

DO YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS INCLUDE GETTING FIT AND TRAINING A PESKY PET? MANDY-SUE CAN HELP



■ Here! Charlotte and dad David Hardy. Right: Mandy-Sue's dog Ruby CO87959_19



■ Here! Mandy-Sue and daughter Hazel CO87959_17

Take Tommy to dog boot camp? You're barking!



■ Good boy! Tommy takes on a jump

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AS owner of a mischievous bearded collie, I have always been in awe of dog owners who do agility training with their dogs.

Developing such a strong bond, plus having the patience and skills to convince your pet to willingly hurtle around a course of jumps, tunnels and bridges, is something many dog owners probably yearn to achieve.

However, the truth is most of us struggle to make our pets even sit on command.

Mandy-Sue Sartl, 46, of Stonebridge Hill, Colne Engaine, competes regularly with her dogs.

She qualified with her eight-year-old patterdale terrier, Izzy, for the Kennel Club Olympia Agility Finals - held in London as part of the Olympia International Horse Show.

Mandy-Sue trains her own dogs, and also teaches others at her training centre - Stonebridge Dog Agility, in Colne Engaine.

She said: "I have been doing agility for more than 17 years.

"It's addictive and it's a great way of bonding with your dogs and understanding them as something other than a pet. It's also a great way to get fit.

"Everyone has to walk their

It's addictive and a great way of bonding with your dogs and understanding them better

By CHARLOTTE AUSTEN-HARDY

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dogs and agility is a great, fun way to do that in all weathers." Determined to give it a go myself, I took my dog Tommy to meet Mandy-Sue.

When we arrived, despite the grey skies and drizzle, a dozen dogs and their owners were already waiting their turn to tackle one of two courses.

One is quite daunting, with waist-high jumps, a seesaw and a bridge, which is for the more

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experienced pairs.

The other is more straightforward, although there is a tunnel and weaving poles.

Some dogs took the jumps in their stride, but others were a little more reluctant, with one cheeky - or clever - dog running underneath a jump, instead of leaping over the top.

Another ignored the tunnel completely, no matter how many toys or treats were used to tempt him through it.

Before we started, I asked for a few tips on turning my laid-back Lassie into an agility superstar.

"It has to be a partnership with your dog, and you work as a team, said Mandy-Sue.

"Every dog has different levels of ability, but there are few that can't do it.

"It is reward based, so you have to find a reward that's worth doing the work for them."

Armed with a pencil case full of his favourite treats, we tried Tommy out with the tunnel.

He seemed a little bit nervous but, to my surprise, soon dived into the tunnel and out the other side - before making a break for it and running for the exit.

After luring him back with a treat, we then tried a few jumps. Although he happily hopped over the first, rewards of his favourite toys and treats were not tempting enough to sustain his interest for the second.

In the end, we brought in our secret weapon - my dad, David Hardy.

Eventually, with dad calling Tommy and me herding him, he trotted over both jumps.

Then Mandy-Sue's daughter, Hazel, 13, showed us how it was done, effortlessly running their dog Ruby, a collie-cross, around the course before finishing with a show-stopping leap though a hoop.

By the end of the session I was exhausted, soaking wet from the rain and covered in mud, but I can understand why so many people choose to spend their Saturday mornings in a damp field with their pets.

It was brilliant fun and completing our little course was exhilarating.

I'll definitely be giving it another go.

Bring on Crufts 2014.