

I am passionate about Agility which I enjoy with my adorable Grade 7 rescue dog **Neville**. Neville has taught me so much; patience, training techniques, understanding of how dogs learn and the pure joy of a happy partnership with your furry best friend. I am also 'Mum' to two tiny 8yr old dachshunds; Wilhelm, who has IVDD and Wolfgang who is nervous of new places and other dogs.



That's why discovering Hoopers filled me with excitement! Finally there was something similar to Agility, but suitable for dachshunds and offering a host of other benefits. I set up Sunshine Canine and became an Accredited Canine Hoopers UK Instructor in January 2018. I now offer exclusive classes to dachshunds (along with separate classes for bigger dogs). As you can see here, Neville enjoys it too and Hoopers has really helped with his Agility.

I've heard Hoopers described as croquet with dogs (without the mallet!). It is fairly new in the UK, originating from Agility, using similar techniques for navigating equipment, completing courses, being directed and handled at distance. The fundamental difference from Agility, is that Hoopers is a safe, low impact and inclusive sport for nearly all shapes, sizes and ages of dog.

It comprises a simple set of equipment; hoops, big straight tunnels and barrels and the dogs are introduced to each item using positive rewards and lots of praise. They wait for a signal before racing off, working ahead of their handler, tackling the obstacles, safe in the knowledge there is *always* something rewarding up ahead.



**Wilhelm** was just 4 when IVDD struck, requiring neurosurgery, followed by further episodes. I appreciate therefore the adverse impact that a long period of confined rest has on social skills and confidence. Wilhelm was my first dog and I confess I didn't do much training after puppy class. He was rather perplexed

when I began teaching him to run through hoops and go around barrels. But after a couple of lessons and lots of chicken he stopped barking and got the hang of it, as you can see. It's really benefited his confidence and fitness.

Little **Wolfgang**, on the right, has always been shy. Attacked as a youngster by off-lead dogs he developed deep fears and anxieties. Wolfgang learns Hoopers without other dogs around to worry him. To say he loves it is an understatement, he screams with excitement and charges to the training area like a rocket. He runs through hoops, around the barrels and through the tunnel without hesitation. He's a fast learner and his love of food rewards certainly helps but he particularly enjoys 1:1 time. He sleeps well afterwards so I know he's had a great mental and physical workout.





**Derek** and **Stanley**, the handsome wires, learned how to tackle equipment, quickly building their independence. They also became familiar with left and right signals and different ways to turn around on a course. They mastered a good sit and wait, while their handlers went to a starting position.

**Basil**, on the right, has been coming to Hoopers since we

started. His favourite thing is a rabbit skin squeaky toy. It is great to discover what your dog likes best as this benefits other skills such as recall. Look at him go! Basil has achieved a Bronze Good Hoopers Award, what a star!



**Lilly**, contemplating the tunnel, is another IVDD survivor. She enjoys classes and is always overjoyed to arrive. Even though she is a little wobbly, her enthusiasm is boundless. Flat exercise is great for her.

**Mr Chips** used to do Agility until IVDD, requiring surgery. Now recovered, he took to Hoopers enthusiastically and as you can see on the right, he loves being back in the game.



Little **Hercules**, peeping through the tunnel, was born with 3 legs, although this doesn't stop him. He's grown in confidence and ability. When he sees a hoop he's off, there's absolutely no stopping him! He's already earned a Bronze Good Hoopers Award and is capable of completing beginners courses with increasing distance from his owner.



**Sidney**, racing away on the right, shows just how much fun it is in a Hoopers class – boy can this dude move for chicken!



Here's new starter **Osho**, a fast learner trying simple courses after just 3 weeks! His Mum, a Veterinary Neurologist working in a specialist referrals centre, says "with 1 in 4 dachshunds suffering IVDD I wanted Osho to try a safe fun sport that exercises his body and brain. He squeals with delight when we arrive at the gate!"

Unlike Agility, Hoopers doesn't require tight turns or wraps, it doesn't use twisty weaves or steep contact equipment, like A frames, that can strain the joints and body. See-saws can be tricky for tiny dogs unable to firmly hold the end down. Even innocent equipment like tunnels hide slipping dangers for fast dogs. Hoopers tunnels are wide and straight. Some giant breeds, tiny dogs, or retired working dogs might be excluded from Agility or Flyball due to age, shape or conformation, past injury or other conditions but they could still enjoy all the fun and benefits of Hoopers.

Hoopers is perfect for diminutive earth warriors, those working hounds with sharp brains. Without sufficient mental and physical stimulation these little dynamo dachshunds may be at risk of boredom, anxiety or destructive behaviours. Participating in group classes teaches them to work things out, learn new stuff, socialise with other dogs and focus on their owner. It's not just the dogs who learn new skills but their parents too, it's also great fun! What's not to like?



See the Dachshund classes on [Sunshine Canine's Facebook Page](#)  
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