

## Bichon Performance

Performance activities are a great way to keep your Bichon mentally and physically active. Not only are these activities fun but they help to strengthen the bond between you and your dog and may reduce problem behaviours resulting from boredom and lack of exercise.

The fluffy coat and small size of the Bichon Frise lead many people to think of the breed as simply a lap dog. But appearances can be deceiving; Bichons are active, intelligent little dogs with a high desire to please. They love to play and they learn quickly. Positive training methods are best suited to their sensitive and gentle temperaments. Be prepared to train with a sense of humour though – Bichons are great workers but are clowns at heart.

Given their Water Spaniel heritage, it isn't surprising that many Bichons are good retrievers and have excellent scenting ability. Most are fast and agile. These characteristics make the breed a natural for performance activities such as agility, Rally-O, competitive obedience, flyball, tracking, scent detection for sport, and Treibball.

Common sense that applies to any breed should be used when engaging in these activities. Don't train or compete when your Bichon is sick or injured. Watch for signs of overheating if you train outdoors in warm weather. Your fluffy little Bichon may look like a toy to some dogs and could be injured if pounced on, even if the intention is to play, so be alert around large dogs. To protect young dogs from injury caused by repetitive impact (e.g. from jumping), many of these sports require that dogs reach a certain age before they can compete. Puppies can be introduced to the basics but jumping and strenuous training should be delayed to allow time for the growth plates to close.

With care, Bichons can continue to enjoy many of these activities into their senior years.

### AGILITY



Agility is a fast, fun, and challenging sport that continues to grow in popularity. Each member of a four-dog team runs at top speed in a racing lane just over 50 feet long, over a series of four hurdles, catches a ball released from a spring-loaded box, and brings the ball back over the start/finish line. As soon as one dog successfully completes a run, the next dog on the team starts. Teams compete simultaneously against one another. The winning team is the one that finishes first without any errors. With dogs barking and spectators cheering the dogs on, this is a noisy sport.

More information can be found at:

[Agility Association of Canada](#)

[Canadian Kennel Club](#)

### COMPETITIVE OBEDIENCE AND FREESTYLE



Every dog should be taught basic obedience commands including sit, down, walking politely on a leash, and come. Competitive obedience goes well beyond these commands and requires precision from the dog. It is a great way to provide mental stimulation and physical exercise for your dog while building a strong bond between the dog and handler. Not only is the work interesting for the dog but the skills learned provide a great foundation for learning tricks – something that Bichons love.

As the dog progresses through the levels of competitive obedience, it learns a variety of skills including heeling, retrieving, working at a distance, scent discrimination, responding to hand signals, and jumping. In an obedience trial, teams, each consisting of a handler and dog, are judged as they work through a series of pre-defined exercises. Points are deducted for each error made. A minimum number of points must be achieved for the dog to pass. The winning team is the one that has passed and made the least number of errors. The Canadian Kennel Club offers several levels of competitive obedience. Upon meeting the requirements for passing all levels, the dog is awarded an Obedience Championship.

Freestyle obedience is an artistic form of obedience that combines obedience work, tricks, music, and choreography.

More information, including the dates and locations of upcoming obedience competitions can be found at:

[Canadian Kennel Club](#)

[The Canine Freestyle Federation has information about Freestyle work](#)

### FLYBALL

Flyball is a fast and exciting sport that continues to grow in popularity. Each member of a four-dog team runs at top speed in a racing lane just over 50 feet long, over a series of four hurdles, catches a ball released from a spring-loaded box, and brings the ball back over the start/finish line. As soon as one dog successfully completes a run, the next dog on the team starts. Teams compete simultaneously against one another. The winning team is the one that finishes first without any errors. With dogs barking and spectators cheering the dogs on, this is a noisy sport.

More information can be found at:

[North American Flyball Association](#)

[United Flyball League International](#)



### RALLY OBEDIENCE (RALLY-O)

Rally Obedience is a sport based on Competitive Obedience that encourages teamwork, focus, and a positive relationship between the dog and the handler. It is meant to be fun and mentally stimulating. The emphasis is not on precision. Handlers are permitted to verbally encourage their dogs as they work.

In a Rally test, the dog and handler are timed and judged as they navigate a course. The handler has an opportunity to walk the course prior to running it. Once the team starts on the course, the judge provides no verbal directions. The handler moves through the course with the dog in heel position. As the team reaches each of a number of stations, they must perform the designated obedience exercise for that station. At the lower levels, exercises may include sit, stay, changes of pace, etc. Also at the lower levels, the team may retry the exercise at a station. A qualifying team is one that correctly navigates the course and completes all of the stations successfully. The winning team is the fastest qualifying team.

There are some significant differences between the levels of the two organizations in Canada that offer Rally Obedience – the Canadian Association of Rally Obedience (CARO) and the Canadian Kennel Club (CKC). For example, at the lower levels of CARO trials, the dog may be rewarded in the ring with food. But as in Competitive Obedience, CKC Rally trials do not permit food or other training aids in the ring. CARO also offers several levels and titles that are not currently available from the CKC.

The Canadian Association of Rally Obedience, founded in 2002, was instrumental in bringing Rally O competitions and titles to Canada. More information on the sport, rules, and competitions is available at: [www.canadianrallyo.ca](http://www.canadianrallyo.ca)

The Canadian Kennel Club also offers [Rally Obedience competitions](#).

### SCENT DETECTION FOR SPORT (NOSE WORK)



Scent detection provides mental stimulation for dogs as they use their noses to follow a specific airborne scent to its source. An item, scented with an essential oil, is hidden. The dog is brought into the area and must locate the source of the odor as well as indicate the find to its handler within a specified time. As it works, the dog ignores other scents and distractions that it may encounter. Competitions are offered at the Starting Dog, Advanced, and Excellent levels. Titles are awarded at each level to dogs that successfully pass each of the three components (container search, interior search, exterior search) required for that level.

More information can be found at [The Sporting Detection Dogs Association](#) and at [K9 Nose Work®](#).

### TRACKING

Tracking provides exercise and mental stimulation for all ages of Bichons from puppies to seniors. Bichons are often very good tracking dogs and enjoy this activity. The dog uses its innate scenting ability to follow the trail of odor left on the ground by a person (the track layer) after the track has been allowed to sit for a period of time. The dog must learn to ignore scents that are not pertinent along the track, including those of animals and people other than the track layer. Tracks can be laid in parking lots, in woods, in fields, and on campuses. The amount of exercise involved in tracking is easily controlled since tracks can be made more or less demanding by varying the length and location.

The Canadian Kennel Club offers various levels of tracking tests. Depending on the particular test, track lengths range from as short as 400 meters to as long as a kilometer. Tracks are aged up to 5 hours and have with one or more articles placed on them which the dog must successfully find and indicate. Upon passing all of the tracking test levels, a dog is awarded a Tracking Championship.

More information on tracking is [available at the Canadian Kennel Club](#).

### TREIBBALL (PUSH BALL)

Treibball is a relatively new activity. It became a competitive sport in Europe in 2007. It was developed as an activity for herding breeds but is fun for any high energy dog. Although Bichons are not known for their herding abilities, they pick up the basics of Treibball very quickly. The sport provides great exercise for the dog, improves confidence and focus, and helps to build a good relationship between dog and handler.

The idea of Treibball is that the dog must use only its nose or shoulders to push eight large balls, into a goal area within 10 minutes. The handler stands to one side of the goal and directs the dog, from a distance, using various cues. Initial training is simple; the dog must learn to push a ball in a straight line towards the handler. As training progresses, the dog learns how to better control the ball while taking directions from the handler.

The Treibball Association of Canada is still a young organization but has information on the sport at: [www.treibballcanada.yolasite.com](http://www.treibballcanada.yolasite.com)

Information is also available from the [American Treibball Association](#).