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How to Get Invited Back to Pet-Friendly Motels

# AGILITY DOGS On the Road

by Kip Kirby

It didn't seem possible. I was sure I'd misunderstood the reservations clerk. She couldn't have said what I thought she said. Maybe I'd misdialed and reached the Waldorf Astoria in Manhattan instead of the Motel 6 in Cullman, Alabama. Or maybe we had a bad connection. How else to explain what I thought

I'd just heard - a room quote of SIXTY-EIGHT DOLLARS PLUS TAX, WITH A TEN DOLLAR PER NIGHT PET FEE? For the same room that my dogs

and I had stayed in just four months earlier at two-thirds the price and no pet fee?

Hey, we're reasonable guests! My Shelties don't require Milk Bones on their pillows at night. I don't ask for heated towel racks or a mini-bar or a Jacuzzi tub in the bathroom.

We don't require 30 cable channels all set to Animal Planet. My dogs and I can make do just about anywhere, and believe me, we have. But recently, we've been running into an alarming number of previously pet-friendly motels that are now hanging up "Sorry, No Fido Spoken Here" signs. No wonder so many agility competitors are triple-mortgaging their homes to purchase RVs and avoid the motel game altogether.

Of course, for most of us, buying an RV, even an old rattletrap, isn't an option. We don't have enough room in our driveways to even park the thing, let alone turn it around or back it out. We're stuck with booking motel rooms at the trials we enter. My annual motel fees could support a small Third World nation. But there are tips and tricks to help us all get invited back, and with any luck, at nearly the same rates you paid last year.

**From the Publisher**

## Agility Turns A Corner

I just competed in my first trial of the season here in Northern California. Although the fields resembled the Everglades after weeks of rain, who cares about wet feet on a lovely weekend with a strong hint of spring and a chance to get out and play the agility game.

I had three divergent thoughts over the weekend.

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 Have an upcoming trial? If you would like fliers or trial CDs about Agility Action to hand out, just email me and I will send those to you. Please contact Laurie@AgilityAction.com.

**SU CASA ES MI CASA:** Loosely translated, this means, "Your room is my home away from home." No matter that the stucco on

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## On the Road (continued)

the ceiling is peeling, the tub leaks, and the motel owner thinks a 20-watt light bulb over the bed is sufficient reading light. How you and your dogs conduct yourselves can determine whether you are welcomed back. Pet fees happen when a motel decides it's costing too much money to permit animals in their rooms. Your mission is to minimize evidence that your dogs were ever there. It's a shell game. "Now you see us... now you don't!"

To help with this challenge, I've put together "A Handler's Handy Guide to Motel Etiquette 101" based on research with motel owners, hotel managers, and agility competitors around the country. Ready?

**Bring your own sheets.** Don't laugh. These sheets are not for YOU. They're for spreading over every inch of bedding and furniture in your room. This guarantees your dogs don't deposit a layer of mohair on the bedspreads, blankets, and chairs. It costs motels money to totally strip and launder a bed when a dog's been in the room. It costs valuable time when maids have to shampoo and quadruple-vacuum the floor because the fur you've lovingly brushed off your dog the night before is now rolling across the carpet like an overgrown Yeti on the lam.

**Resist the urge to convert your motel room into Grand Central Grooming.** The water pressure in hotel and motel showers is deliciously tempting. It's like Niagara Falls compared the measly trickle of water we get at home. Besides, it's not OUR drain that's filling up with all that freshly-shampooed fur! But the trade-off for clogged plumbing and backed-up pipes could be No Vacancy signs the next time a dog show returns to town.

If you absolutely must give your dog a bath, use your own towels. After a marathon washing and drying, those not-so-subtle stripes of beiges and browns left on the motel's formerly white towels won't go unnoticed.

**Crate your dogs when they're unattended.** There are lots of reasons for this. Crating means your dog can't get loose even if a maid opens your motel room door by accident or an emergency brings a handyman in. Crating your dog provides a sense of security in unfamiliar surroundings. It may also keep him quiet and less prone to barking out enthusiastic "SEE YA'S!" at every dog that passes by. Another reason for using a crate is that it could keep your dog from doing what my Sheltie, Soundbite, did her first year in agility. I'd warned my new roommate for the weekend to put everything with food in it up out of the way. However, she forgot about a zippered, Velcro'd cooler bag on the table. Soundbite barely waited for the sound of our footsteps to fade down the corridor before she stuck her snout into the zipper, loosened the Velcro fasteners, and devoured an entire four-day stash of goodies. Houdini himself couldn't have undone the bag any faster. If I'd crated her, I wouldn't have spent

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## MISSION STATEMENT

AgilityAction.com is a resource for new and experienced agility participants, providing quality content that is straightforward and amusing.

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## On the Road (continued)

the rest of the night on my hands and knees scrubbing diarrhea off the motel carpeting.

**Keep your dog on leash.** As appealing as it is to race your dog down hotel hallways for exercise or practice your weave poles in empty corridors, it's not an approved activity endorsed by the Hotel & Motel Association of America. Manners are important.

In Alpharetta, Georgia, a pricey suburb of Atlanta, I stay at the Wingate Inn. This beautiful hotel welcomes pets and dog show competitors even though the Wingate's clientele is largely comprised of briefcase-bearing business types who always look startled to be sharing an elevator at 6:30 in the morning with two Shelties and a Border Collie. Fortunately, my dogs have been trained well. They lie down politely in the side lobby while I graze the breakfast bar. People are amazed at how well-behaved they are. Me! I just see this training as my responsibility in return for being permitted to stay at such a nice hotel.

**Let your maids be your allies.** You'd be surprised at the influence maids have in hotel hierarchies. Maids wield a lot of influence over a motel's decision to be pet-friendly. Rawhide fragments in the rug, hair in the sink, and toys scattered everywhere all add hours to maids' workload. This means unhappy maids, and unhappy maids don't show up for work. This means unmade beds, unvacuumed carpets, and rooms that can't be rented. When maids complain, hotel management listens.

**Clean up after your dog!** This is the Holy Grail of Dog Commandments. If every dog owner would only follow this commandment, we could stay anywhere. Do not give your dog his choice of which rare Chinese shrub to lift his leg on as you stroll past new landscaping. Choose an area off to the side or back of the building instead. Then find an appropriate place to deposit the baggie, preferably in a trash can or dumpster away from a main entrance. Never deposited inside the hotel. If you're caught empty-handed by an unexpected kamikaze bathroom run, return to the spot with a baggie as quickly as possible. "Poop scoop" every time you walk your dog even when it's dark, and you need infrared binoculars to see where your dog just squatted.

**Bring cash to tip the maids.** WHAT?!! TIP THE MAIDS?? Yes, say veteran agility competitors. Hotels can't afford to rent fully-cleaned rooms when their next guest may be allergic to dogs. Maids have to work harder to clean up after dog show people leave, but they're much less likely to complain if they walk in and find a nice cash stash prominently displayed on the night stand. The usual rate is \$2-\$3 a night or \$5 for a weekend, but if you've asked for extra service or had any spills or messes, add a little extra.

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Bring cash to tip the maids



photo by Grenaris

Kip Kirby is an agility trainer/handler based in Nashville, Tennessee. In addition to teaching agility, she competes throughout the Southeast in both AKC and USDAA and has titled four of her own dogs. Her Sheltie, Soundbite, was only the third dog in the state of Tennessee to earn the MACH title, and is now MACH and working on her ADCH. Orbit, Kip's youngest Sheltie, recently earned his MACH at the age of three. Kip is a regular contributor to Clean Run Magazine. She can be contacted at: KipSheltie@aol.com

## On the Road (continued)

Everyone's goal should be making sure that we are welcome at more places, not fewer, and that the prices we pay are not equal to half of our discretionary income. Motels aren't perfect by a long shot, but until we're all tooling around the countryside in new RVs, they sure beat the heck out of lugging a sleeping bag, a pup tent, and a Port-O-John to a night trial!

## From the Publisher

(continued from page one)

I am usually limited to a single thought - I hope I remember the course. On Sunday, I had to drive straight home and nap after such an intellectual exercise.

The first thought was that information about agility is turning a corner. Until recently, resources about agility - other than the essential agility teacher - have been limited to print and an occasional video. As you know, we are working to blend text and video in Agility Action. This is based on our belief that it is best to "see" good training in order to replicate it. Now another interesting product in this same vein has emerged. This weekend, I talked with two agility entrepreneurs who have created AgilityinMotion.com. Their product is a monthly subscription to DVD/CDs with video and narration showing how to teach a variety of agility skills. AgilityinMotion.com is a terrific companion product to Agility Action Online Magazine. It will be useful to everyone interested in agility from pre-novice to the highly experienced competitor.

Next, I had a chance to chat with a gal who was attending her first agility trial to see what it was all about and to socialize her young Border Collie who is in agility training.

I was watching a class where she was standing and we struck up a conversation. My second thought was that is really difficult to remember what beginners are wondering. I have summarized her questions in a short article in this issue. Remember, if you are new to the sport, it is okay to side up to someone, as long as they are not preparing to go in the ring, and ask your questions. If you are a seasoned competitor, watch for those new faces with wide eyes and strike up a conversation. It is a lovely reminder of how much you have learned and can share.

Lastly, I was reminded this weekend of the culture of camaraderie that distinguishes agility at the local level. Maybe it was because it was sunny. Maybe it was because it was one of the first trials this season. Whatever the reason, there was a hum of happy folks and a visible effort to support each other. When I came out of the ring, disbelieving that I had pulled my dog around an easy jump, a gal whose name I barely know came over and commented on the improvement of the teamwork between my baby dog and me. My priorities snapped back in order.

Remember, as you launch into this new season, keep it simple and fun.

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Early spring trials in Northern California are usually on fields that resemble the Everglades.



Got something you've been chewing on? Let us know at: Laurie@AgilityAction.com

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