

AGILITY • OBEDIENCE • FLYBALL • RALLY-O • TRICKS • AND MORE!

DOG Sport

Volume 8 • Number 4 • July/August 2009

Cross Training
Your Dog For
Performance Events

Learning
Glove Exercises

Rally Newbies,
What's Your Sign?

Watersports:
Improve Your
Summer Fun, Health & Teamwork.

Get Pet Happy with
Martha Stewart's
New Petkeeping Website!

SPECIAL EDITION

FOCUS
Obedience
&
Rally

Ringside With
Karen Pryor

July/August 2009

\$6.95



0 74470 70348 8

Watersports:

Improve Your Summer Fun, Health and Teamwork.



When Pugs, Australian Shepherds, Corgis, Scottish Terriers and Afghan Hounds began gathering for organized water play, it was like a stone skipping across the surface of a pond, a wonderment that draws the eye. The plunk that caused the ripples in this story was, at first, the exciting realization that different kinds of pooches possess the potential for puddle plash. Then owners discovered that splashing for recreation was

not the only reason to hoist a flag. These Herding, Terrier, Non-sporting, Hound and Toy breeds had true sea dog potential. The level of zest and ability they displayed for useful water work appeared to rival that of the legendary Newfoundland and Portuguese Water Dog. Not only could they swim, but Pugs were paddling their board surfing owners back to shore, Bull Terriers were rescuing occupied row boats with a tow, Afghan Hounds were plunging under-

water and Corgis were leaping off water platforms to make deliveries. Wannabe watersports teams started showing up at splash classes to train for the wet fun. By 1999, Splash Camp participants decided the world-of-dogs was ready for a competitive sport that would bring recognition to the natural and trained abilities of ALL water-loving dogs.

This desire founded Canine Water Sports, (CWS), an organization dedicated to registering, testing, recording and

Photography by: Deborah Lee Miller-Riley

awarding watersports recognition to all kinds of H2O dogs for a variety of water based behaviors. By 2003, the first any-breed water tests were dipping into the summer waters of a private lake in Fairfield County, Connecticut. The first of its kind event boasted handlers from four states who exhibited a wonderful variety of breeds and breed mixes who did more than dabble in swim courses, retrieves, tows, submersions and courier work. People & their rare water dogs were now hooked on the splash FUNDamentals.

work. Unlike the other two-water division, Water Games and Service Titles, qualification in Singles is not based on speed or mastership of a collection of tasks. A single task test evaluates canine self-control, conditioning, education, and the desire & ability to work off lead, eye to eye with their handler, as in a team swim, or to work over 100 feet away from the handler and the safety of land, as in many of the recovery or delivery tasks. The tests also require the dog to have a vocabulary that includes cues for course directions (waterward, left, right,

ability to do the task. The tasks are not graded by difficulty, but a novice task in any category tends to have lower expectations for canine self-control, behavior complexity and stamina demands. The key to eligibility for all the categories is passing the Novice Team Swim Task. The Novice Team Swim demonstrates the dog's ability to stay on shore until called by the handler, willingness to swim to the handler, swim around the stationary handler for 30 seconds, closely follow the handler away from shore, swim through a marked swim course



“The first of its kind event boasted handlers from four states who exhibited a wonderful variety of breeds and breed mixes.**”**

The innovation of quality flotation devices for dogs made it possible for any dog, with a heart for water, to safely and competitively ride the big wave with the recognized water breeds. However, it was Canine Water Sports who fostered water versatility and breed diversity in the sport. They did it by challenging teams to earn watersports recognition one task at a time. Because some dogs excel early in one area of watersports before another, the opportunity to earn early recognition inspired teams to continue learning and earning. Single Tasks, one of three divisions in CWS, was the first to open for competition. The Single Tasks Division is composed of seven categories of water challenges; Team Swim, Retrieve, Deliver, Tow, Underwater, Water Scent, and Boatwork. The tasks in these categories are designed to exhibit versatile, useful and disciplined team-

come, circle around, weave between, submerge, jump off, follow, stop), target discrimination (boat, shore, swimmer, marker), actions (deliver, retrieve, carry, push, pull, tow, locate & alert), article discrimination (visual, scent, directed, labeled) and the ability to work with a variety of articles (different by size, shape, material, weight, scent and color) in changing environments defined by distance, duration and distractions. Just imagine the possible behavioral combinations that can be created from these variables and you can see why the lists of behaviors under the seven categories are expanding every year.

Teams are able to earn a merit award for each task they pass and may continue to earn all the merits in a specific category to earn a certificate award. A team may also select behaviors from any category, in any order, based on their dog's

about 60 ft long and 60 ft off shore and then return to shore with the handler. After passing the Novice Team Swim the handler may attempt any task under any category in what ever order the handler desires.

Recognizing a watersports candidate starts with an assessment of a dog's attraction to water. Water attraction can be seen in dogs as young as five weeks of age and is identified by the intensity and duration of three traits. Those traits are curiosity, exploration and playfulness. Each dog will exhibit degrees of these traits when first introduced to water. If a dog has had prior exposure to water, pleasant or unpleasant, that history will effect how the dog perceives the water environment during the assessment. Water attraction occurs in any kind of dog. A dog who is born with good buoyancy and propulsion capacity



may have great swim potential, but without water attraction a dog's structure has little value. Water attraction can be obvious to subtle and indicate innate to zero levels.

Innate attraction, confident:

Dogs with strong innate attraction to water are the dogs who blow bubbles in their water bowl, insist on bailing out the toilet bowl one paw-full at a time, lie down in garden puddles or attempt to join their people in the tub or shower. When shown a large body of water for the first time, they wade in and begin swimming without any encouragement and they often refuse to leave the water. Given unlimited access they would prefer to be in or around the water most of their waking moments.

Innate attraction, hyper-sensitive:

Dogs born with a cautious nature may possess innate water attraction, but fail to show it initially. And, a confident dog may surprise you by showing caution when she reaches buoyancy. Floating for

the first time can make a sensitive person or dog feel very vulnerable.

Vulnerability is not something a dog, who acts like she is in charge, wants to experience. Fear and anxiety inhibit exploration and playfulness and an evaluator needs to recognize the difference between suppression and a true dislike for swimming. A cautious dog may display anxiety initially, halting exploration, but her innate curiosity (water attraction) will eventually draw her back to or further into the water. Some of these dogs do fine after several pleasant and safe exposures to water, but they must have owners who allow them a choice to explore and respect their concerns. Social pressure may also increase anxiety and create suspicion for an owner's focus on the water. Owners should avoid attempting to lure or guide the dog into the water, but instead offer calm praise for any interest the dog shows in the water. Any degree of playfulness in the water is a good sign. Water play is one of the best predictors of a future water dog.

Social attraction, confident, biddable, but low water attraction

Some dogs may appear confident in and around the water, but display little exploration or interest in the water. These dogs will follow other dogs in or gladly follow their encouraging owner into the water. However, minus social encouragement and given the choice to leave these dogs will leave the water in pursuit of more stimulating activity. If these dogs have a strong retrieve drive they will appear to have great zest as they charge into the water for a tossed ball. It is not the water that attracts them, it is the opportunity to chase or to socialize that keeps them in the water. These dogs can make good candidates for watersports, because they are confident and biddable.

No attraction, the faithful landlubber

There will be a few dogs that clearly say NO to water. The dog that says NO may drink water from a bowl or walk on wet grass, but a large body of water has no interest to them. They do not appear

fearful. You can lead them to water, but their mind and their eyes are always looking at what's happening on land. Cats could be dancing on the water and these dogs will yawn and walk off to sniff a tree.

Aversion or medical reasons not to swim.

Some dogs, because of emotional or physical limitations are better candidates for other sports and activities. Cautious dogs with no water attraction may be so suspicious of water that the training time and effort for the minor gains these dogs are willing to offer is not cost effective. Dogs who have been traumatized by a water experience, (falling in, thrown in, near drowning) to the point that they will not approach water, may be better off in other sports too. Active water dogs who suddenly lose interest in swimming should be examined by a veterinarian. Bacteria, toxins and parasitic born ills are possi-

bilities for dogs who drink or play in water. Illnesses or hidden injuries can fatigue a dog and cause a disinterest in swimming. Dogs with permanent disabilities need not be ruled out simply because of the disability. However, owners should consult their Veterinarian to determine appropriate-ness and guidelines.

Dogs with permanent disabilities are eligible for CWS testing if the dog can perform the behavior without significant alterations to the test site or articles.

When awakened, water attraction can open up an incredibly fun opportunity to improve & promote health, strength, and aerobic capacity, without the same wear and tear on weight bearing joints as other sports. It can also deliver team enrichment, broaden skills, expand communication and carve a deeper meaning into the words happiness, respect and connection

Watersports is a great compliment to

other sports, especially Agility. Whether used for recreation, socialization or to achieve new competitive goals, water-sports training builds versatile teamwork, maintains and improves conditioning, maintains mental sharpness with new vocabulary and skills, builds social & professional connections and offers a really cool activity in the hottest days of summer.

Are you ready to dive in to water-sports? Check out www.CanineWaterSports.com for more information. **DS**

Deborah Lee Miller-Riley is the founder and director of Canine Water Sports. She is a watersports instructor and a watersports judge for CWS and the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America. She is a retired Norwalk, CT. Police sergeant and has been a professional dog trainer for over ten years. She lives in Connecticut with her husband and a crew of Portuguese Water Dogs. Her email is K9WaterFun@aol.com

Splash Safety Tips by Canine Water Sports



Five minutes of swimming is equivalent to twenty minutes of running - be observant for signs of fatigues. Fatigue is a leading cause of sports injuries. Help prevent injuries by setting gradual and reasonable goals for distance, intensity and duration.



Life jackets keep you and your dog safe and help build confidence and endurance. Wear life jackets because you care enough to be careful with someone you love.



Buoy up confidence and trust by gifting your dog the choice to participate in water adventures or not. The real power to influence or direct a dog shall not be gained through a device or a demand, but through seeking the dog's choice to cooperate and benefit from human leadership.



Deborah Lee Miller-Riley, Founder & Director
www.CanineWaterSports.com
A leash and collar free team sport.