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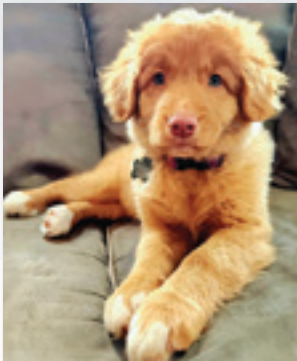
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the beginners issue



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Owner: Hailey Lewis
Photographer: Lisa Jo Schiele

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A revolution in dog show fashion

On Your Mark, Get Set ...

There was that time, long ago, when I took puppy Emily into the rally ring, just to see how she would do. We came to the first sign, *Sit*.

“Is she sitting, or ... ?” the judge asked me. “Or. Definitely or,” I reluctantly replied. We were excused from the ring.

Then there was that time, a bit later, when we entered our first agility trial. I took her leash off, barked “STAY!” and walked out to the first obstacle. She held her start-line stay ... for three seconds. Then she took off, dashing in wild circles, bringing her 100-pound body so close to the judge I feared for his safety.

We were excused from the ring.

“Beginners” is our theme to kick off 2024.

The issue is packed with personal accounts and advice to help newcomers avoid those humiliating “excused from the ring” moments. Our training columnist ([page 12](#)) offers tips to make the most of Obedience 101. On [page 29](#), we visit a 4-H club turning youngsters into prize-winning dog trainers. There’s guidance from the top on dog show etiquette ([page 33](#)), battling jitters ([page 36](#)), and, yes, what to wear ([page 48](#)).

We hope these articles help you navigate your dog sports entry and that someday you’ll have dozens of rosettes and countless happy memories, as Emi and I do. And remember, whenever you step into a ring, whether it’s trial one or 100, you’re always a beginner with a chance to start fresh and make things better.

So now, let’s begin.

Happy trialing,

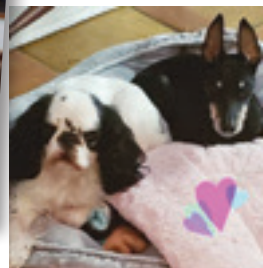
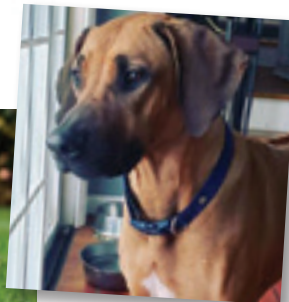
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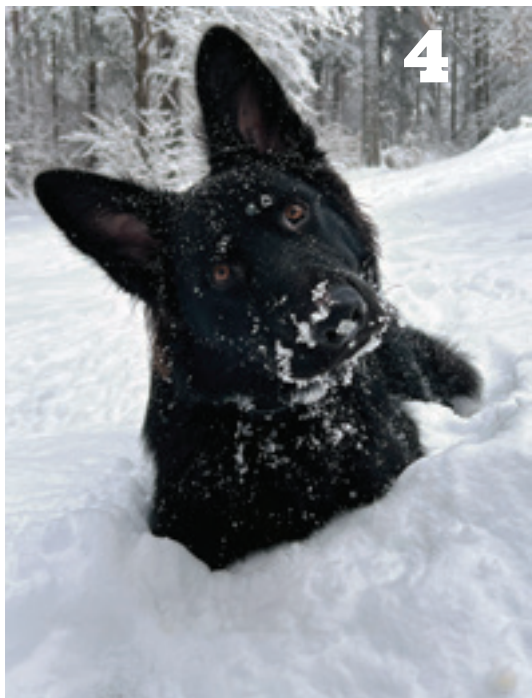
3



Snow Problem!

Follow our readers' dogs as they show us how to love the flurries.

1. **DAKOTA**, Belgrade, ME
2. **DUKE**, Dallas, TX
3. **CLAIRE**, Lancaster, NY
4. **BODHI**, Eleva, WI
5. **GRACIE**, Lynn, MA
6. **KENNEDY**, Center, KY
7. **LINK**, Tulsa, OK
8. **JESS**, Killingworth, CT

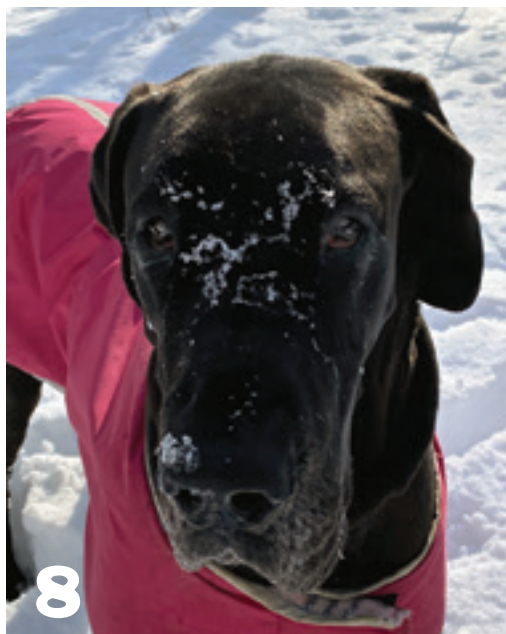


Send Us Your Snaps!

We'd love to see *your* family dog. Email your digital photos (high-resolution, please) to familydog@akc.org. Please include "Your Family Dog Photo" in the subject line, as well as your dog's name and city and state of residence.

- Only previously unpublished photos will be selected for publication.
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Rosie and Jarabin danced their way to victory in the Honky Tonk Cafe.

Top Drawer Trick Dogs

Paula Jarabin, of Santa Barbara, California, was not looking for a canine addition to her family when she agreed to help transport strays for a local rescue.

Then her sunglasses fell off her head.

A shaggy little Schnauzer-mix jumped in to help.

“Rosie picked them up and looked at me, and I knew she was something special,” Jarabin recalls.

That night, Rosie had a new home with Jarabin and her two dogs.

Fast forward six years, Jarabin and the sunglass snatcher have become a winning team, capturing first place in the 2023 AKC National Trick Dog Competition. The routine—“The Honky Tonk Cafe Talent Show”—was a beautiful example of art imitating life in which a saucy little stray wanders in and wows the audience with her skills.

“Rosie’s routine included advanced tricks with her handler at a distance,” says Mary Burch, AKC Family Dog director. “Rosie’s eagerness to work demonstrates the exceptional bond that can result from

training. AKC is so proud of the AKC Elite Performer Trick Dogs and their dedicated, skilled handlers.”

The two finalists were:

■ Elizabeth Berthold and her Russell Terrier, Cricket, from East Patchogue, New York. Their routine, “Puppy Love,” took Cricket through an elaborate wedding ceremony and reception, complete with guests, flower arrangements, and a cake.



To see Rosie and Jarabin in their winning performance, click youtube.com/watch?v=Q5Mkbmr6T8M



To see finalist Cricket and Berthold, click youtube.com/watch?v=X7KLdnF-qTM

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OWNERS



To see Mindy and Paulman, click youtube.com/watch?v=S9Sxyz4SHVo

These were all the product of Berthold's wildly inventive mind. Burch calls her "a master of homemade creative prompts."

■ April Paulman and her Bulldog, Mindy (aka Agent Hit Girl), from Shelbyville, Indiana, went on a "Mission Impossibull" to rescue an injured informant in Gotham City. Her mission, which she accepted, involved walking a tightrope.

In their six-minute performance, Jarabin narrated a poem that told a story, a requirement of trick titling at the Elite level. Rosie twirled, weaved between her partner's feet, circled backward on her hind legs, performed flying toe kicks, and played a piano.

Many of their moves looked like they were dancing, and with good reason. Jarabin had first planned to train Rosie in agility, following in the paw prints of her other dog, Riley, who went to the agility nationals twice.

But that didn't go quite as planned. "Rosie's concept was that you knock as many bars as possible," Jarabin recalls.

So she tried another activity—musical freestyle, often called "doggy dancing." Freestyle is a challenging sport, a combination of heelwork and tricks performed to music.

"So I was teaching her tricks all along," she says.

To learn more about teaching your dog to do tricks, visit akc.org/sports/trick-dog.

facts & stats

201

On January 1, 2024, the Lancashire Heeler became the 201st breed to achieve AKC recognition. Despite his diminutive size, the Heeler joins the Herding Group as the "world's smallest drover."

He's an all-purpose farm dog who was bred to drive cattle across the rocky, rugged terrain of England and keep the barns clear of vermin. Already a rising star in companion and performance events, the Lancashire Heeler is a happy, affectionate companion who loves to work.

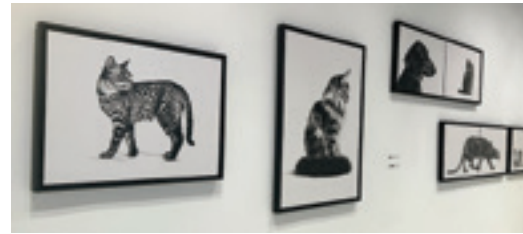


A Celebration of Canines and Felines

UNIQUE INSTINCT, a photography exhibition from Royal Canin U.S., made its North American debut at the AKC Museum of the Dog (MOD) in November. The exhibition features the work of renowned animal photographers Tim Flach, Alexander Crispin, Eric Isselée, and Dan Burn-Forti. The photos had been on display in Paris, France, since May 2022.

In addition to the photography collection, UNIQUE INSTINCT will also feature photographs from two winners selected from the ROYAL CANIN® Photography Awards.

The exhibition includes a sneak peek at Royal Canin's upcoming campaign that



further highlights the incredibly unique abilities and characteristics of canines and felines. The show will be at AKC MOD until February 4, 2024.

"Knowledge, observation, and respect for pets are among Royal Canin's core values, which is why we are excited for the public to discover the unique traits of cats and dogs through this exhibition," said Daryn Brown, Regional President, Royal Canin North America, in a press statement.

"It's not every day one gets to see art featuring cats at the Museum of the Dog! We welcome all New Yorkers and those visiting to join us and enjoy it through February," said Christopher Bromson, Executive Director and CEO of the AKC Museum of the Dog, in a statement.



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we asked, you answered

If at First...



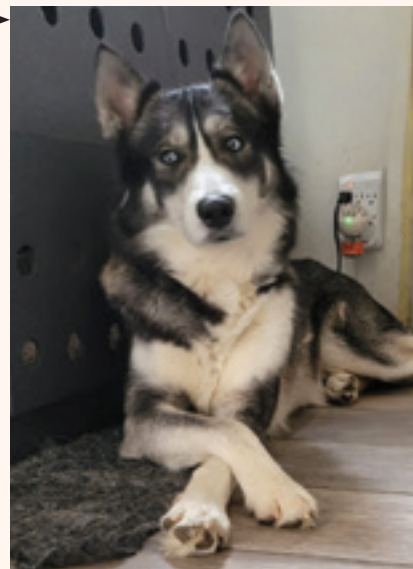
For our beginners issue, we asked our readers to share funny, heartwarming, and, yes, embarrassing memories from their entry into the world of dog sports. Here are some of their recollections:



←.....This pretty much depicts Lenny's water rescue testing in the beginning. He loved to exit the test beach! —Stephanie Lucero

Very first rally trial. I'll admit I did not have Ralphie's full attention. On our heel between signs, he spotted the candy on the steward's table, went to grab a mouthful, got the zoomies. We were kindly asked to leave the ring. —Larissa O'Donnell

My first Fast CAT with my Siberian.....▶
Husky, Fox. He ran halfway, turned in circles, returned to sender. Have tried fun runs with him since, but he's just not tricked by that plastic bag. It's not a bunny like they claimed!
—Jeannine Gotcher



My puppy got the zoomies her first time in a trial ring and ran right through a gap in the fencing. I tried to jump over it to catch her and my second foot didn't make it over. Fell flat on my face. The dog came right back when she saw me land, though. —Chrissy Detore Bertolino



←.....During Bonnie's first Fast CAT event, she was terrified of the "bunny" lure. I had to run beside her! Now she's an expert with a BCAT title!
—Kirsten Polky

My dog pooped! —Jennifer Nicolle-Bowden

Peed upon entry. —Kim Arnold

Join the conversation:

Follow us at facebook.com/akcfamilydog.

Have a question to ask? Email it to familydog@akc.org.

Responses have been edited for length, grammar, and clarity.



The décor was perfect for the event.

Dog-Day Matinee

Every year the State Theater, in Modesto, California, has a matinee where the audience may bring their dogs to a family-friendly film (the pooches get discounted tickets after their humans affirm vaccinations, good behavior, and leashes). My wife, Wendy, and I have watched countless movies in cinemas, private screening rooms, and even big-screen “drive-in” nights in our paddock, but we’d never done anything like this before.

Our friends Tawn and Bud raised the idea. They would bring Max, their gregarious Papillion-mix and we would take our older girl, Tezzy—a veteran of the show ring and lure coursing (and the most unflappable of our Salukis).

The film was the animated *Balto* (1995), about the desperate sled dog race to get diphtheria serum to Nome, Alaska in 1925 (which inspired the modern Iditarod competition).

HOWLS, BUT NO PUDDLES

Appropriately, in the audience was a Husky and Husky-cross who cavorted in a wildly enthusiastic reunion and then found curious moments to happily howl during the showing. It was a good crowd with 30 or so dogs. Down front a Poodle-mix periodically barked opinions. From behind us in the higher seats we heard sudden deep barks (never

did figure out who made those). There were fun-sized terriers, mixed breeds of all dimensions, a Doberman, and even a mellow Great Pyrenees who seemed to be supervising the whole affair.

Jack Cooke, programming manager at the State, says their staff enjoys the doggy matinees as much as the ticket holders do. For the first effort in 2018, Cooke prudently scheduled it the day before the annual carpet steam cleaning. But there have been no accidents or misbehaviors (with the dogs, at least) in the years the event has been offered.

During the film, I found my attention divided between the action on screen and the live-dog performances. One bored pooch slipped her leash to go visiting. Dashing down the aisle with whispered apologies, the owner scooped her up and went back to their seats. Tezzy was content to sit on her fleecy pad and eagerly accept popcorn morsels from Wendy. Behind me, Max would periodically burst from Tawn’s lap to delightfully lick my ears (something that hadn’t happened to me in a theater since teenage dating).

After the house lights came up, people and dogs made their way up the aisles, under the 1930s wall decorations of golden Greyhounds perpetually chasing golden antelopes. In the lobby, the carpet with intricate designs must have seemed to the dogs like an oversized living room of scent heaven. In between doggy greetings, their hypersensitive noses inhaled the kaleidoscope aromas of popcorn, potato chips, and the body odors of previous moviegoers.

It was definitely a fun experience—not so much the movie but observing all the doggy interactions in the seats and aisles. And Tezzy will go back—if there’s buttered popcorn. —Brian Duggan



The author, Wendy, and Tezzy (front) and Tawn, Bud, and Max (behind)

COURTESY/AUTHOR



Friends Forever

The greatest gift to your dog after you've gone?
A trusted companion to take the leash.

BY MIRANDA CARNEY

Sponsored by *The Loyal Legacy Plan Underwritten by New York Life*



Every year, several dogs are left in limbo after their owner dies. The sudden loss of an owner can be a traumatic experience for your dog, but a little forward planning can help ease the transition.

So how do you set up an emergency caregiver for your beloved dog, in case he should outlive you?

Keeping Friends Close

You might assume your dog will go to your closest friend or family member—but will your pet truly be happy in the caregiver's environment? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my dog like this person?

AMY LEE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

- Has this person cared for pets before?
- Will my dog get along well with every member of the household, including any other pets or children?
- Will this person be able to provide the quality of life my dog is used to?
- If your dog has any medical requirements, will someone in the new household be able to take care of those needs?

Juliet Boyd, executive director of Oakland's Hopalong Animal Rescue, encourages owners to discuss the arrangement with their pet's potential caregiver to determine if it'd be a good fit.

"We have had some people contact us who've said, 'I'm supposed to inherit my sister's cat or dog but I'm not completely comfortable,'" she says. Remember: If your pet's new owner isn't truly happy to have them around, your pet won't be truly happy either.

Cost of Care

Sadly, finding a caregiver for your pet won't only be about establishing mutual respect and lifestyle compatibility. Anyone agreeing to care for a dog—especially an older dog or one with existing medical needs—must consider medical expenses, as well as the day-to-day cost of caring for a dog.

The financial burden of caring for pets is one of the major reasons so many dogs end up in shelters after their owners die. It's also why these bereaved dogs—who are often older and more likely to face medical problems—so often struggle to find permanent homes once they've reached the shelter.

All of which makes it clear: When you select a caregiver for your dog, it's

important to leave enough money for your dog's care, too.

A good rule of thumb is to calculate your annual expenditure on your dog, and multiply that by your dog's life expectancy, then add some extra money for unexpected medical expenses. "You don't have a crystal ball for what that future will be, and veterinary costs can be incredibly high, depending on the dog's future health," Boyd says. "So I would say, honestly, allot a little more money than you thought, just to cover the bases for care should a medical condition develop."

While it's not legal to leave money directly to a pet, owners have a few other options, such as willing the money directly to the designated caregiver or setting up a trust in your pet's name. This means that the caregiver must follow your instructions and use the money only for the care of your pet.

Outside Support

Alternatively, you could seek out one of the country's growing number of programs for pets that outlive their owners—like the Pet Survivor Program at Hopalong Animal Rescue.

At the Pet Survivor Program, staff compile a full dossier of information about participating pets, including their likes and dislikes, medical needs, and the owner's dream home for them. The owner then gifts \$6,000 (or more if they wish) per pet to Hopalong Animal Rescue in their will. In exchange, Hopalong finds a loving forever home that matches the pet's needs and preferences, covers all of the pet's medical bills for the rest of their life, and remains in contact with

the new owner as a third party looking out for the pet.

"It takes away the filter for adopters," Boyd says. "A lot of people think twice about adopting a senior pet, because they're worried about medical issues." But the Pet Survivor Program eases the apprehension, "so if they fall in love with a particular dog or cat that has an underlying medical condition or is a senior, they don't have to say, 'I just can't afford it right now.'"

Hopalong Animal Rescue also pledges that no pet in the Pet Survivor Program will end up at a shelter: They're placed in a trusted foster home or directly in a loving home that matches the owner's stipulations. These days, the popularity of the program and Hopalong's network of thousands of potential adopters mean that most dogs go straight to their forever home.

The Pet Survivor Program is based in Oakland, but accepts pets from around the country. To see if a similar program is available in your area, contact your local rescue organizations.

"Many people are shocked to hear that still so many pets wind up in shelters," Boyd says. "I can't tell you how many we see. And you can tell that they were cared for and deeply loved by someone, and because no arrangements were made, they wind up at your local city shelter."

Since there's no knowing what tomorrow holds, the best time to prepare for your dog's comfortable, loving life after your death is now. **FD**

For more information, visit loyallegacyplan.com.

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How to Be a Star Student

New kid in class? Here's what your instructor wants you to know.

Whether you're a first-time dog owner or a seasoned competitor with a new puppy hopeful, you'll likely find yourself in a beginning or basic obedience class.

And whether your dog is the class clown or the valedictorian may depend, in no small part, on *you!*

In dog training, even the most experienced owner may find himself back at the “beginning”—with a new puppy, learning a new sport, or training at a new facility—and there's always more to learn. So no matter where they are in their dog-training journey, here's what I want my new students to know.

REACH OUT

When new students contact me before their first class, it's an awesome opportunity for me to learn about their goals and challenges.

If the concern is reactivity or fear issues, I may suggest a more appropriate class placement or ask the student to come early to settle in the environment before others arrive. Sometimes I'll even designate a specific place in the room for them to experience the class (and choose their class “neighbors”), depending on the dogs' challenges.

In addition, it's helpful for me to learn pertinent things about them or their family that can help me provide a better class experience. In the past, I've made adjustments to curriculum and presentation for students with mobility, hearing, and sight issues, as well as those with fear, anxiety, social challenges, and families with neurodivergent children. Knowing these things ahead of time helps me adapt to the challenges so that the student (and other class members!) can have the learning environment that they need to succeed.

ASK QUESTIONS

... but *don't* wait until the last two minutes of class to ask!

On Saturdays I teach back-to-back classes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., so I begin each class with an opportunity for a Q&A: “This is your chance—ask now and throughout the hour we're together, but if you have a question in the last two minutes, you'll need to email me later or ask one of my assistant trainers after class.”

If you don't want to ask your question in front of the whole class, ask the instructor quietly on the side. If that's not possible, send an email or ask when is convenient for a quick phone call.

One of my students was so embarrassed to ask for solutions in her group class (her dog was getting into her cat's litterbox and “snacking”) that she had to email me about her challenge.

After four decades of training dogs and their families, nothing shocks me—but

BY KATHY SANTO

I do understand that my students aren't always comfortable with sharing those types of situations in a group setting.

A large part of my job as an instructor is to make sure my students understand what I'm teaching and how to re-create it at home. If they don't ask for clarification when they don't understand something, they can't make progress!

Last week, a student watched me demonstrate a technique for teaching a puppy to *down* and said that she already tried that at home and it didn't work.

Before I presented another way for her to do it (I have *lots* of ways to teach all the commands, because one size does not fit all!), I asked her to show me what she did when she practiced at home.

By observing, I was able to pin down the minor mistakes she was making and adjust her technique to achieve the *down* that she wanted!

ASK TO BE MOVED

Sometimes the class is a great fit—but the classmates are not. Maybe your dog is fearful of children, and is fixated on the child next to him. Or your dog is feeling threatened by another dog who looks just like the one that he had an altercation with last week. In these cases, ask your instructor to switch places with another team or move to another part of the room, and if that doesn't work, consider taking a class on a different day.

As I'm writing this, I'm reminded of one extremely boisterous student who's been attending classes with her dog for over a decade! After moving her from one class to the next, I finally found her a "home" with a group of students who were extremely chill about her over-the-top energy and entertained by the, uh, "interesting" comments she would make.

Another reason to change classes could be the level or curriculum—one facility's "intermediate" might be another's "advanced"—or maybe the dog is in a beginning-level class but should actually be in a specialty class, like Cautious Canines.

Lastly, there can be instances where a

student doesn't click with the instructor. In those cases, I encourage the student to communicate the situation to the instructor to see if they can find common ground. Maybe the instructor was having an off day, or maybe the student misunderstood something that was (or wasn't!) said. If that doesn't work, or if the student would rather not have that conversation, we'll make the switch to a new class with a different instructor.

DO THE DARN HOMEWORK!

Just do it. Build in 5 to 10 minutes a few times a day to train your dog with time you already allocate for him (during meal times, taking him for a walk, and so on). You don't need to train all day, every day, but getting in at least a 10-minute session a few times a week is needed to see progression. If you're stuck, email the instructor. If you need to progress a skill but class is days away, email the instructor. A star student has open communication with their trainer so they're able to give their dog exactly what he needs to succeed.

By the way, if you go to class and you didn't practice all week, please let the instructor know. I *always* can tell when a dog hasn't had training at home—and no judgment! It could have been a busy week for the owners, the dog could have been sick—there are lots of reasons. But that info is helpful to an instructor, because then they won't expect your dog to progress to the next steps in whatever you're learning in that class.

Do *not* skip class because you didn't practice at home! Go anyway, and use the time to get some training done. I love when students show up even though they didn't practice, because there's always something to learn and it gives me an opportunity to motivate them to keep moving forward. **FD**

Kathy Santo has trained dogs and their families for over 35 years and competed in AKC obedience and agility. She has a training school in Waldwick, New Jersey, and online courses. For more information, visit kathysantodogtraining.com.

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Ewald is the number-one French Bulldog in the United States for Barn Hunt, says owner Rick Paine. "Barn Hunt honed Ewald's prey drive, and the conversion to Fetch was all the easier for it." A special toy was a central training tool. "Ewald has a favorite toy that he receives at the end of his Fetch run once he leaves the field," he explains. After a brief period, the toy is traded for a treat. "If Ewald's toy becomes nothing more than a play toy that is constantly available, it no longer holds the same value and may lead to rejection. What we want from Ewald is a desire to keep coming back for more."

Fetch

That Title *Your dogs don't have to be born retrievers to show off their skills in this quintessential canine game.*

Owners of pet dogs tell us that the two main activities they want to do with their dogs are take a walk in the community and play fetch. As the most recent addition to the AKC Family Dog lineup, AKC Fetch is a fun program in which dogs can earn four levels of AKC titles by demonstrating retrieving skills.

The titles are:

- **Novice (FTN):** Dogs must retrieve a ball, toy, or bumper from 30 feet.
- **Intermediate (FTI):** The retrieve increases to 50 feet.
- **Advanced (FTA):** Blinds are introduced, and the dog retrieves bumpers or balls that are behind blinds that are 70 feet from the start line.

■ **Retriever (FTR):** The bumpers or balls are behind blinds and the dog retrieves from 80 feet away.

"What I like about fetch as an activity is that both dogs and their owners love it," says Rick Paine, a member of the Macon Kennel Club (MKC), in Georgia. "The dog learns new skills that can be applied to other training, but the dog and owner also have a lot of fun."

Paine is an experienced field trainer whose background includes preparing English Springer Spaniels and German Shorthaired Pointers for fieldwork. The time came for Paine and his wife, Kathleen, who had Boxers, to downsize their breeds. Soon, their family included French Bulldogs. His new breed may have been created to sit on a lady's lap, but Paine's

PHOTOS COURTESY OWNERS



Granite inspired a redesign in one of the tests for the title. Owner Joe Juza could have tried to retrain his talented Flat-Coated Retriever, but in the end it made more sense to change the course.

passion for fieldwork was still strong.

During AKC Fetch pilot testing, Paine's French Bulldog, Ewald, was the first dog to successfully pass AKC Fetch Retriever, the highest level of AKC Fetch.

TIPS FOR TEACHING AKC FETCH

MKC's president, Gloria Flippen, and club members were staunch supporters of AKC Fetch from the moment the idea was conceptualized. The club generously offered its outdoor space as well as trainers and dogs of numerous breeds for pilot testing.

After playing an important role in the development of the AKC Fetch program, Paine now teaches Fetch classes at the MKC. His classes include many breeds of dogs who are learning basic to advanced retrieving skills.

"Remember that all dogs are not natural retrievers," Paine says. "Some tips would be to keep training positive and use plenty of praise. Keep sessions short and don't continue to push beyond when the dog loses interest. Some obedience basics, such as coming when called, are essential. Finally, you can begin training the retrieve in a hallway where the area is contained."

THE DOG IS ALWAYS RIGHT

A second location for pilot testing AKC Fetch was Celeste Meade-Maurer's American K-9 Country. Located in Amherst, New Hampshire, it is one of the most impressive dog training facilities in the United States.

On a sunny, breezy day, during one fortuitous pilot test at American K-9 Country, the blinds were set up in a long line without spaces between them. Field trainer Joe Juza brought his

Flat-Coated Retriever, Granite, to the start line. The task was for Granite to do a triple retrieve by running behind the blinds to retrieve the bumpers. Granite had his own ideas. As a nationally ranked agility dog, Granite, also a fieldwork competitor, saw the blinds that formed one long, continuous (24 inches tall) screen and decided the most direct way to get to the bumper was to jump over the blinds. And for extra flourish, proudly carrying each bumper, Granite also soared over the tops of the blinds on his way back to his owner.

One way to handle this would have been to spend time training Granite to go around the blinds. But when a second dog made the same "mistake," a quote from psychologist B.F. Skinner came to mind. Skinner worked with rats in a lab, and he once got extremely frustrated with how the rats were behaving during an experiment. He initially concluded the rats were doing something wrong. And then, recognizing his own lack of foresight, Skinner began to laugh at himself and uttered what would become a well-known quote, "The rat is always right." The experiment was redesigned and was ultimately successful.

We concluded that in a situation such as our pilot test where dogs were jumping the blinds, the dog is always right. The configuration of the blinds was changed to leave spaces in between blinds so dogs were not reading these as jumps, and the dogs no longer combined their agility skills with AKC Fetch. In addition to possibly seeing the blinds as jumps, dogs trained for fieldwork are taught to go in a straight line to get to a bumper or bird. For example, if a bird or bumper falls on the opposite side of a pond, rather than running around the pond, the dog swims through the pond to get the object. When Granite jumped the blinds to get to the bumper, the straightest line was over the blinds.

Meade-Maurer has had a successful career competing nationally in dog sports for over 30 years. She has earned numerous number-one rankings in obedience and over 100 High in Trials. At American K-9 Country, she coaches many dogs that are nationally ranked in their breeds. But her eyes light up when she talks about teaching pet dog owners and helping them have a dog they enjoy.

"Dog training has changed in recent years," she says. "Dog owners feel better about using positive procedures in training, and they want to enjoy training their dogs. AKC Fetch is a program that will teach new skills, improve fitness, and most of all, Fetch provides an activity in which owners can have fun with their dogs. And that's what it's all about." **FD**

Mary R. Burch, Ph.D., is a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist through the Animal Behavior Society. She is the director of the AKC Family Dog program.

For more information on AKC Fetch, visit
akc.org/fetch.



Everybody Knows ...

Determining fact from fiction in common canine nutrition advice

Everybody knows that feeding a dog a raw egg every day will give them a shiny coat.

At least, that's what my grandmother always said. And everybody knows that feeding a dog this, that, or another special supplement will give them better this, that, or another trait. "Everybody knows" seems to be the competitor mantra, but there's one problem: Nobody knows if there's any evidence for much of it.

GROWING COAT

"Everybody knows" that supplements help make shiny, luxurious coats. Social media testimonials abound, showing dogs with thin coats miraculously transformed once they change diets or add supplements. That may be true for dogs with allergies or fed crummy diets, but for most dogs, a quality, balanced, commercial dog food will produce a coat with adequate coverage. Show dog exhibitors want more than "adequate,"

though. They want long, profuse, and glowing.

Raw eggs are no longer the fad (although the yolks do contain biotin, which is essential for healthy skin and hair). Instead, special supplements containing proteins, fats, oils, and maybe a secret ingredient or five are popular.

Studies do show that diets higher in fat result in shinier, healthier coats. And higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids can provide mild benefits for some itchy skin.



Protein makes up about 95 percent of a dog's hair structure. The minimal protein content for coat maintenance is 18 percent dry matter, but increases to 25 to 30 percent dry matter for increased coat quantity and quality (read: "show dogs"). The skin and hair are made up largely of keratin, which is made up of the sulphur-containing amino acids methionine and cysteine, which are most abundant in proteins from an animal source.

Some supplements address coat color, specifically for black fur that turns reddish. This can result from a lack of the amino acids phenylalanine and tyrosine, which are involved in the synthesis of eumelanin pigment. Most commercial diets contain enough of these amino acids to maintain black coats—but maybe not for "show dog black."

NOSE PIGMENT

"Everybody knows" that if your dog's normally black nose has faded with age or during the winter, a kelp supplement will darken it. There's some science behind it: Kelp contains high iron and iodine content. Lack of iodine will cause thyroid problems, and low thyroid can cause lack of skin and nose pigment in dogs.

According to kelp users, kelp definitely darkens nose pigment, but it takes a couple of months to do so. It

won't make a genetically light nose dark, but it apparently will help a faded nose darken. The results are not instant, but take a couple of months to be noticeable.

But here's the problem with kelp: Too much iodine can cause health problems, including thyroid and eye problems in humans. Don't give kelp to dogs with thyroid or kidney problems, and don't think if a little is good, a lot is better. The toxic dose is over 180 milligrams per kilogram of body weight (so a 50-pound dog would reach toxic level with 5 grams of iodine).

BULKING UP

"Everybody knows" that muscles rely on genetics, nutrition, and exercise to be at their best. And everybody knows good musculature aids in both conformation and performance sports.

Protein and calories build muscles. Controlled studies have shown that low levels of protein (12 percent on a dry-matter basis) are associated with lower muscle mass and higher fat levels than diets with 28 percent (dry-matter basis) protein. Add fat (for calories) and protein, then add exercise to build muscle once the nutritional foundation has had a couple of weeks to become established.

Building muscle is different from preventing muscle loss, which can happen from disuse. Fortetropin supplementation inhibits a protein called myostatin, which prevents muscle growth and promotes muscle atrophy.



In controlled studies, fortetropin helped dogs retain muscle and weight-bearing on limbs that had undergone orthopedic surgery. It did not help build muscle, but rather prevented losing muscle. Nonetheless, many owners of performance dogs swear by it as an aid in keeping their dogs fit during long periods of training and competition. Fortetropin has also been shown to be helpful in maintaining, but not improving, muscle mass and mobility in geriatric dogs.

PEAK PERFORMANCE

"Everyone knows" water is the number-one nutrient for performance. Or if they don't, they should. Maintaining hydration is vital to performance.

Dogs are built for endurance, and rely mostly on fat for fuel beyond anything but short bursts of activity. This means that fat is an important part of the diet of the long-distance canine athlete; dietary fat has been shown to be the most important nutrient for increasing stamina in dogs. Short-distance canine athletes rely more on carbohydrates, so they should have moderate levels of dietary fat but good levels of carbs. Dogs participating in multiday activities recover better if they eat carbs within 20 minutes of the first run. Dogs don't lose electrolytes from sweat like humans do, so sports drinks do them no good.

What about supplements? Not a single study has found evidence for supplementation with creatinine, various minerals, or vitamins C and E in improving performance; in fact, some have lowered performance. Feeding a high-quality balanced dog food, adjusted for the dog's activity type, is the key to the correct levels of these ingredients.

Dog competitors are a serious lot. If they can grab an edge through nutrition, they will. Everybody knows that. **FD**

Caroline Coile is the author of more than 30 books about dogs and a two-time AKC Canine Health Foundation award winner.



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Playing It Safe

Preventing orthopedic injuries in your budding sports star

You've seen them on TV: athletic dogs, eyes locked on their handlers, soaring over jumps and tearing through tunnels at lightning speed. You glance at your boisterous four-legged friend beside you—could he have what it takes to be an agility dog, too?

Most dogs are natural athletes—but athletes are prone to injury. In an online survey of owners of 4,701 dogs, almost 2,000 respondents reported an injury that prevented them from participating in agility for at least a week.

Your dog doesn't know to restrain himself, so it's on you, the owner, to prevent injuries. This starts when your dog is a puppy and well before you begin in a sport. So many owners jump into a sport, and a year later, they are sidelined by an injury. This can be a



minor thing that lasts a few weeks or a career-ending mess.

Injuries happen in organized sports like agility practice and trials, or by

overexertion running after a ball. Often, dogs sit around most of the week and are then morphed into weekend warriors.

In the aforementioned study, shoulder

GREATDANEPHOTOS



Detecting an Impending Cruciate Ligament Rupture

We used to think that damage to the joint caused its rupture. Now we know that there is breakdown of the ligament, secondary to inflammation. It is not an acute injury. Because of this, if we can detect it early and keep the inflammation down, we could save the ligament.

The first thing that is apparent is swelling in the joint. This is caused by the joint fluid thinning and also increasing in volume. Yes, radiographs can help to figure this out, but the key is to feel if there is any crepitance. Think of this as “crunching” in the joint.

As the joint is flexed, the fluid isn’t thick enough to provide the cushion that is needed. The ends of the bones rub together and create friction. Remember that there is no ligament issue at this point, but there will be if this is not addressed.

Some dogs will also straighten their sore leg. This repositioning helps take pain away because new areas of the bone are rubbing on each other.

There are two other things that can indicate knee pain. One is sitting like a puppy, with one leg straight out to the side. The dog is uncomfortable bending the joint due to the fluid increase.

The other thing, though harder to see, is noticing that the weight has been transferred forward to the front legs.

injuries account for about 30 percent of those reported, followed by the iliopsoas muscle (19.4 percent) and then the digits or toes (17.9 percent).

You may wonder about the shoulder injuries—why the front leg? In the standing phase, these legs take 60 percent

of the weight of the dog. Landing after a jump, they take even more force—it’s even worse if they land from a jumping turn.

The injuries we see in these performance dogs are ligament injuries—not bone injuries!

Pet dogs tend to suffer from cruciate

injuries; two ligaments hold the knee together, and one called the cranial cruciate ligament breaks.

We used to think if the dog moved a certain way, the force would break the ligament. This never made sense to me. In a veterinary school orthopedics lab, we were asked to break that ligament. It was almost impossible to do that.

What we know now is that the ligament doesn’t break all of a sudden like you and I would break a bone. It is from ongoing degeneration that the ligament finally gets weak enough to fall apart.

This is aggravated by being overweight, poor conditioning, physical activity without adequate warmup, and overexerting themselves.

The key is this: If we know there are changes that indicate something wrong with the knee, what can we do? I spoke to Dr. Laurie McCauley, a veterinarian with advanced credentials in rehabilitation medicine and operator of Optimum Pet Vitality, an online learning platform.

If there is evidence of joint inflammation (see sidebar on how to detect that), she starts the dogs on oral chondroprotective agents, such as Perna mussel (green-lipped mussel) and collagen, to help the cartilage and decrease inflammation. She finds that works better than pure glucosamine and chondroitin. You can also add omega-3 oils (salmon oil comes to mind).

If you recheck the leg after three months and the crepitance has gone, then quit. If there are still issues, your vet may suggest adding an injectable like Adequan or Cartrophen.

This leads us back to how we can prevent injuries. Be aware of what can go wrong and keep your dog trim and fit. If you think of dogs as the athletes they are, you can avoid most problems. **FD**

Dr. Jeff Grognet is a practicing veterinarian and an award-winning author. He teaches courses for dog owners from a holistic standpoint, as well as college courses for veterinary assistants. His course and regular blog are found at newearthvet.com.

Buzz On Board: Buzz received two "Catch of the Quarter" regional USPCA awards in 2014 and 2017 for locating drowning victims in challenging situations. In one of these cases, a person drowned in a flooded, fast-moving river. Buzz found the body over a mile from the last point the victim was seen. Without Buzz, the body probably would never have been found.

Born to Serve

A handler remembers an unforgettable K-9 nose.

Around 2009, I started looking for a partner for my human remains detection (HRD) dog—Ch. Lone Pine Ms. Chili Dawg, CGC, TD, RN. She was tiny, a miniature Dachshund who started life as a show dog.

Despite her size, she filled a vital niche at Michigan's St. Joseph County

Sheriff's Department—a highly trained nose that could wriggle into passages that were impossible for larger dogs.

Through my work as a part-time instructor at the Department of Homeland Security's Center for Domestic Preparedness, in Anniston, Alabama, I discovered the Auburn University Canine Performance Sciences program

as a source for a new working K-9.

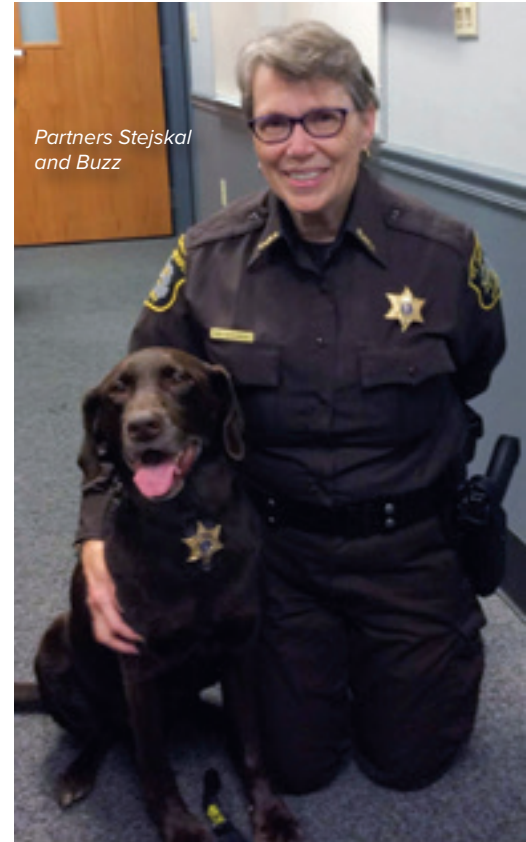
Buzz was one of 11 Labrador Retriever puppies born in April 2008, part of Auburn's program. The chocolate puppy was named Ollie.

He had an illustrious lineage. His sire was K-9 Zorro, a black Lab partnered with then-Sgt. Robert Smith of the Amtrak Police. Zorro was among the

PHOTOS COURTESY OWNER EXCEPT WHERE NOTED



As soon as Buzz detected a target odor, his entire body carriage changed. His tail went up and started wagging as he transformed into a Hoover, trying to take up as much scent as possible.



Partners Stejskal and Buzz

first wave of vapor-wake explosive detection dogs, elite working K-9s who sniffed the air to keep thousands of people safe every day.

At about 8 weeks old, Ollie's litter entered a prison training program to learn the basics. They returned to Alabama at a year old and were evaluated for physical and environmental soundness and ability for future work. Ollie was

one of three pups selected as a candidate for me.

THE FAST LANE

Chili was a force to be reckoned with, but at 8 pounds, that force was easy to live with. A working Lab was something entirely different.

When I flew to Alabama from Michigan to pick up my new partner,

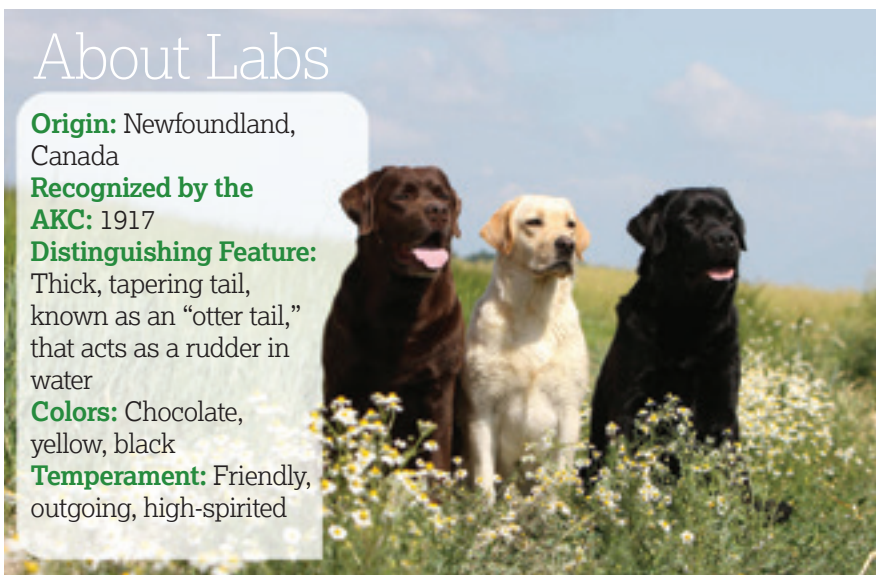
I thought I was ready. But then I met the three canine candidates. I'd never seen such energy. They were nonstop and, in contrast to what I was used to, enormous.

Ollie was a little more mellow and connected with me more than the other two. He was also not repulsed by the smell of human remains—something some dogs seem to be.

So our adventure began.

My husband and I already had a Schipperke named Otter. Ollie and Otter were too similar, so we had to find a new name. I chose Buzz, a shortened version of the last name of a police lieutenant who helped me tremendously over the years.

I had trained two detection K-9s before but was used to an 8-pound dog with incredible drive. Now, I had a 65-pound dog with astonishing drive. It was an adjustment, but Buzz quickly learned his job and passed his cadaver detection certification with the United States Police Canine Association (USPCA).



About Labs

Origin: Newfoundland, Canada

Recognized by the AKC: 1917

Distinguishing Feature: Thick, tapering tail, known as an "otter tail," that acts as a rudder in water

Colors: Chocolate, yellow, black

Temperament: Friendly, outgoing, high-spirited

BOTTOM: GROSSENY/VANESSA / ALAMY/STOCK PHOTO

Family Portrait: Buzz visits his illustrious sire, Zorro, one of the first vapor-wake detection dogs, and handler K-9 Captain Robert Smith, of the Amtrak Police.



Working with two dogs of such different sizes and styles was fascinating. Chili was methodical and, at 6 inches tall, didn't cover ground quickly. Buzz was the polar opposite—large, very quick, and able to turn on a dime. Depending on the specifics of a case, I would often work with Buzz first and then follow up to detail the area with Chili.

I continued to pair the two on cases, working Buzz first and then Chili until she retired at 13.

Buzz and I continued with our work. His happy, upbeat Lab attitude helped me through some dark times. That includes a case that almost ended my career as an HRD K-9 handler—a homicide/

suicide search and one of the most horrific experiences I have had.

Buzz was unaware of the horror of the case. To him, it was just his job to locate a target odor that I had trained him to find. Once he found it, he got his beloved reward—a game of tug. His joy for work and life helped me continue.

BEYOND THE NOSE

A few years after I started working with Buzz, I saw another exceptional quality in him. After tough dive recoveries, I often saw dive team members seek him out for a pet or quiet conversation. I had certified two dogs previously by Therapy Dogs International (one who visited nursing

homes and the other as a reading therapy dog). Here, I had a dog with an innate sense of helping people who needed it. He was also certified by TDI and served two critical roles in the two dive teams we belonged to—first helping locate the missing person and then guiding dive team members through emotionally challenging situations.

I would guess that Buzz interacted with thousands of people during his time. Buzz shared his goodwill and skill with students of all ages, and at professional canine seminars and conferences nationwide for law enforcement, forensics, and veterinary medicine.



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END OF WATCH

Then it all changed. At a lively and still working 9-plus years old, Buzz was diagnosed with canine lymphoma, an incurable cancer.

Because of the generosity of the Sturgis Kennel Club in Michigan, who supported Buzz's medical insurance, and a dedicated team of his regular veterinarian and staff, his homeopathic veterinarian, and his oncologist and staff, he was able to continue both as a working dog and my partner for another 14 months.

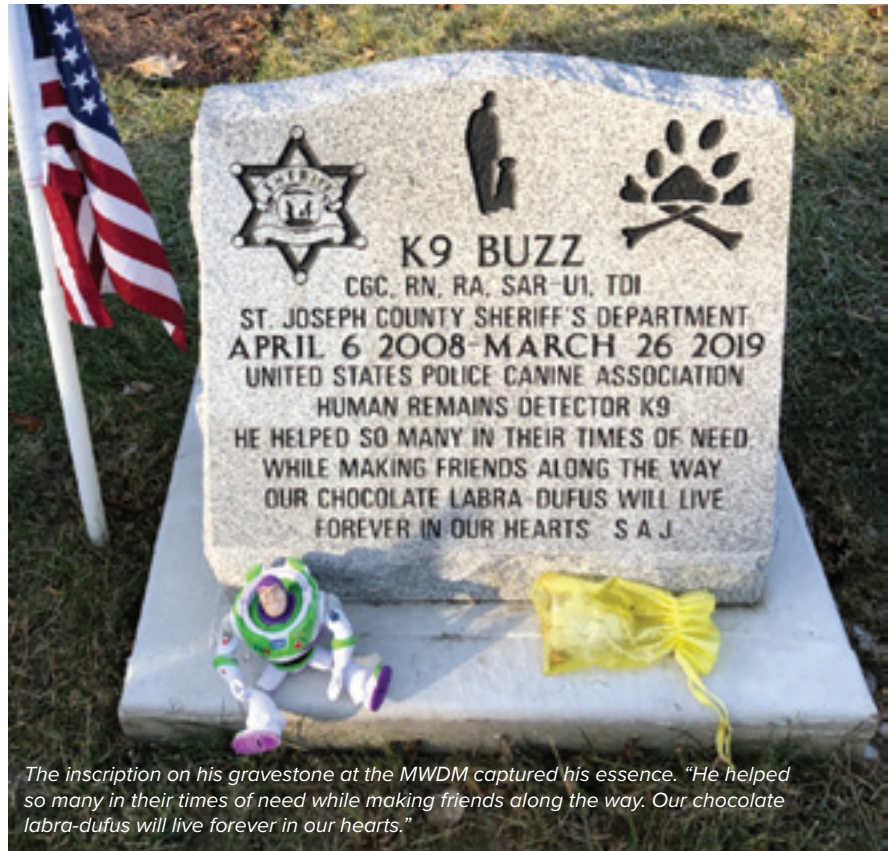
Buzz brought a smile to his team when he went in for his weekly and then monthly chemotherapy sessions. He would enter the hospital, walk over to the scale to get weighed, and then wag his tail and smile at everyone in the waiting room, including anxious owners waiting for their four-legged family members. At every session, he walked over to the veterinary staff member, wagging his tail on his way back for treatment. He was an amazing dog.

Buzz worked a cold case two weeks before he told us it was time. On March 26, 2019, after spending the day visiting his colleagues at the sheriff's department and then with friends and family who loved him, his life ended quietly, privately, and with grace. I felt like a part of me had died, and I know many others felt the same way.

A few weeks after Buzz died, I learned about the Michigan War Dog Memorial (MWDM) in South Lyon, Michigan. The mission of MWDM is to educate the public on the heroics and dedication of K-9s serving and protecting.

The nonprofit organization maintains a cemetery where retired military working dogs, law enforcement dogs, and service dogs can be interred at no cost to the owner or handler. We are so honored that Buzz was accepted to the MWDM. Buzz also received accolades from the USPCA, the Connecticut Police Work Dog Association, and the United States War Dog Association.

Those who loved and revered my



The inscription on his gravestone at the MWDM captured his essence. "He helped so many in their times of need while making friends along the way. Our chocolate labra-dufus will live forever in our hearts."

dog attended the interment ceremony on September 7, 2019. His extended family was present physically or in spirit and showed me how many people he touched.

But that's not where this story ends. In the year before Buzz passed, we lost Chili Dawg at 16 1/2 and Otter at 16. We were left with only Maple, our English Springer Spaniel, who was 3 1/2 when Buzz died.

Buzz had helped raise Maple, and the two were very close. We all had difficulty adjusting to a house with only one dog. During the summer after Buzz died, a friend told me about a special miniature Dachshund he felt might fit in my household. At that time, we were too full of grief to even consider another dog.

But then, after the ceremony at the MWDM, it felt like it was time. When I called to see if he was still available, I found out that Bernard, who later became known as Sheriff Woody (Hundeleben Oh Its Sheriff Woody, CGC, TKN, RN,

RI), was born on March 26, the same day Buzz died.

Despite our losses, the work continues with Maple and Woody working for the sheriff's department as HRD canines. They can never replace Buzz, but I do believe that, somewhere, Buzz is watching and smiling as we keep searching. **FD**

Sue Stejskal, LVT, Ph.D., is a retired toxicologist and licensed veterinary technician. She is a Special Deputy/Forensic K-9 Handler with the St. Joseph County Sheriff's Department's Criminal Investigation Division and dive team. She has worked with her HRD partners for over 20 years on land and water cases throughout the United States and Canada. She is the author of many scientific journal articles, magazine articles, book chapters, and books, including The Little Dog Who Did Big Things; Buzz Visits Mackinac Island; Beds, Bugs, and Breakfasts; and Death, Decomposition, and Detector Dogs: from Science to Scene.

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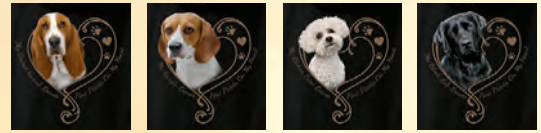
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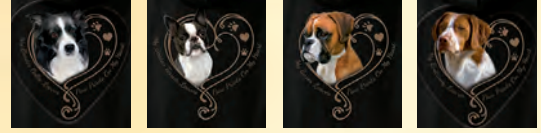


Basset Hound

Beagle

Bichon Frise

Black Lab

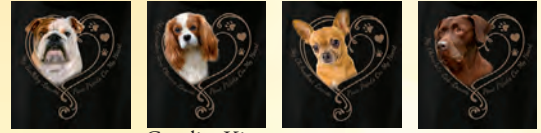


Border Collie

Boston Terrier

Boxer

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Bulldog

Cavalier King Charles

Chihuahua

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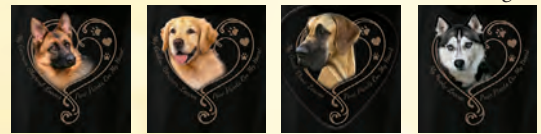


Cocker Spaniel

Corgi

Dachshund

French Bulldog

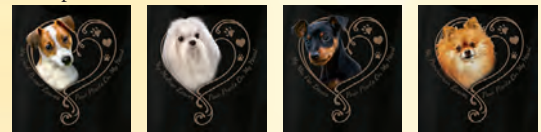


German Shepherd

Golden Retriever

Great Dane

Husky

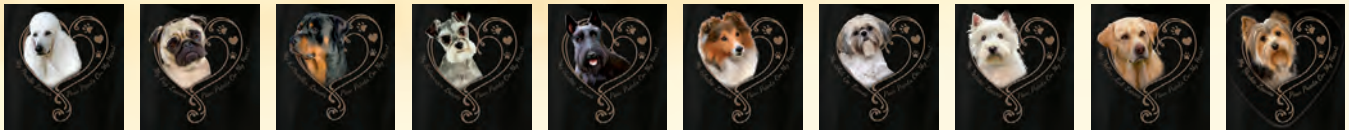


Jack Russell

Maltese

Miniature Pinscher

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Poodle

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Bernese | <input type="checkbox"/> Cocker Spaniel | <input type="checkbox"/> Maltese | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheltie |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bichon Frise | <input type="checkbox"/> Corgi | <input type="checkbox"/> Mastiff | <input type="checkbox"/> Shih Tzu |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black Lab | <input type="checkbox"/> Dachshund | <input type="checkbox"/> Miniature Pinscher | <input type="checkbox"/> Springer Spaniel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Border Collie | <input type="checkbox"/> Doberman | <input type="checkbox"/> Pit Bull | <input type="checkbox"/> Westie |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boston Terrier | <input type="checkbox"/> French Bulldog | <input type="checkbox"/> Pomeranian | <input type="checkbox"/> Weimaraner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boxer | <input type="checkbox"/> German Shepherd | <input type="checkbox"/> Poodle | <input type="checkbox"/> Vizsla |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brittany | <input type="checkbox"/> Golden Retriever | <input type="checkbox"/> Pointer | <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Lab |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bulldog | <input type="checkbox"/> Great Dane | <input type="checkbox"/> Pug | <input type="checkbox"/> Yorkie |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cavalier King Charles | <input type="checkbox"/> Havanese | <input type="checkbox"/> Rottweiler | |

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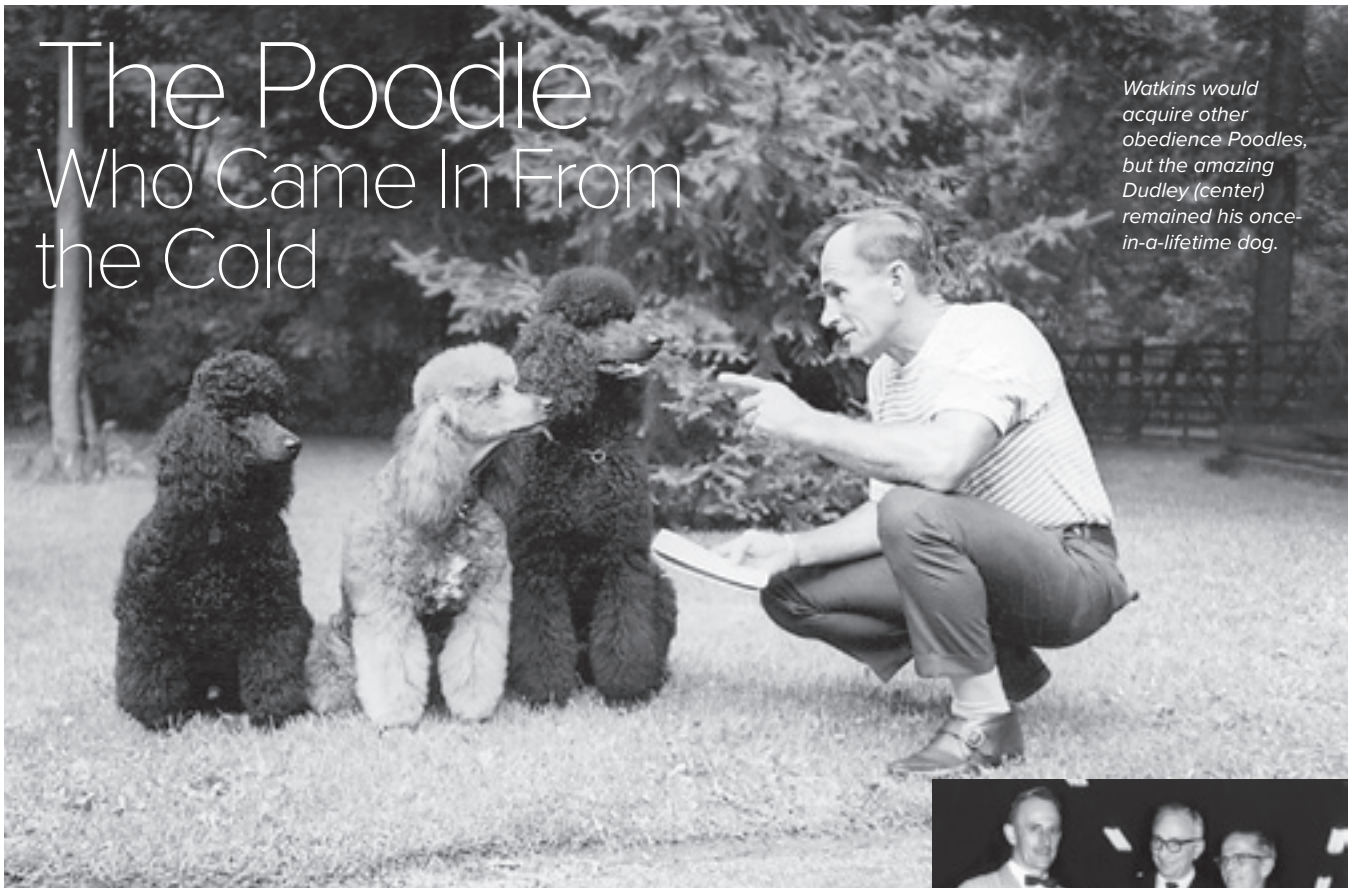
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The Poodle Who Came In From the Cold

Watkins would acquire other obedience Poodles, but the amazing Dudley (center) remained his once-in-a-lifetime dog.



1964: Watkins and Dudley take top honors at the Philadelphia Dog Training Club.

John Rendel's "News of Dogs" column from the *New York Times* of February 9, 1967, begins:

It didn't seem right to dismiss the exceptional performance of Dudley, the foundingling poodle, in last Saturday's obedience trials at the Henry Hudson Hotel with just a recital of the facts. He won all three classes in which he was entered at the Poodle Obedience Training Club of Greater New York event, he gained all eight trophies for which he was eligible, and he was the smartest dog on the premises.

Dudley's unlikely rise to fame began in 1960, when William H. Watkins, a Pennsylvania roofing contractor, took in a stray Poodle pup he found shivering in the street. Watkins knew nothing of dogs, but Dudley was keenly intelligent and awakened in his new owner a previously unknown talent for training. A self-confessed "born pessimist," Watkins had to be urged to enter Dudley in

competitive obedience.

With his sensitive nature and lack of experience, Watkins was rarely pleased with his ring work. "We have our good days and our bad ones," he said.

The late obedience judge Patricia Scully once recalled one of those rare bad days: "I was observing a very big event. Dudley made an error, most unusual for him, that took him out of the running. And I was very taken with Bill. He leaned over to the dog and said quietly, 'That's OK, boy. We'll have other days.'"

Indeed, they did. 1966 was a typical year for Dudley. In 16 shows he had the highest combined score in the Open B and Utility classes 15 times, and 13 times he was highest scoring dog in any class.

Scully recalled, "The dog was not only precise, he was happy. And Bill was a wonderful handler and a gentleman—a real ambassador for the sport." Old-timers fondly remember the handler's gentle

modesty that shines through the conclusion of Rendel's story:

"He's a little small for a standard and too big for a miniature. A conformation judge wouldn't give him a second look," Watkins said. "He's just an all-American poodle." **FD**



Backed by a determined leader and the larger dog-sport community, a Minnesota 4-H dog club lives up to its motto.

By Lindsey Dobruck

Making the Best Better

NICOLE WIEBUSCH

Wednesday morning of the 2019 St. Louis County Fair was bustling with 4-Hers eager to showcase the projects they'd worked on throughout the year—livestock, horses, and canines, but also fine art, photography, and woodwork.

Lexi Wiebusch, of Aurora, Minnesota, had come to compete in rally and agility with her Golden Retriever, Strive. Although she was newer to the North St. Louis County 4-H Club, Lexi was well acquainted with dog sports. She and Strive had competed in agility through

New agility equipment replaced the club's well-worn obstacles, enabling more young handling teams to safely try the sport.



other venues, and her mom, Nicole, is a dog-training instructor with decades of experience competing in rally, obedience, and agility.

But the county fair was a different environment than what Lexi and Nicole were used to.

Like so many volunteer-run organizations with limited resources, the club was making do with the space and well-loved equipment it had. A small obedience ring was set up on cracked blacktop and patchy grass, sharing a crowded tent with the goat and sheep exhibits. The space was so tight that the Rally Excellent obstacles were merely a few feet apart.

And the homemade wooden agility equipment, which had seen the joy and progress of so many young dog and handler teams throughout the years, was beginning to split and splinter.

Lexi and Strive competed, despite the conditions. But the experience left Nicole



For club president Lexi Wiebusch, 4-H is an opportunity to be a leader and build friendships. "Some things I do are help guide the less experienced kids, lead the meetings, and arrange different events and fundraisers. ... I just like interacting with the kids and teaching them about dogs."

wanting more—not just for her daughter, but for all the kids participating in the 4-H dog project.

"I wanted to make it better," Nicole says.

New Beginnings

Then, in 2020, the pandemic hit. "Everybody took a step back," Nicole says. Participation dwindled. Nicole stepped in to assist with the training



Left: Young handlers who don't have their own dog can still participate—like Maddie Wiebusch, Nicole's youngest daughter, who leases an Akita for 4-H.

Below: At the 2022 4-H State Dog Show, the North St. Louis County 4-H Club excelled in rally, obedience, agility, and showmanship. A few teams even earned AKC Trick Dog and Canine Good Citizen titles.

portion of the 4-H meetings, and eventually transitioned into the instructor role entirely.

As a trainer who exclusively practices force-free, positive-reinforcement methods, Nicole created a new curriculum for the 4-H dog project, combining elements from her basic manners classes and strategies from her competition-focused courses at the online Fenzi Dog Sports Academy (FDSA).

“These dogs needed to learn offered eye contact; they needed to learn ‘the name game.’ They were missing all these foundation pieces,” Nicole says. “So we spent the first six weeks getting foundations. And then we started working more specifically on what a *front* is, and here’s what *heel* position means.”

Another major change: Nicole moved the training sessions to her newly built Golden Paws Dog Training facility, which she had designed with cordoned off stations for beginning teams and specially designated areas for reactive or fearful dogs.

“Most of the work in the first few weeks is done in that station,” Nicole says, “and then we kind of start coming out as the dogs get better.”

At the county fair, Nicole worked to create a trial environment that more closely resembled what the young handlers would experience at an AKC show.



“The first change I made is we moved our show indoors”—away from the pigs and goats, Nicole says. With the financial support of local dog clubs, her friends and students in the dog-training community, and grant funding, Nicole raised more than \$6,000 to purchase cushioned floor mats, ring gates to accommodate a standard (40 by 50 feet) obedience ring, and a complete set of rally signs, numbers, and sign holders. Safe, standard agility equipment replaced the rickety obstacles.

“From a fundraising standpoint, we couldn’t have done it without my agility friends that don’t know most of these kids,” Nicole says. “... They just know that promoting 4-H is important for dog sports in general, to get these kids into it as adults.”

Growth Beyond Numbers

The year Nicole took over the 4-H dog project, only five kids competed in the county fair.

By 2023, that number grew to 22,

North's a Star

Hailey Lewis had never seen a dog like this before.

The 13-year-old follows a dog groomer on YouTube who creates videos demonstrating the styles of different breeds. In one video, she bathes and blows out a small, sporty dog with a fiery red coat: a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever. "I didn't think much of it, but [the video] kept popping up," Hailey says. "I ended up looking into it, and I fell in love."

Hailey had grown up with large breeds like Saint Bernards, so the compact Toller was a puzzling choice to Hailey's mom, Lisa. But after much research, planning, and waiting, a cinnamon-colored fluffball joined their family: Riverside's Northern Light, or North.

"We were on the waiting list for a long time, so we really had it figured out," Hailey says. "We wanted to make the best of this dog. And a part of the agreement [with the breeder] was to do 4-H."

Hailey—who had no experience training dogs, let alone a young puppy—enrolled North in a basic manners course at Nicole Wiebusch's Golden Paws Dog Training. She knew

Nicole and Lexi from the North St. Louis County 4-H Club, where Hailey participated in the horse and rabbit projects. Joining the dog club would be a natural next step.

"We had to go through a lot of training before we even started the dog project, and it was definitely hard," Hailey recalls. She quickly learned that training the clever, hunting-line Toller would require patience, communication, and creativity.

"She's smarter than us," Hailey laughs. "And it was easier to get her to do stuff when she wanted to."

Hailey began attending 4-H training sessions, where North's puppy antics were on full display—rolling on the floor, chasing the tail of the dog in front of her.

But Nicole encouraged Hailey to continue to train and compete at the upcoming 4-H shows. The novice team qualified for state, where they earned a blue ribbon in showmanship.

At only a year old, North has a bright future ahead of her. Hailey will continue to participate in the 4-H dog project and is looking forward to starting agility. The team also regularly visits their local retriever club, where North and Hailey have started training in fieldwork.

with a handful of kids qualifying for state competition and bringing home ribbons.

"I live in kind of a rural area, so a lot of these dogs are like farm dogs, dogs that live out in the country," Nicole says. Some of the dogs struggle with challenging behaviors, and the kids typically don't come from dog sport backgrounds. But as they begin to train their dogs, the bond strengthens.

"At that point, it's really fun because I'd ask them at the end of the year, 'How did this go?' And what I heard more than anything was, 'Our

relationship is totally different than it used to be.'"

For Nicole's daughter Lexi, the benefits of 4-H extend beyond the leash—and beyond the ring. Now president of the dog club, Lexi, 13, leads the meetings and assists Nicole in training the beginning teams. The role has helped her grow as a leader, build communication skills, and foster friendships.

"In our dog club, there is a wave of completely different personalities, ages, everything. But we all are joined over the fact that dogs are amazing," Lexi says.



On the Right Foot: Before joining the 4-H dog project, Hailey started North in basic manners courses as a very young puppy. Now, the pair competes in 4-H, fieldwork, and conformation in multiple venues.

What started as a YouTube video turned into a way of life—Hailey's involvement in 4-H and fieldwork inspired Lisa to get a Toller pup of her own.

"We're all in this," Lisa says. "It's really kind of brought us together."

"We want to learn more about them, train them, and grow in a relationship." **FD**

Lindsey Dobruck is the senior consulting editor of AKC Family Dog. She lives in Los Angeles with her family and their two dogs, Scoop and Bubbles.

To find your local 4-H extension office and a club near you, visit 4-h.org/find or contact AKC's 4-H outreach coordinator, Rindi Gaudet, at 4h@akc.org.



Step One

A longtime competitor offers a beginners' guide for your first show.

By Elaine Waldorf Gewirtz

I knew we were a match when the 4-month-old Dalmatian ran helter-skelter across the breeder's yard and into my lap for a pit stop. Jenny was exactly the canine package I wanted to share my life with.

But after a few days at home, my puppy's hijinks turned acrobatic and mostly just a blur. While I loved Jenny's joy for life, I knew she needed a way to channel that energy. And fast! Training her for an AKC companion event would sharpen her behavior skills around the house and give us something fun to do

away from home. She oozed show dog potential, but this puppy needed another canine sport, such as obedience, agility, or rally.

But where to begin?

Prep for Success

If you're contemplating getting involved in dog sports, there's a lot to learn when you enter a trial for the first time. Here are some tips that helped make our adventure go smoothly.

■ **Register and vaccinate your dog.** Any dog can attend training classes, but

purebred dogs of AKC breeds must be AKC registered to compete in conformation. Mixed-breed dogs or breeds not yet recognized are eligible to compete in other events if enrolled in the AKC Canine Partners program or the Purebred Alternative Listing program (PAL). All dogs should be current on all vaccinations.

■ **Socialize your dog.** In dog sports, your dog will encounter various situations with new objects, dogs, and people. Before beginning a new sport, exposing your dog to new sights,



Studying the signs will pay off when you enter the ring. AKC offers full descriptions and video demonstrations of all signs in an app and on YouTube.

sounds, and strangers in your community as early and as often as possible makes him feel more secure in a show environment. When your dog realizes the world is friendly, he can relax and focus on learning new skills.

■ **Learn the AKC rules of the sport.** The rules are available on akc.org. If you need clarification on the wording or regulations, ask your trainer for an explanation, go online, or contact a show superintendent or local kennel club member.

■ **Earn a Canine Good Citizen title (CGC).** Although your dog doesn't need this designation before competing, earning this title is a great way to assess your dog's readiness for competition.

■ **Enroll in a reputable training class.** Many dog trainers offer basic obedience instruction, but to compete successfully in a dog sport, it helps to have expert guidance from a trainer who competes and knows the ins and outs of the sport.

■ **Think you have a show dog?** To save disappointment inside the show

ring, ask your breeder or a breed expert to evaluate your dog according to the breed standard and to check for any breed disqualifications.

■ **Before entering.** After your dog masters the skills, test his ability by practicing at a different venue. If no training classes are nearby, take your dog to a safe public place and work with and without distractions. If match shows are available (akc.org/sports/conformation/akc-match), enter your dog in one or more.

Finding Events

When you feel your dog is ready, locate dog sport events in your area. Check the American Kennel Club website at akc.org/sports/events. You'll see the show superintendent or show secretary in your area who offers a premium list, the official announcement of events for conformation, obedience trials, agility, and rally. You'll also see other AKC dog events listed.

What's a Premium List?

This announcement contains the show information and an entry form. To avoid missing the competition entirely, follow the rules to the letter.

When considering entering a show, pay special attention to these details on the premium list:

■ **Date and time to enter.** If you miss the entry deadline, your dog will not be allowed to compete. Some clubs offer online registration with payment through PayPal. Others are mail-in only. If this is the case, factor in the time it will take for your entry form to reach its destination by snail mail.

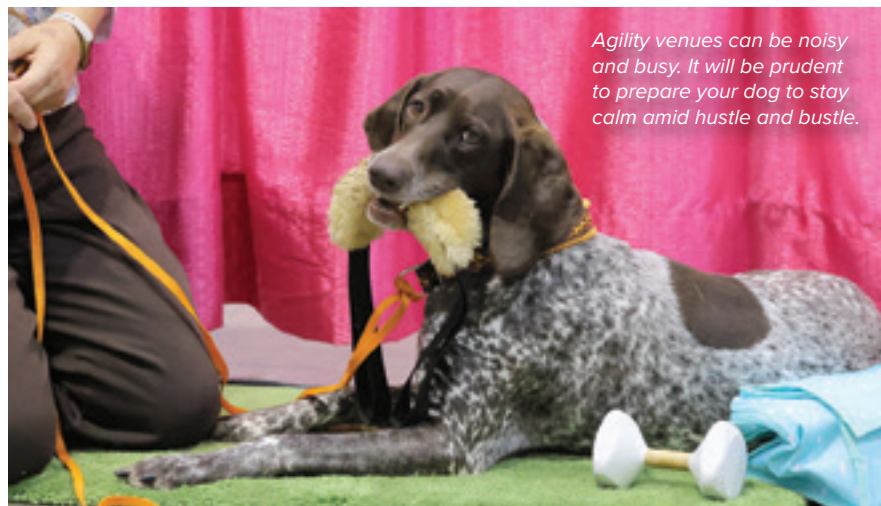
■ **The show date.** Is your calendar clear for most of the day of the show? Depending on the show's superintendent, you won't receive notification of your dog's ring time until a week or more before the event.

■ **The refund policy.** The premium list includes information about conditions for refunds. There are no exceptions.

■ **The show's fee and expense.** Entering a dog event isn't free. Ask yourself if the entry fee and transportation cost fall within your budget. Is the site within a reasonable drive without needing an overnight stay? If you don't own a motorhome, you may need to find lodging that accepts well-behaved dogs and make a reservation in advance. If you have a large dog, check on size restrictions at the hotel.

■ **Classes offered.** Read the class (competition level) descriptions and enter your dog in the correct category.

■ **Indoor or outdoor?** The premium list will include crating requirements. At indoor shows, exhibitors' crate



Agility venues can be noisy and busy. It will be prudent to prepare your dog to stay calm amid hustle and bustle.



Remember to pack everything you need, such as an appropriate collar, leash, and, in more advanced obedience classes, specialized equipment like your dog's dumbbell.

placement must comply with safety precautions. If your crate isn't allowed indoors or only in another room, make sure you feel comfortable with these rules before entering. The premium list will include information about grooming areas and shade tents for outdoor shows during warm or inclement weather. Determine if you need to reserve your spot in advance and if there's a fee. When tenting isn't available, bring your own for protection.

Traveling to the Show

Some events are larger than others, but they all must be well-organized and run on a strict schedule. Plan your departure from home after receiving the premium list to ensure you don't miss your dog's event.

■ **Creature comforts.** A day or two before the show, gather your dog's collar, leash, bottled water, grooming essentials, poop bags, and treats and food. While some shows offer food and beverages for sale for exhibitors, you may want to bring your own from home.

■ **Allow plenty of drive time.** Check directions to the show (don't rely solely on GPS!) and pack your car the day before you leave. On the morning of the event, allow extra time for traffic and arriving at the show.

■ **Parking.** Parking may be far from the show, so allow additional time to unload the car, walk, and potty your dog around the location.

■ **Need grooming?** If your breed needs last-minute primping to prepare for the show ring, allow time and find the permitted grooming space.

■ **Check-in.** Before your ring time, let the ring steward (the judge's assistant who keeps the ring schedule running smoothly) know your dog is present and pick up your armband.

Mind Your Manners

The dog show world has its subculture with unspoken rules of conduct. For first-time exhibitors, the whirl of canine activity can be confusing, especially regarding how to act and what to do. Ask your trainer or friends who compete in your sport about what to do and not do outside the ring.

■ **Don't leave food lying around.** The last thing you want is to tempt and distract dogs waking past your crate.

■ **Be patient and don't be late.** Waiting for your turn to compete can be nerve-racking, but try to relax, breathe, and be ready to enter the ring at the right time.

■ **Last-minute practice.** Conformation exhibitors may not practice with their dogs inside an empty ring, but a quick show stack off to the side of the room or near your crate is acceptable. Avoid warming up ringside as it distracts dogs in the ring. For warmups, find designated practice areas away from competitors.

■ **Wear appropriate attire.** Here's where wearing comfortable clothing and sensible walking and running shoes makes sense. Avoid a wardrobe malfunction or losing a flip-flop or tripping in a high heel while competing.

■ **Control the chitchat.** Certainly, dog shows are great places to meet people and talk about dogs, but realize that competitors are trying to focus on their routines and may not welcome a conversation. Before and after the event are the best times to get questions answered.

■ **No salty language.** While it's OK to use the word *bitch* when referring to a female dog, other language isn't appropriate at a dog show. The rules state that the use of profane language is expressly prohibited.

■ **Your dog comes first.** Always consider your dog's comfort and health above any competition. He is the reason you're there in the first place. If your dog seems ill or excessively anxious, immediately skip the contest and seek veterinary advice. **FD**

Elaine Waldorf Gewirtz has shown Dalmatians and a Pembroke Welsh Corgi in conformation and competed in AKC obedience, sometimes on the same day. She has taught conformation classes for 25-plus years, but Midge, her new Corgi, still sniffs every corner of the yard instead of coming into the house.

Teammates: Hungarian Pumi
G-Man and Louganis

Got Nerves?

A legendary world-class athlete offers tips on conquering ring stress.

By Mara Bovsun

MARK HANAUER, COURTESY GREG LOUGANIS

Seoul, September 19, 1988. Greg Louganis, 28, considered the greatest diver in history, bounced high off the springboard and gracefully completed a series of airborne somersaults.

Then disaster struck. Louganis remembered it as a “hollow thud.” The horrifying image the world saw was his head slamming into the edge of the board on the way down.

That he remained conscious and exited the pool was a miracle. But even more stunning, about 20 minutes later with a concussion and four stitches in his head, he was back up on the board.

He went on to win one of his four Olympic gold medals in the finals.

What do six seconds (an average dive take around three) in a super athlete’s life have to do with you as you step up to the line with your novice dog?

As it turns out, a great deal.

Today, Louganis is a dog sport competitor with experience in conformation, obedience, and agility. His current partners are G, a Pumi, and Pax, a Pyrenean Shepherd. Like the rest of us, he’s seen how his moods can affect his four-legged partners.

“If I’m overstressed, then he can go into avoidance. He can disconnect. There are so many ways it shows itself,” he told FD in a phone interview. When Louganis was nervous, G had issues with his start-line stay. As soon as the collar came off, G would bolt and start zooming around the ring.

“So usually, I have to laugh at myself and then do some tricks, easy things that are easy for him to be successful, get his mind off it, get my mind off it, and really kind of get focused on each other,” he says.

Louganis has a repertoire of stress busters that he honed over decades for the highest levels of world competition. He teaches these techniques in an online course, Finding Your Rhythm (greglouganis.com/shop/course-finding-your-rhythm).



Bouncing Back: Breathing exercises and a moment of empathy and laughter with fans helped Louganis get back on the springboard.

He recently shared some of these methods with *AKC Family Dog*.

Just Breathe

Louganis was terrified when he stepped up for his second dive in the preliminaries that day in 1988. He felt like his heart was pounding outside his chest. He put a hand on his chest and took a deep breath. At that moment, he heard some of the spectators giggling.

“The people who saw that realized, *Oh my God, he’s scared. We’re scared for him.* And they chuckled because they were having that same anticipation of fear. So when they chuckled, I started laughing,” he says. The breath, the pause, and a little humor broke the tension enough for him to complete a great dive.

Patterns of inhalation, exhalation, and even holding your breath create different physical reactions. In his course,

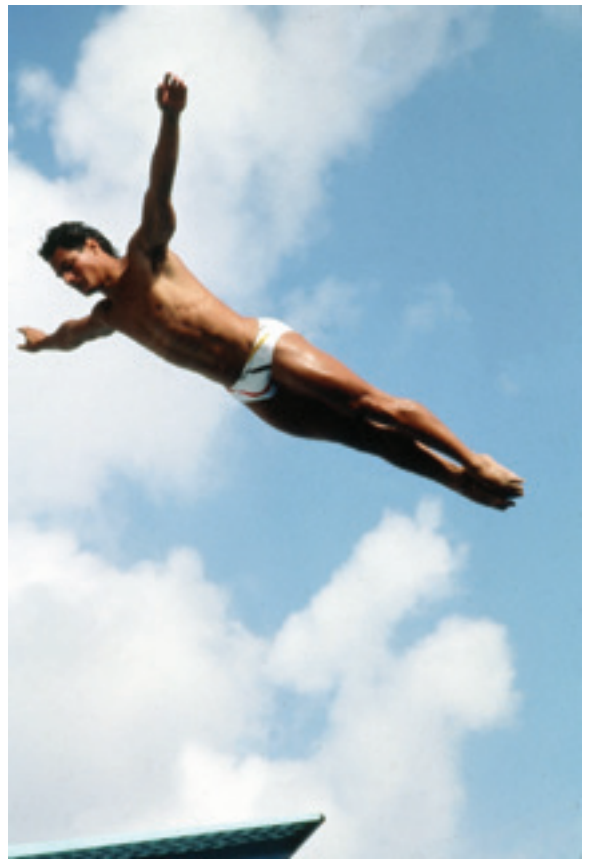
Louganis teaches several breathing patterns to deal with all kinds of situations.

“If you’re really high on the arousal, then what you want to do is use a breath to calm,” he says. “Generally, a breath to calm is exhaling twice as long as you inhale,” such as inhaling to a count of four and exhaling to a count of eight. Another pattern, “box breathing,” involves holding the breath at the end of deep inhalations and exhalations. Some of these exercises may make you dizzy, but that may be what it takes to jolt you out of a negative mind loop—repetitions of *I can’t, I can’t, I’m not good enough*—and allow you to clear the mind for the task at hand.

Think About It Tomorrow

After the accident, Louganis had a flood of negative thoughts—reliving the crash and chastising himself because

Louganis' mother used to say he lived in three D's—dancing, diving, and dogs.



“really good divers don't do this.”

“A lot of people asked me, ‘How did you get over it?’” he recalls. “There wasn't enough time. To get over something you need time, you need to process it.”

He had less than half an hour to get back up there.

Over the years, Louganis has honed a technique to set doubts, negative thoughts, judgmental people, and fears aside in a snap.

“I can compartmentalize things quite well. I've had a lot of practice at that,” he says.

It's not a matter of pushing the thoughts away, he points out. “The harder you push, the more present it's going to be. So you have to acknowledge it and say, ‘Well, is there anything I can do about it?’” The answer usually is no. “So then it's like, ‘OK. Then let me focus on this moment.’”

Human minds, wired as they are, always look for judgment, drama, conflict, and worries. It takes practice to be able to put these paralyzing thoughts aside and focus your attention where it needs to be. But it's a skill that will pay off in many areas of life.



Remember to Warm Up

Peak performance, Louganis has learned over the years, is a matter of regulating a trio of reactions—heart rate, breath rate, and body temperature. Of the three, body temperature can be a little tricky.

When he performed in musicals as a dancer, performers used physical warmups

like ballet barre and vocal exercises, such as humming. These exercises are important, because “every night is opening night, there are no do-overs.”

Dog sports are the same. Serious competitors have pre-run protocols to get in sync with their dogs, such as stretching, quick walks, or tricks. Louganis likes

COURTESY GREG LOUGANIS

to use easy tricks, such as a hand target or a high five, which can build a dog's confidence.

Settle for Success

Many athletes rehearse in their minds, a method known as visualization. Often they like to imagine a flawless performance, but Louganis suggests taking it down a notch. "I encourage people not to visualize perfect," he says. Striving for perfection leaves little room for small mistakes that might happen in high-stress situations. Striving for perfection after an error could lead to an overcorrection. That, in turn, could spark a downward spiral of errors. When that happens, Louganis says, "your relationship with your dog, which is the most important thing, is going to deteriorate." Aim to have things go well, trust the hours of training you've put in with your partner, and don't overthink it.

Pick Up the Pace

The walk-through, a standard part of agility and rally competitions, gives participants a chance to rehearse the course without their dogs. In agility, for example, it's an indispensable part of preparation, essential for figuring out angles, timing, and turns.

Louganis has observed many competitors rehearsing their moves in slow motion during walk-throughs. Slow motion is fine, he says, when you're learning a skill. A slow pace allows you to create a memory of what the movement should feel like.

"A huge key to success is you have to get your visualization at speed or faster," he says. "If you do all your visualization in slow motion, you're more than likely going to be late." Even in diving, where the move takes three seconds, Louganis went a little faster in practice and warmups.

The future diving champ came to this realization as a very young child. Years before he climbed up on a diving board, he trained and performed as a dancer and acrobat. It started when he was a toddler



"I've competed in obedience. I've competed in agility. I love it. It's fun. And I also don't take it too seriously because, first and foremost, is about my relationship with my dog." G and Louganis playing to warm up for an agility run.

and accompanied his mother to watch his sister take classes. Instead of watching, he tried to join in.

After a couple of years of lessons, his teacher told him to practice a routine and then she left the room. He practiced until he was confident of all the steps.

His teacher came back and asked him to perform the routine. But when she turned on the music, she increased the tempo. It was a test. If he could do it fast in practice, he'd be ready to do the step at the normal speed during performance.

"The first time out, I made it fluid," he recalls. "She said, 'OK, you're ready.'"

But Don't Rush

Another mistake some handlers make is rushing to get into the game, trialing too early. It takes time, training together, and

understanding movements and rhythms that are unique to you and your dog.

"When you first start out, understand it's a learning process, so allow yourself time," he says. With G, he trialed infrequently, just to see where they were as a team and what they needed to work on. Then they'd practice before going to another trial. Take the time to build confidence before entering the high-stress environment of competition. "It's their trust in you and your trust in them," he says. "It really is mutual." **FD**

For more inspiration and stress-busting tips, visit greglouganis.com, or follow Greg Louganis on Facebook and Instagram.



To detect incoming migraines, a sighthound uses her nose.

Heads Up

By Elaine Waldorf Gewirtz

Holiday themes and animal prints with a few tutus dominate Amalfi's collection of more than 300 custom-designed dog sweaters. Half-fun, half-necessity, Amalfi's outfits help maintain the dog's body temperature, as lean and short-coated Italian Greyhounds require extra insulation in cold weather and protection from the sun in the summer.

When students at the University of West Florida in Pensacola enter their applied behavior analysis class, they might scan the front for the best seats. Sitting up close means catching every word attorney-professor Mary Reagan delivers. But Amalfi, the teacher's pet, always beats them to the prime perch.

Parked on the podium, the 11-pound Italian Greyhound assumes her post as Reagan's migraine-alert dog. Decked out in a chevron-striped sweater under a red service dog vest, the dog sniffs chemical changes in her owner's breath. Picking up the scent of unstable respirations, 6-year-old Amalfi alerts the professor that a debilitating headache will strike.

Heading Off Pain

A migraine-alert dog is trained to detect changes in his owner's mood, fatigue, and sensitivity to light and sound. He can also pick up on food cravings, stiff movement, trouble speaking, problems with sleeping, and other headache signs up to 48 hours before the owner experiences full symptoms. But knowing how to send the warning takes training.

PHOTOS: JERRY CHARVAT, COURTESY MARY REAGAN



Before she trained Amalfi to catch early signs of a migraine, Reagan suffered from about 20 of these disabling headaches a month. Since her dog has been on the job, that number has dropped to less than seven. The skilled canine companion has given Reagan the freedom and confidence to maintain a demanding work and travel schedule.

Amalfi's education began soon after Reagan, a behavior analyst, spotted a medical alert dog in an airport. Reagan was inspired to train one of her dogs to let her know when a migraine was coming—but which dog? With three German Shepherd Dogs and the IG, each breed offered pros and cons. While German Shepherds are known for their detection work, Amalfi won out.

"IGs are funny little clowns and not only beautiful but intelligent, so I thought she would be perfect," Reagan says. "Traveling with a small dog, rather than a large one, would be easier, too."

Reagan contacted Mary Cates McNeight, CCS, BGS, a certified medical alert service dog trainer and owner of Service Dog Academy (servicedogacademy.com). McNeight trains puppies and teaches owners how to prepare their dogs for service work. In nine online classes, McNeight advised her small group of students to begin the specialized training by socializing their dogs.

"For puppies, the best preparation is enrolling them in local puppy classes followed by early obedience and earning an AKC Canine Good Citizen certificate," says McNeight. "Following that, the specific medical alert training is lifelong."

To begin, Reagan took Amalfi everywhere with her. "Introducing her to different environments and situations helped prepare her for situations she would encounter later during our travels."

Reagan's subsequent assignments involved collecting swabs of her saliva during a migraine, soaking them in pieces of cotton, and placing them in an airtight container before freezing them.

"I used a defrosted sample to teach Amalfi how to identify my migraine," she recalls.

By telling Amalfi *scent* and then *paw*, the dog began associating the odor with the alert behavior. Daily 20-minute practice sessions repeating the exercises and testing the dog kept her alerting skills sharp.

"Teaching a dog to perform a life-giving task takes time, patience, a dog with the right temperament, and working with an experienced trainer," Reagan says. "Now I feel safer and can live my life."

Always by Her Side

When Amalfi's delicate legs paw at Reagan's arm, she's giving a serious warning: "A migraine with aura is coming. To stop it from coming on, take your meds *now*."

The migraines accompany severe

sensory disturbances, or aura, compromising Reagan's eyesight and threatening to derail Reagan for days.

"The minute Amalfi alerts me, I know my condition is serious, and I'll reach for my medication," Reagan says. "She understands the connection between my breath and when I need medicine. If I don't take the meds within 15 or 20 minutes, she'll hit me with her paw again until I do."

Reagan would feel disoriented, tired, and nauseous without this preventive prescription.

"I also may vomit, lose vision in one eye for 30 minutes to an hour, and wind up in bed for two or three days," she says. "I've suffered from disabling migraines since I was 8, and this dog changed my life. I can't function without her."

Reagan suffered 20 migraines a month before she trained Amalfi as a scent-detection dog. After prepping Amalfi, the number decreased to five or seven.

According to Reagan, her small sighthound's accuracy is about 60 to 70 percent.



On the Job: Wherever Reagan is, you'll see Amalfi nearby, always on alert—even when she is lounging on her bed—for the telltale signs that trouble is coming.

Buy or Train?

According to the American Migraine Foundation, migraine is the third most common disease in the world. It affects one in four households in the United States. A migraine-alert dog can improve the quality of your life and act as a loyal companion.

Buying a Dog

If you're considering buying a trained alert dog, thoroughly check the trainer's techniques, references, qualifications, and terms of sale before agreeing to purchase a dog.

Training a service dog requires extensive preparation and differs significantly from training a pet dog for obedience.

Trained service dogs cost anywhere from \$10,000 to \$20,000, depending on the trainer. Unfortunately, most insurance policies do not cover the expense.

Train Your Own

Training your dog to alert to migraines is challenging and happens only after a significant amount of time. With daily practice, reliable alerting can take up to two years to teach, so plan on committing the time.

One advantage of using your dog is that you can train it to the type of alert you choose, such as pawing, licking, barking, or sitting. Another plus comes from saving the expense.

If you already have a dog you're bonded to, you both know the other's behaviors and won't have to start from scratch.

"She might miss an alert if she's in the house and I'm outside or if I have a migraine in my sleep, although sometimes she will warn me at night," Reagan says.

These odds guarantee Amalfi full-time



Frequent Flyers: Reagan and Amalfi travel by air more than a dozen times a year, sometimes for work and often for vacation.

employment as her owner's silent alarm system. Thanks to her dog, Reagan's migraines have not prevented her from living a fulfilling life and maintaining her career and travel schedule.

"My dog accompanies me to work, my hair salon, shopping, doctor's visits, and across the country," she says.

The clever IG doesn't need to stay at her owner's side to help ward off a bad migraine.

"One day at my office ... I was working at my desk and so hyperfocused on a project that I ignored Amalfi pawing at me," Reagan recalls. "After a few minutes, she ran down the hall to my friend and colleague, Courtney Peppers. When Amalfi began pawing at her arm, Courtney knew what it meant and came checking on me."

At another time, Reagan introduced a speaker at the podium and asked a friend in the front row to hold Amalfi. But true to the breed's temperament, the toy charmer refused to be ignored.

"Amalfi was 4 feet in front of me, and I could hear her whining," Reagan says. "Since my dog never whines, I suspected a headache coming. She kept trying to

alert me, and my friend struggled to hold onto her. When a guest uses the podium now, Amalfi lies on a blanket beside me."

As executive director for the Standard Celeration Society, a special interest group of Applied Behavior Analysis International, and the assistant director of student success for the Center of Behavior Analysis, Reagan and Amalfi are always on the go.

Seven or eight times a year, this executive presents a conference on behavior analysis in the United States, Mexico, and Ireland. She and Amalfi also fly to four or five vacation spots.

"I never thought I could apply my law degree to this job," says Reagan, who teaches the course Autism and the Law. "Thanks to Amalfi, my career is so rewarding. If I can help one person with autism or a single student to become a behavior analyst, all the travel is worth it." **FD**

Elaine Waldorf Gewirtz is the author of more than a dozen books about dogs. She doesn't need to train her Pembroke Welsh Corgi to let her know when to take a break from work. Midge barks on the hour.

A devastating diagnosis upended a veterinarian's life. Agility helped her heal.



Playing Through Pain

Kim Krueger was in a great mood the morning of the 2022 Douglas County Fair. The veterinarian loaded up her dogs, goats, and children and headed to the fairgrounds, excited for competition and fair fun, when her phone rang.

Then Krueger heard the words that would turn her world upside down: She had cancer.

"I was diagnosed on August 1 with invasive ductal carcinoma, grade 2,"

Krueger recalls. "I had no symptoms. It was found on a routine mammogram. It was in a weird spot that was hard to palpate."

Instead of canceling the fair plans, Krueger and her family decided to forge ahead and enjoy the exhibitions.

"It was a great distraction while I got all the testing done to have my surgery. My son competed in conformation, obedience, rally, and agility," she says. "I had surgery on August 22 when my kids were starting their third week of

middle school."

Krueger took the month of September off work to recover from surgery, but, much like how she stuck with the fair plans, she continued competing with her Bearded Collies.

"I decided to keep running agility while undergoing treatments, because life goes on. My dogs still needed exercise and stimulation," Krueger says. "But mostly I needed a reason to get up and keep training them. It was one of the best decisions."

Kim Krueger soars over hurdles with the help of her heart dog, River. Running agility has helped her deal with her cancer treatments.



GETTING TO GOLD

Krueger has been involved with dog sports for more than 30 years and discovered the Bearded Collie while in high school.

“My mom and I rescued a dog that we adored but realized she needed training. We were hooked, and I got her CD,” she says. “We saw a Bearded Collie at an obedience trial and loved the look of it. We got one! She had the funniest personality. They are such smart dogs.”

Krueger had the first Bearded Collie in Colorado to earn both an obedience title and a herding title, which she achieved while in veterinary school in the mid-’90s. Her current agility partner is River, who is

7 1/2 years old and also a therapy dog who visits cancer wards and infusion centers.

“River is my heart dog. She would lay in bed with me when I felt so awful,” Krueger says. “But she was always ready to go run agility.”

Along with continuing classes and trials, Krueger joined a team with the new AKC Agility League program, and that became the best therapy for keeping a positive attitude.

“I was so excited when I was invited to join the team,” Krueger says. “It was a time when I really needed something good, and it provided that for me.”

The league teams are composed of three to eight dogs and compete on their home

fields or at their local training facilities. They run six courses over the 12-week league season along with other teams around the country.

She became a member of the Golden Star Golden Girls of Sedalia, Colorado, which runs in the Limited division, featuring shorter courses for smaller spaces.

“I have known a lot of the agility people since I was a vet student in the ’90s. They are my friends. Some days I couldn’t even run, but that was OK,” she says. “I walked through the course and somehow made it. It was a time when I could escape being a cancer patient. I got to just go run with my dog and hang with my friends.”

KEN GEE PHOTOGRAPHY



The Healing Power of Setting Goals and Doing What You Love

*Heeling and Healing:
Dr. Brenda Riemer, seen
here with Liza, is an avid dog
sports competitor.*



GOING STRONG

Krueger ran in all six rounds of the league competition without missing a course while undergoing radiation treatments, which ended a week after the league fall season concluded. She and River won the AKC Agility League Clean Sweep award for completing every round fault-free. But the real prize is that her health has steadily improved.

“I am doing pretty well now. I take a daily aromatase inhibitor. I had some really bad migraines and struggled during the month of January,” she says. “We added acupuncture into my treatment plan. That has helped me tremendously.”

Her dogs were a powerful motivator to keep going and get outside, even when she felt ill.

“I feel having our dogs helps us be more positive about life. They are so accepting of us and always happy to see us,” she says. “... Every day I feel better and have more energy.” **FD**

Penny Leigh is the program manager of the AKC GoodDog! Helpline, and competes in agility and obedience.

Being diagnosed with a disease or suffering an injury can be devastating and frightening. But finding ways to keep working toward goals and be active with your dogs can help your attitude and your healing process, says Dr. Brenda Riemer, who holds a doctorate in sports psychology and works with many athletes. Riemer is a longtime dog sports enthusiast, competing in obedience and having earned an OTCH on her Shetland Sheepdog, Liza, plus competing in rally, agility, and more. She also is a new AKC obedience judge and serves as a trial chair for obedience and rally trials.

(Continued on next page)

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Does setting goals and working toward those goals help someone through difficult times and recovery processes?

Goal-setting is one of the greatest tools we have. Setting reasonable goals that are process-oriented helps individuals both succeed at training and showing, but also helps with recovering from illness, injury, and other life events that might have postponed training. The research indicates that when we write goals down, we are more likely to achieve them than if we keep them “in our mind.”

Not only do we need to write the goals down, but we need to be able to measure them. By having measurable goals, a person can see improvement. To use an agility example, we would not have a MACH as our goal. What we would have are items that are the foundation of the sport and what people can measure. For example, we might set a goal about a dog learning weave poles and then learning different weave entrances (right/left). We could set a goal for ourselves to learn back crosses. All these items, once learned, lead to the titles one hopes to earn.

Last, all of us are great at rewarding our dogs. When you are goal-setting, write down how you will reward yourself when you reach each milestone.

What is the positive aspect of staying active and engaged with what you love to do, even through injury or illness?

When we are able to continue with an activity, it helps with how we identify who we are. All of us have multiple factors that contribute to our identity. For example, my identity includes such items as professor and dog trainer. As I approach retirement, my “professor” portion will get smaller and other



aspects of myself will become a stronger part of my identity.

When we have a passion for a sport or hobby, being able to participate in that hobby while we are recovering helps with the sense of self and psychologically helps to keep a positive attitude. What we want to be aware of is making sure we do not overdo an activity so that our bodies can heal. It is a balance to be able to continue to do what you love, but in a smaller amount until you have the strength to be fully active again.

What recommendations do you have for dog sports competitors who are diagnosed with illnesses and want to continue training and competing with their dogs as they are able?

First, listen to your doctors. Do you have an acute illness that will be out of your body in a week? If so, take it easy and skip the show so that you can heal

and you don’t get anyone sick (such as a bad cold or flu).

If you have a diagnosis that is not contagious, train and learn what your body is able to handle as you move through the treatment process. Keep training and showing as much as you want to. If you find you get tired faster, if possible, have someone you can go to shows with so that you do not have to worry about having enough energy to drive home by yourself.

In the past few years, I have been participating in virtual walks (1,000-mile walks), and I can’t tell you what it has been like to see people post photos of themselves receiving chemotherapy and then walking later that same day. Follow your passion. If you can’t run as fast, that’s OK. Enjoy every moment with your dog and your friends while training and at shows. In the long run, that’s what matters.

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THE END OF THE LEASH

“That dress, I believe, was about 30-something dollars. On Amazon.”

When I started showing my own dog, I saw all these women—great handlers winning with great dogs. But another thing that stood out were all those expensive St. John suits.

And I'm like, *Well, I'm not going to drop \$800 or \$1,000 on a suit for one night.* So I started poking around for something just as flashy and pretty and professional, for less dime.

I would say to anybody starting, comfort is the number-one thing. And number two is to not be afraid to be different. I'm a plus-size handler, which makes it even more difficult. Then there is the unspoken rule that we *have* to wear a skirt suit. Basically I was just like, *I'm going to tear those walls down.*

If I want to wear a pants suit, I'm going to wear a pants suit. If I want to be comfortable but flashy, I can do that.

Professional handler Vickie Venzen discussing her emergence as a dog show fashion icon. She's the human member of the groundbreaking Team Vixen, two gals who are defying all kinds of conventions. Vixen, owned by Sunny Simpson, is the first female Leonberger to snatch Best of Breed honors at Westminster, and is racking up group placements show after show. Venzen, who is also a Department of Defense environmental compliance expert and mother of three, is relishing her part in revising the dress code. Women seek her out at shows to talk about outfits. “They're like, ‘We love it. Are you OK if I go buy it?’ I'm like, ‘I'm not the suit police. I hope you enjoy them and you go wear it!’ ”





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