

Why use a canine floatation device in watersports training?

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A canine floatation device, also known as a life jacket, is most commonly used to provide safety for a dog who does not swim well or for a dog who might fall into dangerous water. Wearing a life jacket ensures that, if the dog becomes helpless in the water, the dog's body will remain at the surface for rescue or recovery.



Watersports training is done in a controlled environment, close to shore and most of the time the dog is a very good swimmer. So, why should a dog with swim ability wear a canine life jacket during training?

A life jacket can build a stronger dog with greater stamina. While the dog is swimming, the canine life jacket creates water resistance. The greater the dog's swim intensity, the greater the water resistance, and thus a superior exercise experience for the dog. Appropriate conditioning with this water resistance helps to build canine stamina, strength and endurance.

A life jacket may also offer enough water resistance to slow an over-exuberant dog so the dog can relax and connect with the handler.

Many trainers are excited to witness how much more energy, endurance and speed their dog exhibits in a water test without a life jacket, after being fully trained in a life jacket.

A life jacket doesn't float the dog, it adds external buoyancy when needed. When the dog's swim propulsion slows due to the need to focus on handler instruction, take a treat, retrieve or deliver an article, or due to fatigue, the life jacket provides just the right level of external buoyancy to benefit. The life jacket supports the dog when the dog's natural buoyancy moves toward zero. Natural buoyancy is affected by a dog's muscle to fat ratio, plus lung air volume and propulsion (paddling). Some dogs are more buoyant because they have the right balance of fat to muscle, have large lung air capacity and good leg length with wide paws for propulsion. Dogs with less natural buoyancy work harder in the water to stay at the surface. Adding a life jacket to swim sessions will offer external buoyancy when the dog needs it.



A life jacket supports canine confidence while the dog is learning. The life jacket's support can help a dog feel more confident in the water whether the dog is just learning how to swim or is learning advanced water skills. Dogs who are less buoyant in the water or who are processing information from their handler and trying to maintain a swim posture may worry and stress more about their safety than dogs who feel secure about their ability and buoyancy. Tension affects muscles, breathing and buoyancy. Dogs who worry will seek an exit from the water, be less able to focus on the handler or the behavior, appear unwilling or disinterested and may fatigue quickly. Adding a life



jacket to canine training is a good strategy for buoying up swim confidence and succeeding at swift, joyful learning.

A life jacket can extend swim duration and increase canine focus.

Dogs who train in a life jacket tend to stave off fatigue for longer periods of time and are better able to remain focused on the training goal and the handler for longer periods of time.

A life jacket can offer emotional and physical protection. When multiple dogs are active in the water a life jacket can protect an impressionable pup or inexperienced dog from an unwanted and unexpected submersion. There is always one rude dog who will climb on another swimmer's back or who throws a paw on a passing head -- dunking the dog. For some dogs, this kind of negative experience can create water or other avoidance behaviors that negatively affect future training goals.



When platform jump training begins, the life jacket can minimize submersion upon impact with the water. This reduces the risk of a harmful experience and boosts jump confidence.

Even the best of swimmers can drown from fatigue or a traumatic event that renders the dog helpless. A life jacket can reduce the risks of a dog drowning or suffering fear and panic from a submersion experience.

A life jacket protects your investment. Life jackets protect your financial, time, energy, training and emotional investment in your dog. It protects against risks of submersion, physical or emotional injury, and loss. Dogs extensively trained, conditioned and used in professional rescue work are suited up in safety gear, including life jackets for dogs on or entering the water. You love your dog and appreciate all that you have invested in your dog, right? Why risk loss or injury by not using safety equipment?



Get the best quality life jacket you can afford for your dog.

Canine life jackets differ in fit, comfort, durability, visibility, and price. Because dogs vary in size and shape, it is important to look for a life jacket that offers the best support, durability and comfort for your dog. Here are some tips for your search:

- Measure your dog's girth, length of rib, total length of back, and the dog's neck. Look for a life jacket that is sold by a sizing chart defined by canine body measurements. Avoid a brand that sells by breed size or weight.
- Ideally, the saddle portion of the life jacket should end around the last rib of the dog's rib cage and should not interfere with the dog's range of motion in the rear.
- Straps should be durable and not extend past the dog's rib cage into the stomach or so far up as to interfere with the dog's leg and shoulder movement. If you have a long coated breed, avoid large sections of velcro as it traps and pulls hair.
- Look for a life jacket that offers the least amount of pressure and interference with front leg and shoulder range of motion.
- The saddle should have a handle strong enough to lift your dog off the ground. The handle should also be positioned so that the dog's head does not tip down when you lift. This is important if you have to rescue your dog and pull it up onto a boat or dock.
- If fitted correctly, the dog should not slip out of the life jacket when lifted off the ground by the handle.
- Look for a life jacket that appears made for an athlete. Avoid life jackets that look like a blanket on the dog, covering the shoulders and all the way to the base of the tail. Long bulky jackets are not designed for swim work -- they are designed to just keep the dog floating for rescue.
- Life jackets with high visibility in color and reflective material may aid in recovery if the dog swims too far from handler control or the dog falls into risky water.