



Introducing a New Dog Sport to Australia - Bale Seek



The name may be new, but a similar sport has been enjoyed in a few other countries over the past 10-14 years. The conditions and Code of Ethics in Australia dictate that the rules and sport be different from its overseas origins, in the props used, classes offered, and non-live quarry/scent tubes.

The sport derives its roots from farm dogs ridding sheds and storage areas of vermin that damaged food. This work involved searching, scenting, and agility to access where the vermin hid. If a dog could not reach the vermin, it would alert its master to the location, and together they could remove the vermin.

The sport has been promoted unofficially for the past 3 years in WA through fun practice days, led by Brigitte Walkey, who is a past Judge in the related discipline of Barn Hunt in North America. Ms Walkey also titled 3 of her own dogs in that discipline.

Ms Walkey has been appointed by Dogs Australia as the Chair of the National Bale Seek Working Party. This will unify and standardise the sport of Bale Seek across Australia. Currently, there are 6 States getting involved - WA, QLD, NSW, TAS, SA, and VIC.

The sport is open to all breeds and Associate Registered dogs. Some of the dogs that have enjoyed the fun training days came from the Toy group, such as English Toy Terriers, and others from the Working and Utility groups, such as Kelpies and Mastiffs. To date, we have seen breeds from every Group participate.

The sport is held in a well-fenced area and involves bales of straw or hay (7-9 bales in the Instinct level, and up to 50 bales in the Master level) set out in specific patterns that include a tunnel made of bales and support boards. The Novice class has a short, straight tunnel, but in the highest class, Master, the tunnel will contain 3-4 turns! The

amount of hidden PVC tubes varies per class, from 3 tubes in Novice to 8 tubes in Master.

If you have had the chance to come watch this sport or participate, you know how much fun the dogs are having! They get to use their best attribute - their noses - to search around and over bales of straw or hay, looking to indicate to their handlers where the "quarry" is hiding. The scented items are hidden in strong PVC tubes that are lightly covered with loose straw so that neither the dog nor the handler can see them, yet the dog can smell them. Once the dog indicates the find (through touching the tube with their nose, pawing at it, staring, and/or vocalising) then the handler must call it so the Judge may then confirm it, or it might be an empty tube! That's where training helps, so the dog and handler work as a team. The sport challenges the team to work together.

There are titles to be earned in 6 regular classes and Veteran classes, plus an unofficial, fast-paced class called Super Seven Snuffle. Bale Seek is an excellent spectator sport, too! The events are currently held at Dogs West in the cooler months from late April until early October.

WA is leading the way with training Foundation Judges and hopes to hold their first official Trials in September and/or October of this year. Other States are not far behind because last year Ms Walkey already visited TAS, NSW, and QLD to promote Bale Seek through fun practice days. There is a huge interest in participation and welcoming this new sport officially across Australia. We hope you and your dog will come join the fun at the next Bale Seek event!

For further information, contact Dogs West and also look to follow this discipline on Facebook - Bale Seek Western Australia.



Photo credit to Kelly Pilgrim-Byrne of 7 to 1 Photography.