

# Balingup Small Farm Field Day

## NZ TUX Sheep Dog Challenge

### 18 April 2026



**Welcome to a fun day of demonstration, learning, participation and laughter!**

While we aim to provide an entertaining experience for spectators, we are committed to promoting the safety and welfare of sheep, dogs, handlers and participants.

Visitors are reminded that the dogs used during the display are working dogs. Please ask the owner's consent prior to approaching a dog, particularly if they are tethered. Parents, please always supervise children.

A sincere thank you to **Steve and Liz Slater and family** who trust in our livestock handling skills and have kindly provided their lovely sheep for today's event.

#### **What You'll See Today**

The first part of today is designed to "train" our lovely sheep.

Our more experienced dogs and handlers will work the sheep calmly using blocking techniques and giving the sheep space to think. This helps them learn to walk quietly around the course with respect for the dogs and handlers in this new environment.

Once the sheep have accepted the "scary" new situation, you will see some of our more novice dogs and handlers continue the process under guidance. They will be educating the sheep, learning themselves, and teaching their dogs new skills.

When the sheep are settled, we will invite volunteers from the crowd (three at a time – one handler and two "dogs") to try moving the sheep through the obstacles **WITHOUT DOGS** under the guidance of experienced handlers!

This is always full of fun, laughter, and a great way to understand how sheepdogs place themselves in exactly the right position to move sheep.

We hope you will join in.

#### **A Brief History of Sheepdog Trials**

- The first recorded sheepdog trials occurred in New Zealand, Australia and Wales between 1867 and 1873.
- They began as practical and competitive tests of real farm skills.
- Early trials often grew from friendly "matches" between neighbours to prove who had the best working dog.
- Trials became a "shop window" for breeding stock, helping farmers identify dogs with exceptional intelligence and control.

- They were commonly part of agricultural shows and later became important community social events and fundraisers, including for Legacy during World War II.
- Traditional New Zealand trials require massive hill courses, which are increasingly difficult to find and maintain.

### **What is the NZ Tux Yarding Challenge?**

The **TUX Yarding Challenge** and **TUX Handy Dog** events are modern adaptations of traditional sheepdog trials.

Established around 2005, they were designed to:

- Bridge the gap between "technical" trialling and "practical" farming and reflect the practical, everyday work required on modern New Zealand farms;
- Focus on yarding, drafting and close-quarters manoeuvring;
- Be run on very small areas (even a quarter acre or indoors);
- Allow more competitors to compete in a shorter time-frame; and
- Be more easily hosted at agricultural shows and community events.

Purina TUX dog food has sponsored sheepdog trialling in NZ for over 57 years. The course is named in their honour, and three of the obstacles spell **T - U - X**.

### **The Two Classes**

#### **TUX Yarding Challenge**

- Focuses on the final and most difficult part of sheep work — penning;
- Tests a dog's force, control and patience in tight spaces;
- Primarily for Heading dogs.

#### **TUX Handy Dog**

A utility test where dogs perform practical farm tasks such as:

- Driving sheep through a complex series of gates or obstacles;
- Working in a traditional herding style with the handler;
- Loading sheep into a trailer or crossing a mock bridge.

### **How the Yarding Challenge is Judged**

In an official competition each competitor starts with:

3 sheep  
100 points  
11 minutes

Ideally the sheep should move calmly with continuous flow in straight lines around the course. Points are deducted for imperfect work.

The handler may assist the dog but must not touch the sheep.

## **The Course**

### **The Gap**

The trial begins when the sheep pass through the Gap.

The handler must also pass through the Gap.

Dog and handler drive the sheep toward the Bridge.

Penalties apply if the handler gets in front of the lead sheep or moves backwards.

### **The Bridge**

Once all three sheep cross into the free working zone (marked by cones), the dog and handler may enter.

The dog may head the sheep if needed.

The sheep must go over the Bridge — not around it.

The handler can walk over the bridge to clear the sheep.

Dog and handler drive the sheep toward the T.

### **The T**

Once all three sheep cross into the free working zone (marked by cones), the dog and handler may enter.

After negotiating the T, the handler must follow through the obstacle.

Failure to do so results in being called back with a large penalty.

The handler may now choose to drive or pull the sheep from this point on.

### **The U**

The dog must hold the sheep in the U while the handler moves to the gate and opens it outwards.

The handler must continue to hold the gate while the dog forces the sheep through the gate.

If the sheep escape back the way they entered the U, the gate must be shut and the sheep re-collected.

### **The Maltese Cross (X)**

Sheep must:

1. Enter from the U direction
2. Travel straight through the obstacle to exit without deviation in either direction
3. Go left
4. Re-enter from the other arm of the X and travel straight through without deviation to exit toward the pen

Any incorrect path must be reworked correctly.

### **The Pen**

When all three sheep are completely inside the pen, the judge calls “Right!”

The handler shuts the gate to complete the run.

**We hope you enjoy learning about the skill, patience, and partnership between sheep, dogs and handlers — and that you’ll join in the fun!**