

## **Having fun with your dog !!! FEBRUARY 2010 ISSUE**

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**O**wning a dog is all about having fun with a capital 'F' in my humble opinion.

Today we are blessed with the different activities available to us to have real fun with our dogs and with the vast variety of dog toys on the market we are able to engage with our four legged family members and train them in a more fun and positive way.

Dog training alone has changed dramatically in the last twenty years and today, once your dog has reached a good level of control and providing the dog is old enough, you can partake in many exciting canine activities.

I had a particular couple who came to see me from near Felixstowe with a dog who had always been obedient, who had never put a paw wrong and would do whatever was asked by it's owner.

Through no fault of their own the owners thought they were training the dog rather well and was quite mystified by increasing changes in the dogs behaviour. Obviously dogs can change for different reasons but in this case, working through and ruling out various options, we suggested it could just be plain boredom. The dog was only three years old and the owners agreed that perhaps life for the dog was not interesting or fun enough.

The following suggestions (below) were recommended and I am pleased to say the dog is now happier, he is alive inside, you can see it in the dogs eyes. The owners are pretty chuffed too !!!

The daily walk can be enhanced. Find somewhere safe and have a 'tricks' stop. This is when you ask the dog to do tricks you have taught it at home previously like 'shake paws', 'twirls and twists', 'sit, stand, down and rollover'. Not only will this make the walk more interesting for your dog but will increase the bond between you and give the dog mental stimulation. Remember to praise your dog with a smile on your face !

Walking through the forest can be made more interesting by getting the dog to jump over fallen branches and trees (providing the dog is over a year old as the joints are still developing before this time and in giant breeds the dog would need

to be over eighteen months of age). Using a command like 'over' works well and the use of a treat will encourage even the most unsure dog. Take it slowly and be full of enthusiasm.

'Hide and seek' games are fun for all the family. A member of the family goes and hides and after a count of ten or twenty the person left behind gives the command 'find them' and allows the dog to take them on lead to where the person is hiding up. If the dog has an excellent recall then this game can be done off lead providing it is safe to do so. The dog is then rewarded with praise, petting and a food reward or a game with the dogs favourite toy. **(Not sticks as these are very dangerous and have caused death when they have got stuck in the dogs throat).**

If you own a dog which is good at retrieving articles then take a favourite toy out with you. Besides playing fetch you can extend this into a great 'find it' scenting and tracking game. Show the dog where you are going to drop the toy. Not too far out or too difficult to begin with. Continue to walk about ten feet, stop, turn round and face where you dropped the toy and send the dog back to retrieve the article using your retrieve command.

There are lots of canine activities to discover. The internet is full of information or your local veterinary practice may be able to point you in the right direction. The most popular sport at the moment is 'agility' which is a great way to engage with your dog and get fit at the same time, it is also a good way to get gundogs fit for the shooting season. with 'fly ball' close behind which Collies particularly enjoy.

Have fun !!!

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**Next month in the March issue: Do dogs' really understand what we say to them ???**