

Discovering Dog Sports

A Guide to Engaging Your Toy or Miniature Australian Shepherd or Poodle

Engaging in dog sports is a fantastic way to bond with your canine companion, provide essential mental and physical stimulation, and tap into their natural instincts. For owners of Toy or Miniature Australian Shepherds and Poodles—breeds known for their intelligence, agility, and enthusiasm—there are numerous activities offered by organizations like the **American Kennel Club (AKC)** and the **American Stock Dog Registry (ASDR)** that are a perfect match. This guide offers detailed insights into a variety of dog sports, outlining what each sport entails, the benefits and challenges, and how to get started.

Conformation Showing

What It Is

Conformation shows evaluate how closely a dog adheres to its breed standard, including physical structure, gait, coat quality, and temperament. Dogs are judged against an ideal standard—not against each other directly.

Suitability

Both Toy and Miniature Poodles and Australian Shepherds can participate if they are registered with the AKC or ASDR and meet their respective breed standards.

Pros

- Highlights the quality of breeding and adherence to breed standards
- Opportunities for titles and prestige
- Enhances breeder reputation

Cons

- Requires significant grooming and handling skills
- Can be highly competitive and subjective
- Time-intensive to maintain show coat condition (especially for Poodles)

Cost & Time

- Entry fees: \$25–\$50 per show
 - Professional grooming: \$50–\$100 per session
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- Handling classes: \$100–\$200 per series
- Ongoing investment in travel, grooming, and training

Learn More

- [AKC Conformation](#)
 - [AKC Rules for Dog Shows \(PDF\)](#)
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Fast CAT (Coursing Ability Test)

What It Is

Fast CAT is a 100-yard dash where dogs chase a mechanically operated lure. Their time is recorded and converted to MPH, giving a fun, measurable way to enjoy running.

Suitability

Open to all AKC-registered dogs at least 12 months old. Toy and Miniature breeds can excel, especially if they enjoy chasing.

Pros

- Easy to understand and low entry barrier
- Encourages physical fitness and excitement
- Dogs are scored against others of similar size

Cons

- Not ideal for dogs with low prey drive
- Requires access to event-specific venues

Cost & Time

- Entry: \$20–\$30 per run
- Minimal training required
- Events are short and easy to fit into busy schedules

Learn More

- [AKC Fast CAT](#)

- [Fast CAT Rulebook \(PDF\)](#)
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Barn Hunt

What It Is

Barn Hunt tests a dog's ability to locate safely contained rats hidden in a straw-filled maze, simulating traditional vermin control. Dogs must differentiate between empty tubes, bedding-scented tubes, and the real deal.

Suitability

Miniature Aussies and Poodles often enjoy this mentally stimulating, scent-driven sport. Open to all breeds and mixed breeds.

Pros

- Fulfills natural prey and hunting instincts
- Great fun for dog and handler
- Low impact on joints and accessible to all sizes

Cons

- May require travel to specialized facilities
- Some dogs may be unsure about navigating straw tunnels

Cost & Time

- Entry: \$15–\$25 per run
- Training classes: \$100–\$200 per session
- Time: Regular practice and occasional travel to events

Learn More

- [Barn Hunt Association](#)
 - [Barn Hunt Rules \(PDF\)](#)
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Scent Work (Nose Work)

What It Is

In this sport, dogs search for essential oil-scented cotton swabs hidden in rooms, containers, or outdoor areas. It mimics professional detection tasks.

Suitability

Ideal for Toy and Miniature Poodles and Aussies due to their intelligence, focus, and trainability.

Pros

- Excellent mental stimulation
- Can be done indoors, making it great for bad weather
- Builds confidence and teamwork

Cons

- Requires consistency and patience
- Starter kits and training classes can be an initial investment

Cost & Time

- Entry: \$20–\$30 per trial
- Training: \$100–\$200 per course
- Home practice and gradual trial progression

Learn More

- [AKC Scent Work](#)
- [Scent Work Rulebook \(PDF\)](#)

Obedience

What It Is



Obedience trials evaluate a dog's ability to perform tasks such as heeling, stays, recalls, and retrieving. It showcases the teamwork and communication between dog and handler.

Suitability

Both breeds are naturally eager to please, attentive, and quick learners.

Pros

- Enhances everyday behavior and manners
- Great foundation for all other sports
- Deepens dog-handler relationship

Cons

- Requires long-term training and focus
- Some find the formal structure less “exciting”

Cost & Time

- Entry: \$25–\$35 per event
- Classes: \$100–\$200 per series
- Weekly training, trial prep, and travel time

Learn More

- [AKC Obedience](#)
 - [Obedience Regulations \(PDF\)](#)
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Dock Diving (Diving Dogs)

What It Is

Dogs run down a dock and leap into a pool, competing for distance or height. It's high-energy and water-focused.

Suitability



Many Poodles excel due to their water-loving heritage. Mini Aussies can enjoy it if they are confident swimmers.

Pros

- Excellent physical outlet
- Very fun and visually exciting
- Cool water is ideal for hot climates

Cons

- Not for dogs that dislike water
- Requires access to specialized facilities

Cost & Time

- Entry: \$20–\$30 per jump
- Training: Variable by location
- May require travel and seasonal practice

Learn More

- [AKC Dock Diving](#)
 - [Diving Dogs 101](#)
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Herding

What It Is

This sport simulates livestock management. Dogs work sheep, ducks, or cattle through courses based on verbal cues and instinct. There are various trial levels and livestock options.

Suitability

- **Miniature Aussies** often thrive in this sport, retaining strong herding instincts.
- **Toy Aussies** may enjoy instinct testing if they have drive.

- **Poodles** are not eligible for AKC herding but may train with private facilities for enrichment.

Pros

- Provides a deeply satisfying job for herding breeds
- Mentally and physically engaging
- Encourages impulse control and listening

Cons

- Requires livestock and trained handlers
- Not widely available in urban areas
- Poodles not recognized by AKC for herding trials

Cost & Time

- Instinct Test: \$50–\$75
- Lessons: \$40–\$100/session
- Trials: \$30–\$50/class
- Ongoing practice and travel often required

How to Start

1. **Instinct Testing:** Introductory evaluation on livestock
2. **Find Trainers:** Search via AKC clubs or the [American Herding Breed Association \(AHBA\)](#)
3. **Join Clubs or Groups:** Facebook and regional dog sport groups are good sources for local herding opportunities

Learn More

- [AKC Herding](#)
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Agility

What It Is



Dogs navigate a timed obstacle course featuring tunnels, jumps, weave poles, and A-frames. It's fast-paced and precision-based.

Suitability

Both Toy and Miniature Poodles and Aussies are quick, athletic, and trainable—making them agility naturals.

Pros

- Combines speed, focus, and teamwork
- Improves obedience and off-leash control
- Great cardio for both dog and handler

Cons

- Requires investment in training and equipment
- Mistakes can be frustrating for new teams

Cost & Time

- Entry: \$20–\$30 per run
- Training: \$100–\$300 for structured classes
- Time: Weekly practice and multiple weekend trials per season

Learn More

- [AKC Agility](#)

Getting Started in Dog Sports

Assess Your Dog's Interests

Watch how your dog naturally plays—chasing, retrieving, sniffing, or solving puzzles—and match a sport to their instincts.

Register Your Dog



Ensure your dog has an **AKC registration, Canine Partners listing, or PAL (Purebred Alternative Listing)** if not originally AKC-registered.

Find Local Clubs & Trainers

Use the [AKC Club Search Tool](#) or check ASDR directories and local training facilities.

Attend Events & Meetups

Watch events in person to learn rules and culture. Many clubs welcome observers and beginners.

Start Training Classes

Begin with foundational obedience or intro sport classes to build skills and confidence.

Sports for Non-Purebred Dogs

Not every great dog comes with a pedigree — and that's perfectly okay! Mixed breed and non-purebred dogs have **plenty of opportunities** to shine in the world of dog sports. Whether you're looking to burn off energy, build a stronger bond with your dog, or even earn official titles, there are many sports open to dogs of **all backgrounds**.

Eligible Through AKC Canine Partners Program

The **American Kennel Club (AKC)** offers a special program called **Canine Partners**, which allows mixed breed dogs and non-AKC-registered purebreds to compete in most AKC companion and performance events.

AKC Sports Open to Mixed Breeds:

Dogs enrolled in Canine Partners can participate in:

- **Agility**
Run, jump, and weave through obstacle courses!
- **Obedience**
Show off your dog's precision and training with structured commands.

- **Rally Obedience**
A fun, fast-paced sport that blends obedience and teamwork.
- **Scent Work**
Let your dog use their nose to find hidden target scents.
- **Tracking**
Follow human scent trails through fields and natural terrain.
- **Fast CAT (Coursing Ability Test)**
A 100-yard dash for speed lovers — any dog can join in!
- **AKC Trick Dog**
Earn titles by teaching your dog fun and useful tricks.
- **AKC Fit Dog**
Promote fitness and health while earning recognition for staying active.

How to Enroll:

You can enroll your dog in the Canine Partners program directly through the AKC website. Once registered, your dog will receive an official AKC number to enter events.

Dog sports are more than just competitions—they're about discovery, connection, and fun. Whether you're jumping into agility, herding sheep, or testing your dog's nose, the experience will bring you closer together and unlock new joy for both of you.

Let the games begin!

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