

Dog days

Dock-jumping canines to compete, entertain at Kool April Nites

By Jim Schultz, Record Searchlight, March 26, 2006

Dogs and muscle cars aren't usually a very good mix.

But they may well be a perfect match during next month's Kool April Nites car show at the Redding Convention Center.

The Shasta Splash Dock Jumping Team, in cooperation with Kool April Nites organizers, is sponsoring the first Kool April Dogs dock-jumping competition, slated for April 8-9.

It could well become a crowd favorite, with many similar contests drawing standing-room-only crowds.

There's just something special about watching wired and energetic, come-on-hurry-up-and-throw-the-ball dogs fly through the air and make a big splash in a pool of deep water.

"The fans really get into it," says 38-year-old Dwayne Lindsey of Redding, a Shasta Splash club board member whose chocolate Labrador, Luke, is an award-winning dock-jumper.

It's not a complicated sport. And the dogs, at least most of them, love it.

The dogs run down a 40-foot runway, launch themselves into the air and land in water, usually a lake or pool, as they chase a thrown ball or toy. The dog that jumps the farthest, wins.

Country, a greyhound-coonhound mix who hails from the East Coast, holds the world record for dock-jumping with an astonishing leap of 28 feet, 10 inches.

"It was just an amazing jump," said Ralph Darrow, a 65-year-old Redding resident and president of the Shasta Splash club.

But records are meant to be broken, and there's no telling when that record might fall to a new kid in town.

According to Darrow and Lindsey, the organized sport of dock-jumping began about seven years ago.

Before that, they said, it was primarily an informal sport among duck hunters who, bored on a slow day, began betting to see whose dog could jump the farthest off the dock.

Dock-jumping dogs have been featured on ESPN, as well as ABC's Wide World of Sports, and the Wall Street Journal reported in 2002 that a dog-jumping competition beat out an X-Games contest in television ratings.

The Kool April Nites dock-jumping venue -- a 40-by-20 pool with a flatbed truck converted to a dock -- will be placed near the Redding Visitors Bureau outside the car show grounds.

There is no admission fee to watch the competitions, which are at 11 a.m., and 2 and 5 p.m. on April 8, and at 11 a.m., and 2 and 4 p.m., on the final day.

Practices also will be held throughout the weekend.

"There will be dogs flying through the air all the time," said Darrow, who notes that the upcoming dog-jumping competition, as well as the practices, have a double purpose: raising more interest in the dock-jumping sport and just having fun.

Although it's not yet clear how many dogs might turn out for the event, Lindsey and Darrow estimate that perhaps as many as 100 dogs may compete for ribbons, titles and possible cash prizes.

Dog owners are encouraged to register at www.shastasplash.com or at www.splashdogs.com.

The cost is \$20 per wave, or contest. Each wave includes two jumps.

But dog owners who would simply like to see how their best friends handle dog-jumping may participate in practices, which are \$10, and include coaching tips.

Further information about the upcoming dock-jumping contest may be obtained by calling Darrow at 241-5031.

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AIR BO: Don Erb of Bella Vista watches as his yellow Labrador, Bo, fetches an airborne tennis ball off the Whiskey Creek boat ramp at Whiskeytown Lake during a recent practice outing of the Shasta Splash Dock Jumping Team.



DOG WHISPERER: Scott Phipps of Redding prepares to let loose of his dog, Sobe, who's ready to chase a ball off a dock ramp at Whiskeytown Lake.



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THROW IT, ALREADY: Don Erb's dog, Bo, waits — and waits — for Erb to throw a favorite tennis ball into Whiskeytown Lake. Bo has jumped as far as 21 feet during dock-jumping contests.