

Where the clever dogs fly

Amy Dale and Chelsea White

WHEN IT comes to multi-skilling, they put most athletes to shame. Whether it be running faster than Michael Johnson, getting to the ball faster than a Williams sister on centre court or hurdling better than Cathy Freeman, they come out on top.

Top dog, that is. Welcome to competitive flyball, the premier sport for dogs. Pooches from every state competed in the national flyball championships at the Castle Hill Showground yesterday.

Results were still coming in late yesterday, but the honours in division one went to the Northwest Thunderdogs team.

Leoney Pritchard, who owns and trains one of the Thunderdogs, said it could take a year for a dog to master all the tricks necessary to complete a timed course.

In flyball, each dog runs over four hurdles before triggering a box pedal that releases a ball.

Once they catch the ball, it's a sprint back to their teammates.

"Most dogs love to retrieve a ball or run and jump, so it uses a lot of their normal behaviours," Ms Pritchard said.

And, after a rigorous training program, there's plenty of pampering. "When they finish the course, they get a treat," Ms Pritchard said.



Eyes on the prize: Enthusiastic competitors in the national flyball championships clear the hurdles yesterday

Pictures: Gregg Porteous

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