

## Park fun

Families have wide variety of amusement parks to choose from

TRAVEL, F10



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# DESERT LIVING

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SUSAN REINHARDT

## Old lady suit: awakening for women

Lord help the poor woman who buys her first old lady bathing suit. Give her a trophy of bravery to place on her shelf next to the cookbooks and family photos reminding of thinner days.

The granny suit is a symbol, a rite of womanly passage. No woman really wants to enter the mee-maw zone, but hefty portions, birthing babies, and too many Happy Meals have forced the doors wide open for all but a lucky few.

We are reminded of this every year, as spring ripens toward summer and the new swimsuits arrive in stores, rack after rack of bikinis, tankinis, and rhinestone-encrusted one-pieces that have legs cut up to the armpits.

It was during a recent trip to Chattanooga, Tenn., to see Ruby Falls and Rock City, the subject of swimwear selection came up. We had checked into a hotel with a rinky-dink indoor pool, shucked our jeans and sweaters, and broke out the bathing suits.

I heard my mother gasp and mutter, not a good sign. She was pointing to my selection, a perfectly low-key number, despite the mesh netting across the bodice.

She tried to say, but all she could do was sputter and mumble and jut her chin. Finally, she composed herself.

"Those would be fine for the beach," she snapped, "but not for a family pool environment. Don't forget you've had two babies."

She rummaged through her canvas bag and produced an elephantine T-shirt, which she demanded I put on over my swimsuit. "You cover yourself up, hon," she said. "It's time for a 'Mommy' bathing suit. The kind with some material and those cute little skirts around them."

These were the words from a woman who warned us as preteens that French kissing could lead to pregnancy.

So it was only fitting when the Centenarians In Style catalog suddenly and mysteriously appeared in the mail, I ordered the ugliest garment on its pages. It was so hideous retailers had slashed the price 70 percent.

I dialed the 1-800 number, hoping the monstrosity had sold out.

"Item number, please," a nasally voice whined.

I reluctantly gave her the number.

"Confirming item No. 234GH7," she said, giving up the rest of the conversation.



Anna, a Danish-Swedish farm dog, trains with owner Sally Frankel.

## HOW FLYBALL WORKS



Four-dog teams compete in relay races. The dogs race down a 51-foot-long course and jump over four hurdles (demonstrated above by Hoover and Sharon Hadley) set by the height of the smallest dog on the team. At the end of the course a dog steps on a spring box, which releases a tennis ball. The dog must take the ball and run back through the course and cross the finish line before the next dog is released. The first team that has all four dogs finish the course wins.

# DOGGIE DRAG RACING

## Flyball gives dogs and their human pals time to play together

BY RICHARD GUZMÁN  
THE DESERT SUN

Two-year-old Lexi, an Australian cattle dog, and Booger, a 2-year-old Basenji-Shepherd mix, stand shoulder-to-shoulder, shaking anxiously in anticipation of a race ahead.

Their owners wave chew-toys in front of the dog's faces. They yell "ready," holding the vowels for a few seconds longer to get the dogs even more excited about the race.

Impatient and hyper, Lexi and Booger lunge forward, making it a little more difficult for Palm Springs resident Kyle Caudill and Palm Desert resident Sally Frankel to hold back each dog. And they're off.

Like tiny four-legged rockets, they fly over hurdles, speed down the straightaway and bite into the chew toys, their reward after the race.

"This is doggie drag racing, this is doggie NASCAR," said Brenda Mejia, Lexi's owner and founder of 2 Fast 4 Paws, the desert's first and so far, only Flyball team, which is training to enter its first tournament this fall.

In the sport, four-dog teams compete in relay races. The dogs race down a 51-foot-long course and jump over four hurdles set by the height of the smallest dog on the team.

At the end of the course a dog steps on a spring box, which releases a tennis ball. The dog must take the ball and run back through the course and cross the finish line before the next dog is released. The first team with the first four dogs to finish the course wins.

"The dogs can bark their heads off, run like nuts



Booger, a Basenji-Shepherd mix, has a nice jump over a hurdle during the training for flyball competition.

May, California regional director for the North American Flyball Association, the sport's sanctioning body.

Flyball started in California in the 1970s after an appearance on the "Tonight Show" by Herbert Wagner, a dog enthusiast who showed off the trick to Johnny Carson, May said.

"People picked up on it," May said. "But it has evolved. It's much faster now," he said.

There are 340 Flyball clubs with 1,330 teams in the United States, 10 percent of them in California.

Some of the top teams compete on TV shows carried on channels like Animal Planet, May said.

The current national record for the course is 15 seconds, he said.

"Any breed of dog can do it and it gives you an opportunity to get out there and have fun with your dog," he said.

"I love the teamwork, the dogs are having fun and I get to make friends," said Rebeka Caudill, Kyle's wife and Booger's co-owner.

She also owns Matches, the team's smallest dog.

As Booger and Lexi finish their race, other dogs on the team bark inside their kennels, anxiously waiting for their turn to race.

"When they hear that 'ready' sound, it gets them revved-up," said Palm Springs resident Sharon Hadley, owner of Hoover, a 2-year-old Australian cattle dog who likes to chase coyotes when she's not racing.

The Palm Springs team has no illusions about breaking the speed record yet. With them it's all about fun.

"I would be happy with 25 seconds," Mejia said.

The 2 Fast 4 Paws team is in the early stages of developing the dogs' racing skills.

The team has yet to time their dogs on a complete race since some of the dogs are still learning how to retrieve the ball from the spring box.

"I'm just happy if my dogs are having a blast," said Mejia.

and it's OK. It's a lot of fun ... they have so much energy when they do it, it's like they're going to blow up," Mejia said.

With a background in other dog sports like Frisbee throwing and agility, Mejia started the team last fall. So far it has five human members with 10 dogs.

"It's very popular and very competitive," said Doug

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