages. Keeps you coming back.

At the end, I was rooting for Dusty and Rodi as though they were relatives--that must be the "group-thing", or community, that Rodi talks about. It seems his insight is useful to all of us in our daily lives:
"...acceptance isn't something you wait for--it's something you actively claim. And more importantly, something you *give*."

Whatever. I was belly-laughing by the end, and wishing I 1) had a dog, and 2) had an agility location near me. A relative of mine has a dog that is just the right size and temperament, and I've already started searching agility centers...I am not interested in competition, but the exercise and mental focus (for the pet) sounds like just the ticket.

Chana says

Rob starts running Agility with his first Sheltie Carmen but when she starts having hip problems he adopts another Sheltie, a high-strung and neurotic dog, named Dusty. He starts training Dusty for Agility and this is the story of Rob and Dusty during their first year of competition. Rob is neurotic as well and so in some ways it is a good match but often they seem to exacerbate each other's anxiety and anti-social behaviors. When Rob seriously breaks his ankle he has to retire from Agility until it heals but he doesn't want to retire Dusty so he asks his partner Jeffrey to take over for him. He then suffers from feeling unnecessary and displaced, and guilty for his feelings, and he tells us all about it. This book is about Rob's neurosis as much as about Dusty's career in Agility. Another thing we hear about is the weather in Chicago in winter and how hard that can make getting to and participating in competition. I can totally see it. I wonder if he is now skipping winters in Chicago and instead running his dogs in Italy during the winter.

Funniest scene: the dog psychic. Most disturbing scene: Magic time (can that even be true or did he just make it up?) Negativity is often expressed but there is a sense of humor and the love of the dogs comes through clearly. At the end it is clear that there is to be yet another neurotic dog in Rob's future which I am sure Rob will love and do his best to train for Agility.

Leota says

Entertaining and delightful reading, especially for a dog person like me. Dusty is a rescue dog who challenges Rodi at every turn. Rodi also gets a bit far afield on his efforts to understand his renegade.

Jess Van Dyne-Evans says

I woke up my husband. Twice. Snorting to myself, trying not to shake the bed so he'd wake up AGAIN.

This is FUNNY. If you liked Marley and Me (and by that I mean the BOOK) you'll really laugh at this. It's worth getting up in the middle of the night out of your warm bed to go downstairs and sit on the sofa with the dog for.

Carol says

Entertaining, humorous, touching at times, but there were a couple things I didn't like. I'm no dog trainer, but it seemed like Dusty was being pushed too much to do something he didn't really want to do. And the author's snobbishness was a bit much. Maybe he was trying to point out that both he and Dusty were fishes out of water, but sometimes it just came off as condescension.

Anne says

Some good friends of mine have a Sheltie who's been a bit of an also-ran in agility competitions, so I was interested to read this memoir. It turns out to be incredibly funny, fascinating, and sweet - a real love letter to an underdog. Plus a bonus to animal lovers: this is one pet memoir where the pet does NOT die at the end!

Stephanie says

First of all, I love dog stories. But only the ones where the dog doesn't die. So this book had a boost for me just because of the subject. The writing was also witty, and the chapters were short, leading to that "just one more chapter" mentality that keeps me from doing other things that I should be doing (like going to sleep). The author's love for his dog shows through, and that was nice, but I was bugged by his constant need to show us, the readers, how he really doesn't fit in with his sweatshirt-wearing, sloppy joe-eating fellow agility competitors. Dude, I don't care what symphony you listened to on your way to the competition, or what gourmet lunch you took to eat in your car (because the ubiquitous sloppy joes make you queasy). I had to roll my eyes a lot whenever he described how he really didn't fit in with them, and I kept thinking, who do you think is going to pick up this book? Your fancy pants gourmand friends and fellow classical-music aficionados, or people who are into dog agility? Because I bet it's more of the latter than the former, and you have just insulted them. Again.

Dogs are my favorite, though, so I will always rate a good, non-dying dog story highly.

Dawn says

I have a sheltie and belong to several FB sheltie pages. One day a few months ago I read that Dusty the sheltie had crossed the rainbow bridge. As I sometimes do, I went to the owner's page, hoping to learn more about him and his dog. Turns out Robert Rodi, Dusty's owner, is a writer and had written a book about the two of them chasing the agility champion's dream.

I couldn't NOT go read the book.

The writing is fabulous, and I laughed out loud at some of it, would have even if I didn't have a sheltie and hadn't tried a bit of agility myself. Poor Dusty, he was a rescued sheltie with a sad past and he was a bit overwhelmed in the ring, yet a bit independent, and well, just a sheltie overall.

Here's a description of one of his runs, held in a frigid pole barn in the middle of a Chicago winter:

"We finished out yesterday with more refusals than a Catholic girls' school on prom night. Dusty bailed on the teeter, balked at the tire, shirked the A-frame, ducked the jumps, fled the weave poles, snubbed the table, and dodged the dog walk. The only thing he did, and did consistently, was the tunnel. Maybe it was warmer in there."

If you've ever loved a dog despite its shortcomings, if you've ever realized those shortcomings were your fault, not the dog's, if you've ever loved a dog period, you'll enjoy this book.

Rebecca says

Another (dog related) book I had had high hopes for and just for some reason did not deliver. Actually, I know why this book didn't deliver. The author annoyed the HELL out of me. I pictured the protag as the (gay) guy partner on SMASH and while I like the character on tv a lot, this guy was just a high class ass. I am too high and mighty to congregate with the masses, so I'll sit in my car and eat my fancy salad. Leave the burgers and fries to the underlings. OH PAH-LEEEESE. Get off your high horse and participate or don't bother showing up. I wonder if the dog could sense this about the guy and that is why they didn't really do so well in agility? The dog did a lot better with his partner and it seemed like he participated in ALL ACTIVITIES more once the protag was out with an injury. Boohoo, I know I wasn't crying AT ALL. Things I did like: setting, outside agility and his relationship with his dog and why he got into agility. I can relate to this because my pup is very good at it and I think we'll start doing classes later in the year. The protag just totally ruined the story for me. Get off your high horse and join the masses. It's not as bad as you think.

Judy says

Yes, the author is a dear friend, but I consciously kept a distance. This book is a glorious read - even if you're not a dog freak. As much of a memoir of Rodi and Dusty, it's a coming-of-age of sorts for the very-adult author. It's wonderful to see his world open up in a way he never expected.

Mindy says

The author successfully competed in numerous agility courses with his first border collie. Unfortunately, the dog comes to a point where she can no longer compete. So, the author finds an "unadoptable" border collie ("ugly" with lots of issues) and knows this is the dog for him, believing he can change the dog with lots of love and a job. The dog has other thoughts, however. This dog is difficult to train and is somewhat of an embarrassment to the author as he already gained notoriety with his first dog. But, he perseveres, thankfully, for the dog's sake.

The most hilarious part of the book comes during the author's darkest time. It is the dead of winter, freezing. The pair go to a competition anyway despite neither one really wanting to go. The event ring is almost as cold, Dusty's water even freezes. As the author attempts to leave the building, he is hit in the face with the door, prompting a bloody nose. He is then forced to compete with the bloody nose, which is ok since the blood froze. After another awful display by Dusty, he packs the car to leave. The car is stuck on a patch of ice, so the author gets out to fix it. He attempts to kick dirt on the ice and hurts his toe. As he leans on the car to rub his toe, the car lurches forward as it was still in gear. The car takes off with Dusty casually hanging out the window. The car comes to a halt when it sideswipes a tree. This event leads to the temporary halt of competition as well. Due to surgery for the broken ankle surgery, the author's companion takes over the agility runs. Defeat is inevitable, however, Jeffrey is having a good time and becomes enthralled. Dusty is his usual self and while the author is having a hard time dealing with the hand-off of Dusty, the dog proves his dedication (while being mostly stand-offish) by running to him DURING one of the agility runs. This invokes do or die for the author and he completely turns over the running of Dusty to his partner...and then he gets another dog!

This book is difficult to become fully engaged in. The last several chapters were the most entertaining but not to the point of recommendation.
