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DOG Sport

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AQUAGILITY

Sporting Good Fun For Exercise And Competition



By Deborah Lee Miller-Riley

The really important things in life are not material; they are the precious intangible moments in life that bring joy and satisfaction to the soul. Such moments overflow when you work with a water-loving dog, eye to eye, shoulder to shoulder in a graceful, fluid expanse. You cannot help but to inhale the spiritual nature of the moment and smile.

Whether your goal is to train for exercise and greater canine awareness or to exhibit your dog's talent at a watersports test, training Novice Team Swim behaviors can serve to enrich and deepen your teamwork and skill level.

Karen Stiff-Carroll of New Jersey has water-loving Rottweilers, Jerome and Takoda who also work in Obedience, Agility, Tracking, Herding and Rally. Karen claims swimming with her dogs gave her a whole new perspective. Training a leash-free dog at eye level tends to change your perception of real control and cooperation. "I think team-swim tasks are a must-do for anyone who wants to solidify their relationship with their dog. I truly feel our water work experience paved the way for all our successes in other sports, because success in the water relies heavily on having a great relationship with your dog."

New Jersey watersports instructor, judge, and Aussie owner, Lisa Pattison, says, Swimming enhances my connection with my dogs. I literally "see" what they are experiencing. I am more aware of their breathing and focus. Training in the water can test cues and reinforcers in the purest sense, because the water covers familiar body language. I like that in the water, the playing field for learning is leveled for teams. Both the dog and handler are in an environment that has no previous history. You have a clean slate to build on. You reap what you sow. You accept your dog's psyche and create moments together that foster learning and trust. The relationship feeds on itself and you soon realize you are a team in the water.

Mary Nottingham of New York brought her 10-month-old male Portuguese Water Dog, Kinsale, to the water last summer. Her decision to come was not based solely on the fact that water work is a healthy choice for a growing pup, nor because it is part of the PWD's heritage. Mary came because she finds the water a highly pleasurable place to focus on the training needs of her spirited adolescent. Sun and splash fun are shared pleasures that provide bonding moments while building a team foundation. Mary is also quick to say having a

Photos by Deborah Lee Miller-Riley



relaxed and quiet pup for the ride home isn't so bad either.

How is team swimming different from recreational swimming?

Team Swimming is the mastership of useful and regulated watersports behaviors. It asks the dog to be patient, careful and respectful around a vulnerable swimming person. It asks the dog to be confident, self-disciplined and cooperative with his/her human partner as they intentionally swim together over a course. The dog may be required to discriminate target labels and to obey a swimming handler's directional and proximity demands. Team Swimming demands both partners develop additional audible and visual signals for near and far teamwork, as familiar body language is often submerged and words can become muffled in the splash. It asks the team to accustom themselves to swimming with safety gear, like life jackets, and to become disciplined and respectful of other teams sharing the swim area.

All Dogs Welcome

Don't think that just dogs bred for waterwork can pass the entrance level team swim test. These pio-

neer teams are the first in their breed/mix to pass the Team Swim:

Afghan Hound, Victor and Cynthia Fox
Australian Cattle Dog, Kitty and Jane Killion
Australian Shepherd, Lacey and Lisa Pattison
Australian Terrier, Ben and Nancy Wentworth
Belgian Malinois, Vino and Sheila Booth
Border Collie, Beau and Pam Dennison
Boston Terrier, Mr. Peabody and Lisa Norris
German Shepherd, Nova and Sheila Booth
Irish Red Setter, Derby and Marjorie Lineweber
Irish Red & White Setter, Fyssher and Marjorie Lineweber
Irish Wolfhound Mix, Briar and Kate Connick
Pug, Clarabelle and Carol Yonan
Rottweiler, Takoda and Karen Stiff-Carroll
Schapendoes, Guardian and Kim Parker
Scottish Terrier, Leeza and Kathy Foley
Vizsla, Casey and Marianne Megan

The Novice Team Swim Test

The Novice Team Swim test, is a start-here task that exemplifies basic control, water safety and teamwork. This test is part of the Canine Water Sports – Team Swim Work category, consisting of

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Swim test behaviors may include, towing, retrieving, delivering and weaving in between water markers

all tasks where handlers direct their dogs from a swimming or standing position in the water and swim with their dog for a portion of the exercise. Swim test behaviors may include, towing, retrieving, delivering and weaving in between water markers. Dogs must swim patterns around swimmers, have directional and distance control around markers and boats, make platform climbs & jumps. Shore stopovers and 35 to 100 ft. recalls from shore to sea add to the challenge.

In the Novice Team Swim, the dog is required to:

1. Stay: keep four paws in a 6 x 6 shore-based starter's box, until called by the handler who leaves the dog and moves to a marker, 35 feet from shore.
2. Come: go directly to the handler when called.
3. Circle: paddle around the handler for 30 seconds, while the handler remains in place.
4. Team Swim: swim together out to the 60 line, where they will face four water markers set on a parallel line (with the shore), 20 ft apart.
5. Follow Course Direction: swim together, in a zig-zag pattern between the markers.
6. Go to Shore: return together to the starter's box.

Like all CWS tasks, the Novice Team Swim is judged against two performance aspects, technical and presentational. The technical aspect, includes accomplishing the physical demands of the task within the rules and regulations. The presentational aspect includes sportsman-like behavior, priority for safety and the overall sense of joy the dog and the handler project during their performance. The team must pass both the technical and the presentational aspects of the task to qualify. Passing the Novice Team

Swim test earns the team a water Merit and qualifies them for entry into the other categories of watersports.

Two-Dog Team Swim Test

Erica Etchason of New Jersey was the first handler to complete the Double Dog Team Swim Task. She and her two Newfoundland Dogs, Molly and Fozzie, beautifully and successfully completed the technical and presentational aspects of the Novice Team Swim. Both giant dogs simultaneously performed the Novice Team Swim with Erica to earn this merit. It was a lovely exhibition of training, cooperation and joyful teamwork.

Her accomplishment demonstrates doubling the effort can bring you twice the pleasure of success.

Tow and Slalom Team Swim Test

This fun test incorporates a handler-tow and an agility challenge. The test requires the dog to:

1. Stay: keep four paws in the starter's box while the handler swims to the 100 ft line.
2. Come: go immediately to the handler when called.
3. Tow: tow the handler, by a harness line, to the 60 ft line.
4. Team Swim: to the to four slalom markers spaced 3 feet apart on a perpendicular line between 35 and 45 feet from the shoreline.
5. Weave: swim alone, between the markers in a zig-zag pattern
6. Go To Shore: while the handler remains at the 35 ft. line the dog returns and waits in the starter's box until the handler, who waits for a count of 10, returns to the box.

The Advanced Team Swim Test

This test expands upon the basic demands in the Tow and Slalom Team Swim and adds greater duration, endurance, course directional control and impressive distance control. The task has eleven segments with four stations. The stations are: starter's box, boater, slalom markers and two swimmers. The test requires the dog to:

1. Stay: keep four paws in the starter's box while the handler swims to the 100 ft line.
2. Come: go immediately to the handler when called.
3. Team Swim: with the handler, swim to the 60 ft line.
4. Circle: upon direction of the handler, swim alone around a boater and return to handler.
5. Team Swim: to the four slalom markers spaced 3 feet apart on a perpendicular line between 35 and 45 feet from the shoreline.
6. Weave: upon direction of the handler, alone, swim a zig-zag pattern between 4 markers.
7. Go to shore: swim alone to shore and wait in the starter's box for the count of 10.
8. Come: return to the handler waiting at the

35 ft line.

9. Swim: go with the handler to within 6 feet of two swimmers spaced 10 feet apart.

10. Figure-8: upon direction of the handler independently swim a figure-8 pattern around the swimmers.

11. Return to shore: with the handler return to the starter's box to complete the test.

Several teams have come close to passing this test, but no team has qualified in the Advanced Team Swim yet. You and your dog could be the first to accomplish the Advanced Team Swim or one of the new aquagility games being created by Canine Water Sports for water-loving dogs. Make the splash difference with your dog and bring home soul-wanting joy and satisfaction. **DS**

Deborah Lee Miller Riley is the founder and director of Canine Water Sports, a sports organization dedicated to providing swim challenges for all kinds of dogs. She is also a watersports competitor, instructor and judge for Canine Water Sports and the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America. www.caninewatersports.com

Erica Etchason of New Jersey was the first handler to complete the Double Dog Team Swim Task.

Why We Train ...

To minimize fears and maximize trust.

To ensure safety and freedom through cooperation.

To increase confidence through manners and domestic order.

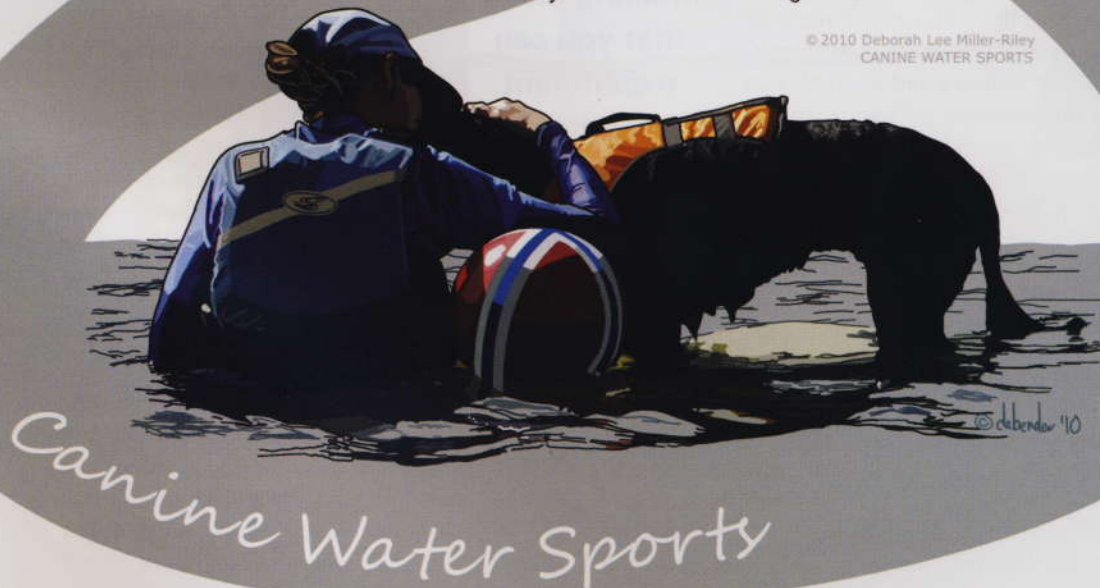
To provide enrichment and play for emotional wellness.

To nourish mental and physical growth by facilitating challenges.

To strengthen healthy social behavior and guide innate ability.

To bear witness to moments of canine brilliance.

To share an awareness from which love grows.



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CANINE WATER SPORTS