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Gypsy's nose guides Chontel to top award

A DYNAMIC duo from Junee beat elite competition from the RAAF, Australian Army, Australian Federal Police and NSW Police at the Australian Service Dog Trials.

Chontel Barber and border collie Gypsy represented Junee Correctional Centre and claimed the perpetual trophy in substance detection.

More than 40 handlers and their dogs representing nine different agencies competed at the trials, with Ms Barber and Gypsy the only competitors from the GEO Group.

Handlers competed in five fields, tracking, bite work, offender location within a building, obedience and agility and substance detection, and were judged by highly-regarded dog trainer Steve Austin.

"Over half of the handlers competed in substance detection, which ranged from narcotics, to accelerant, explosives and cadaver – deceased persons," Ms Barber said.

"With detection you had to pick three searches of the five being assessed, those were person, box, room, vehicle and field.

"I chose person, box and room.

"Each search was scored out of 100 with a total score of 300."

In a huge achievement for 10-year-old Gypsy and Ms Barber, the pair secured perfect scores for two of the categories.

"Gypsy's first run was box and she

located the odour on the first pass," she said.

"The judge's assistant confused herself as to where the odour was, so the judge checked the box that gypsy indicated to and confirmed that she was correct and she scored 100.

"Gypsy's third run was a person search.

"It was up to the handler to line the people up where they wanted them and we had a five-minute time period. I lined the people up and started the search with Gypsy

"She started her low search and at about the fifth person in the line she stopped and put her nose up around the waist area of that person. Gypsy proceeded to indicate and we scored 100/100 for that search too."

As well as taking home the top prize, Ms Barber and Gypsy attracted plenty of positive attention over the course of the two-day competition held at Kirkconnell in Sydney.

Fellow competitors and judges alike were shocked to learn the attentive and clever border collie was 10 years old.

"No one could believe that Gypsy is 10 and how well she is still working," Ms Barber said.

"A competitor came to me and said, 'She goes all right for a pup.' When I told him she was 10 he couldn't believe it."



DYNAMIC DUO: Junee Correctional Centre handler Chontel Barber and Gypsy the border collie have won a prestigious trophy at the Australian Service Dog Trials.

Picture: The GEO Group