

Super Dogs Are Made Not Born

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Today almost everyone involved with dogs has heard of the work of Scott and Fuller. Perhaps they have attempted to read the studies, and like many people stumbled over the scientific language and technical charts and graphs in an attempt to understand. Many have read Pfaffenberger's book, or at least are familiar with its contents on the critical socialization periods in a dog's life. However, when it comes to "tearing" the books apart and discarding the excess verbiage to get to the salient points, many are at a loss.

This is not meant to imply that these books are not excellent works. Pfaffenberger gives much valuable information. However, his book was not written as a textbook. It was written to be informative, yet "readable." In order to find the information on socialization we must first read through anecdotes of his life and then glean the bits and pieces of information from each chapter. The studies of Scott and Fuller should be the "Bible" of the conscientious breeder. But, again, they do not always discuss their findings in the language of the average dog owner.

Add to these facts that additional studies have been conducted which shed new light on the critical periods, and in some cases even alter some of the thoughts expressed in the earlier works, and add additional critical periods in the life of a pup.

Just what are the critical periods in the life of a dog? What must a breeder do and not do in order to help a pup develop his aptitudes to the highest possible potential? What can a breeder do to assure a sound out-going temperament, while helping the pup develop confidence without being aggressively dominant? Where does the responsibility of a breeder begin and end? It isn't enough to select a stud and bitch for their sound genetic qualities and temperament. Super dogs are not bred. They are carefully molded each step of the way through the established critical periods.

Scientific studies have shown a dog's innate temperament and trainability



can be altered by the type of environment provided. While we can't change the aptitudes the dog has inherited, we can take these aptitudes and with careful handling turn almost any pup into a super working dog and super companion.

Hopefully this article will provide some of the answers for the breeder. Each of the critical periods is explained in everyday language. What must be done and what must not be done is spelled out in detail, along with the reasons why.

The one prevailing thought the breeder must adhere to is the fact that the outlines periods are not the "final word." It offers an average time frame for the "average" pup. Some pups will follow the outline exactly, while others may be ahead of the schedule or slightly behind. The actions and reactions of a pup during each period are described to give the reader something to look for to alert him to the fact that the pup is entering that particular critical period. Hopefully it will help him determine when to put into practice each "Do" and "Do Not" on the list.

If the breeder follows this guideline in raising a litter, he or she is going to be one busy person! I recently raised a litter of ten puppies and followed the outline with care. It meant many hours above and beyond feeding and changing newspapers. It also meant the help of generous friends. Each pup was socialized individually on a daily basis and each pup received obedience training on a daily basis. It meant rotating pups in various pens and even rotating them to different homes and different environments (that's where generous friends come in handy!).

Following the guideline was not complicated, but it was very exhausting! However, the results made it all worthwhile and very rewarding. The pups were all placed in their new homes between 10 and 12 weeks of age. Each new owner continued the training at a formal obedience class for puppies. This was achieved through a contract which gave the new owners an opportunity to receive up to \$85 of the sale price of each puppy back as it proceeded through the various stages of training.

Three of the pups qualified in obedience matches with above average scores at the tender age of 16 weeks! While by accepted standards they weren't even old enough to enter obedience training, much less trials, they were and are outstanding puppies, well on their way to becoming truly super dogs!

First Critical Period

(Birth through 3 weeks)

Basic Needs: Food, sleep, warmth, massage

Do

Provide warm whelping Box

His body thermostat is not sufficiently developed, so he has no control over his temperature. You must assure the whelping room remains warm.



Minimum of handling, and leave to their mother's care

Mentally the pup is insulated from his environment. There is very little difference in his brain waves awake or asleep. Since the environment has no effect on his mental development at this age, leave him alone except for attending to his physical comfort.

Do Not

Attempt to train

Studies proved a pup is unable to learn anything except by long repetitions of up to 80 times. Then can only retain the stimulus for a few seconds.

New Actions and Reactions

The pup has reflex responses only to hunger, cold, touch, and even elimination which is created by the mother's massage and lapping. Pups will "pig pile" for warmth. Pup whines and cries. Swings his head from side to side. Can crawl forward and backward, but does not venture out of the nest. Eyes will open between 10 and 19 days of age, however, he cannot see. Does not follow moving objects and does not startle at rapid movements. Around 18 days, he may get up on wobbly feet and walk.



Second Critical Period

(4th Week)

Basic Needs

Food, sleep, warmth, his mother, canine socialization with his littermates, socialization with humans on limited basis, unaltered environment.

Do

Provide gentle handling by humans

An attachment to humans is beginning to form, however, due to importance of this particular period, handling should be by adults in your own immediate family. Not by strangers or children.

Do Not

Remove from the litter

If removed from the litter the pup will lose his ability for socially adjusting to dogs, and will probably remain as maladjusted "people" dog for the rest of his life.



Wean

Weaning will create an emotional upset that will be unsurmountable. If due to mammary problems or other unforeseen circumstances the pup must be weaned or removed from the litter, it should be done before the 21st day or after the 28th.

Allow negative events to happen

During this period negative events can bring the inborn characteristic of nervousness to light. Negative happenings can create shyness and other unwanted qualities in a puppy. Once these qualities have developed they will be difficult if not impossible to erase.

New Actions and Reactions

All senses are functioning. The pup can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. (You will notice a loud noise or fast movement will cause the pup to startle.) Studies have

shown profound changes are now occurring in the brain waves. The pup stops all neonatal behavior, such as crawling and swinging the head from side to side. The pup whines much less. He doesn't sleep as much. He will leave the next area for a considerable time by himself or with another puppy, but will not travel very far away.



Additional comments

This is perhaps the most critical of all the periods. Before this time the pup was insulated from the environment emotionally, but now suddenly he can see and hear and he discovers the world to be a very scary place filled with strange noises, sudden movements, and contrasting shades of dark and light. Unless this period is handled with care he can become so emotionally upset it will remain with him for life. For this reason any changes in his environment should occur either before or after this period. This is definitely not the time to move his whelping box to a different location, or to introduce him to the neighbor's children. However, common sense should be used. I knew one breeder who adhered to the established critical periods and during this week would seal off the whelping

room, disconnect his doorbell, his telephone, and refuse to even enter the room for fear of upsetting the pups with a strange noise. While the pups do need a carefully controlled environment, they also need contact with humans (preferably their breeder or other responsible adults). While you certainly wouldn't want to go into the room and drop a metal feeding pan, or allow a screaming youngster to enter the area, you do not have to go overboard. Use your common sense in going about the daily routines



Third Critical Period

(5th through 7th week)

Do

Begin personal attention and some training by fifth week

The pup is beginning to form attachments to people, as he is now able to recognize people. By giving him personal attention away from the litter and his mother, he learns that he is an individual. Since he is probably experiencing the beginning stages of the “social pecking order” within his litter, the personal attention will help to counterbalance the dominance expressed over him by some of the pups. Training is begun in simple form, because the best time to teach him runs from 21 to 49 days. He is learning, whether you teach him or not. If he forms bad habits, it could be stumbling block to later learning. By starting now, you are helping “learn to learn.”



Have regular socialization times established

Pfaffenberger studies proved regularity rather than length of time or frequency of intervals of human socialization is very important.

Begin housebreaking

At this age puppies will begin to wander out of their nest to evacuate. This natural tendency to want a clean “den” makes housebreaking easy at this age. Area used should be heavily lined with papers.

Continue with individual socialization during 6th and 7th week

This will help to even further establish the fact that the puppy is an individual, and will help build his confidence in himself.

Wean and discipline

Begin feeding puppies from dish, but do not remove the mother. She should continue to have access to the pups and to nurse them in between feedings if she’s willing. Her presence is important during this time as she will begin disciplining the pups. Do allow her to discipline the pups. Many people are shocked when their bitch turns on the pups with a snarl and a snap or bite on the muzzle, and will even correct her for doing so. But, this is important to teach the pup submissive postures. He is learning to be a dog, and during his lifetime, assuming submissive postures will save him from being challenged by every aggressive, dominant dog that comes along. Most pups need to be taken down a peg or two at this age. Their teeth are sharp, and they get carried away in their play. If the mother is removed, then you must supply the discipline.



Do Not

Remove from littermates.

Again, the puppy is learning to separate people and dogs. He is learning he is a canine, and he is learning to get along with other dogs (learning greeting patterns, submissive and dominant gestures, and all important play gestures). If he is separated from littermates during this period, he will show less interest in dog activities when he is grown, and will probably pick fights with every strange dog he meets. If removed from the litter at the beginning of this period, he is usually very aggressive as an adult, especially if human attention replaces the dog attention. He will be confused over his identity, and become so “people oriented” that even his sexual desires will be expressed towards humans instead of canines. He will be very difficult to breed to another canine as an adult.

Completely remove his mother before the end of the 7^b week. Even though weaning has been completed, she should have access to her pups to clean, play with, and discipline them.

Pups removed from their mother completely during this period are often noisy and nervous for the rest of their life.

New Actions and Reactions

The social litter order is established during this period. The pups begin play fighting as well as actual fighting, primarily over food. By seven weeks the pup has an adult brain; he only lacks experience. Pup can recognize different people. He responds to voices.

Additional comments

If you must remove from the mother, you can do it by the 5th week, but you must leave with the litter, and you must supply the discipline. Unless it is absolutely essential, it is advisable to let the mother remain.

Not is the time to begin introducing your pup to the average noises of a busy household. By the 5th week he has become accustomed to his environment and is well adjusted. Using metal food dishes is advantageous, as the pup associated clanging noises with something pleasant. You can begin setting the dishes down with a clang, and use a spoon to stir the contents in a clanging, banging noise. This assures you will not have a pup who shrinks at the sounds of pots and pans banging in the kitchen, or other accidentally dropped objects. You can begin soft handclapping as you sit in the whelping area, praising and loving the pups when they run to you, and then advance to louder clapping and other noises. The vacuum cleaner can be introduced first from the other room, and then slowly brought into the whelping room. The pups will learn to accept it much better while still with their littermates.

This is also the time to begin the introduction to lead breaking. Each pup should be fitted with a buckle collar. A small length (single strand so that it cannot become caught) of lightweight rope, or even a shoestring, can be attached to each collar. It should not be so long as to hang down between the pup's legs and snag and trip him as he walks. The pups will pull and tug on each other's short line, thereby accustoming them to the feel and weight of something around their neck, and light tugs on the collar. During your individual attention sessions, this is an excellent time to place the pup up on a table and gently examine his teeth, his testicles (if a male, of course!), and begin foot caressing. By handling the feet and gently strok-



ing them, the pup becomes accustomed to his feed being touched. As you progress, introduce the nail trimmers and cut just the tip of each tiny nail. Brushing can also be introduced at this time.

Fourth Critical Period

(8th through 12th week)

Basic Needs

Human socialization, mother substitute, training

Do

Avoid frightening or painful new experiences

Studies have shown that prior to eight weeks of age a pup will continue to approach a person, even though that person frightened or hurt him the previous day. Upon reaching the eighth week and being frightened, he will remember and will be afraid of the person and try to avoid contact with them. The eighth week is a period of fear for the pup, and you should avoid trips to the vet for vaccines (although this is usually the week most pups are taken for their first trip), exposing the pup to new situations that may be frightening. As you can see, this rules out one of the most common practices of transferring the pup to a new home during this time—unless the new owners have been thoroughly “grilled” and will avoid any unpleasant experiences for the pup. This is also the time many breeds have their ears cropped—again it should be done prior to the 8th week, or closer to the 10th week of life. Studies have also shown that once a puppy passes this stage in his life, his devotion to humans is so great (if he has been properly socialized) that even though they may reject him and attempt to frighten him, he will still approach and creep submissively to their feet!



Remove from littermates and mother influence, or rotate (rotation explained under additional comments)

Leaving the pup with the mother can become very confusing, and actually be damaging to his emotional development. During this period she will begin actively rejecting the puppy which can be quite a blow to his newly gained confidence. Leaving the pup with the mother can also cause him to remain dependent on her, which again, will be damaging to his emotional development. Since she is rejecting him, he will not find the security he needs. Anytime following the 8th week is an ideal time to place the pup in his new home (provided the new owners are willing to follow through with the remainder of the critical periods). He will naturally become attached to the person who becomes his substitute mother. His instinct of following (the beginning of the pack instinct) comes into being early in this period and he will naturally look

up to his human pack leader. It is important to separate or rotate the pups from or with littermates to keep them from becoming bullies or cowards. The pup must remain with the litter long enough to develop a competitive attitude, but leaving him too long will have the opposite effect and injure his emotional growth. If he is left, he is likely to remain a bully or a coward for life. If the dog is removed from the litter and m other and raised with other dogs in the family, for some reason he is not affected in the same way. So don't be afraid to place in homes that already have a dog.

Provide love and attention

The pup's ability to form a strong bond of affection and devotion is greater during this period than at any other time in his life. That doesn't mean he must be fussed over constantly or "coddled." But to help achieve his bond to humans, he needs good care, and individual times of play and petting.

Provide supervised play with children

A dog does not see all humans as one species of animal—a child is totally different from an adult, and a young adult is completely different from an elderly person. He must meet all types of individuals. Children and adults, as well as other animals in the family or neighborhood, should not be allowed to scare or hurt the puppy, (accidentally or on purpose), so they must be watched carefully. If you do not have children, then "borrow" them from the neighborhood. Introduce one child, then gradually add several children. Do not allow the puppy to pull or chew on the child. Have the child offer him a toy, or if necessary, correct the puppy gently.

Provide supervised socialization with as many different types of people as possible.

His introduction to people during this period will determine his later sociability and emotional outlook towards humans. His fondness (or fear) of people will permanently affect how he accepts training and directions. If he is properly socialized, it is possible to even overcome the inherited breed characteristics of independence, aggressiveness, and aloofness. The importance of closely supervising all contact with people during this time cannot be emphasized strongly enough. You must make sure **nothing** occurs to cause negative conditioning.

Expose the big, wide, world after the 8th week.

The pup should gradually be introduced to the "outside" world. He should be taken in the yard, taken for walks, taken for short automobile rides, and introduced to strange new objects. Even the common household garbage can be a frightening experience, unless you've been properly introduced! He should see and smell everything within his reach. He should learn that bicycles are not to be feared, nor washing machine noises, or automobile sounds and motion, or doorbells and telephones—and a hundred other new and exciting and funny things that make up his strange new world.

Begin Gentle but firm discipline

During this period he is capable of accepting and understanding discipline. By discipline, we mean learning that all-important word "NO," which in reality should be the only negative word he learns. He can accept mild corrections for failure to obey the "NO" command. (Puppy corrections will be covered in detail later.)



Complete your housebreaking

During this period he is capable of going through the night without having an accident and he can progress from paper training to outdoor training. It should be done only in a positive manner. His desire to be clean in his bed area, as well as his desire to please will make housebreaking a snap at this time.

Begin his simple obedience training (response to sit, stand, down, come)

His developing pack instinct will keep his total attention on you, the leader, at this time and make training so simple you will vow to begin training every additional pup you acquire at this tender age! Even more important, what he learns during this time will remain with him for life, and become a basic part of his complete personality and his acceptance of training throughout his life. His leash breaking should be completed during this period. Progressing from the short line on the collar to an actual training lead.

Be positive and constructive

Again, what he is learning during this period will shape his entire attitude towards training and life in general. Everything related to training should be done in a positive manner. During training sessions forget the word “NO.” He will be praised for correct behavior and will receive “nothing” for incorrect behavior. We merely replace him gently in position, and praise when he responds. The word “NO” can only be employed in training when the pup is attempting to bite.

Work individually out of sight and hearing of mother and littermates, in a distraction free area.

By working separately you are still stressing that he is an individual and helping to build his confidence even more. In addition, you are also helping him understand he can be a co-worker with you. He must be away from his littermates and mother and in an area that is free of distractions so that his attention is focused only on you. He can be trained with distractions, but the results will be much more spectacular if distractions are not available.

Begin teaching him to fetch

If you are planning to enter this pup in obedience competition now is the time to begin retrieving! Actually the fetch test is used by Guide Dogs for the Blind to determine how willing a pup is going to be to work for man. They consider this test extremely important and have found that pups who do not fetch willingly **never** become reliable guide dogs.

Do Not

Restrain

The only restraints should be the crate or other necessary fencing to keep the pup in his kennel or bed area. The pup should not be tied outside or left tied anywhere during this time.

Isolate from humans

Tests proved that a puppy who is isolated from humans during this period remains maladjusted for life. They also proved to be incapable of becoming companions to humans as well as incapable of training. Your daily training sessions will provide ample contact with humans—but this can create what is known as a single-person socialization—a dog who accepts one person, but is



terrified or aggressive to other people. For this reason, again the importance of introducing him to other people is stressed.

New Actions and Reactions

Extreme competition now begins in the litter, creating bullies and timid, cowardly pups. The pup can now learn by association chains. Show him what to do, and he will learn to do it. The natural pack instinct develops and he will willingly follow a human leader if the opportunity is provided. He is learning at an accelerated pace. Because environmental influences create such a big impression on him, this is the best time for man to step in and mold the puppy into exactly the kind of dog he wants. He will never again be as “pliable” as he is during this period. His body sensitivity is increasing rapidly, and it is important to avoid physical punishment or accidental painful events.

Additional Comments

As you can see this is another extremely critical period in molding your puppy. From my own personal experience, I would never purchase a puppy over seven weeks of age, unless I knew the breeder was strictly adhering to the training and socialization in the various periods—however, I would never sell a pup of my own breeding until they were at least 11 to 12 weeks of age. I know that most people are not willing to put in the time to cover all the “Do” and “Do Nots,” and I would want to make sure that this pup had the best possible start in life to counterbalance the many new, strange, and frightening as well as negative influences he is bound to encounter in the course of his life. Although most of the studies stress puppies should be placed in new homes at the end of the seventh week of life, because this is when the permanent bonds of affection begin, you can keep the pup without detrimental effects if you are willing to devote the time and energy necessary. The pups should be watched closely during this period for signs of domination. If one pup continuously dominates another pup, then it is time to being your rotation of pups. In a few litters, no one pup is ever totally dominant—meaning there are times when he’s the guy on top and other times when the pup he was just dominating is now dominating him. With these litters it is not necessary to provide separate housing. But if a dominance pattern is developing then you must set up enough pens or crates (or whatever you are using) to accommodate the pups in pairs. Let’s assume you have six pups in your litter. Today you might pair puppy A and B in one pen, puppies C and D in another, and puppies E and F in a third pen. Tomorrow you would rotate these pups, placing puppies A and F together, B/D, and C/E. The next day you would again rotate, place A and E, and so on. In this way, a dominant pup is never left with the one he is dominating for more than a day. Likewise, a submissive pup-to-pup A may be dominant to pup D and so on. It is very rare for one pup to be dominant over every other pup in the litter, just as it is rare for one pup to be the underdog and be submissive to the entire litter. This way each pup gets his opportunity to be the dominant one, and he also learns he is not the “king of the mountain” as there are times when he must submit to another pup. In addition to rotating to counterbalance the pup’s place in the world, you must hold daily training sessions and individual attention, and it must be done out of sight and hearing of the rest of the litter or the mother. In this way the pup can successfully be kept for longer periods before placing him in his new home, and still emerge a confident, sociable pup, with a positive attitude towards training. All pups tend to “mirror” their human families. If the family is noisy and active, then chances are the pup is going to be noisy and slightly hyper. Conversely if the pup is raised in a quiet, calm atmosphere, he is probably going to be the same type of dog. It is important



when placing your pups in a new home that the owners understand if they want a pup that is gentle and loving as an adult, then they must treat it gently and lovingly. If the pup is always greeted, when the owners return home, with excited cries of “Hello puppy! What a good puppy, blah, blah, blah!” the pup is going to overly excited each time his family returns—which leads to jumping and running wildly through the house. While the pup should certainly be greeted, it should be done quietly, with gentleness and loving attention. The pup should be placed into a sit prior to being petted—which will end forever the problem of jumping up, and will teach the pup sitting quietly earns the welcome reward of petting and praise.

Fifth Critical Period

(13 through 16 weeks)

Basic Needs

Training, Love, Discipline, socialization to humans and canines.

Do

Begin serious training

The pup is ready to undergo formal obedience training during this period. Disciplined behavior can be expected and enforced now. While training is still done in a positive manner, mild corrections can be introduced. Caution is advised as the pup's attitude towards training can become very negative. The method of training should be positive and gentle, but firm.

Avoid negative commands

Withholding praise can be just as effective as negative commands (such as “shame, bad dog, no” and other negative sounding words). Praise for correct behavior and ignoring the pup for incorrect responses to commands will keep his attitude positive. All praise should be delivered with real feeling, rather than a monotone of “good dog.”

Begin providing slight distractions

When introducing a new exercise, the pup should be trained in a distraction free area. However, the exercises taught in the last period can now be performed with mild distractions at first, and building up to expecting obedience no matter what distractions may be in the area.



Do Not

Wait until after 16 weeks of age to train

Studies have proved if a puppy goes beyond that 16th week of life without some form of training having begun, he may never reach his full potential. He will still be capable of learning, and may even be a top performing dog. But, if he turns out to be really good, just think what a SUPER DOG he could have been if his training had been started at the proper age! The studies of Pfaffenberger also point out that a dog who begins training after 16 weeks of age will never make up for anything lost through neglect in earlier training.

Leave with littermates

Even though you have been rotating the pups, now is the time to completely separate all littermates. Leaving him with his litter beyond 16 weeks is going to make him a very “dog oriented” dog. His ability to form a close bond with humans will be limited, and his attachment to his new owners may never become strong. If he has been left with the litter, and dominance patterns allowed to develop up until this age, he will probably be a bully or coward for life, and will be very difficult to train. By 16 weeks all of his emotions are developed, and what he is at this age (whether it is hyper, calm, aggressive, or shy) will remain fixed for life.

New Actions and Reactions

The flight instinct develops. The pup cuts his teeth, and his apron strings. He will wander from the nest (and refuse to be caught). He gets into increasing mischief. His brain is fully developed. He will begin to try to assert his dominance over human pack members.

Additional Comments

Since the flight instinct begins to develop during this period, it is imperative that the puppy learn the recall before this age. He must have obedience to that command so ingrained in his mind, that he is unaware he has any option except to come when called. Since this is the age of getting into mischief, he must be retrained to avoid injuring himself and to keep the breeder or new owner from deciding he is too much of a “monster” to keep! He is cutting teeth, and will chew everything in sight. He must be given plenty of chewable items of his own, and confined when he cannot be supervised.

Please note: the last sentence of the following paragraph is edited by Ray Carlisle. He will begin asserting dominance in subtle ways, such as chewing on your hands and feet, grabbing pants legs, or refusing to obey even when he knows the command well. This must be dealt with immediately, as it occurs, and firmly (not cruelly). He must understand while he can dominate other dogs, and while he can be very confident around humans, he can never be the dominant one over his owner. That throughout his life, his owner is at the top of the social ladder (the pack leader).

The Juvenile Period

This period is a little more difficult to pinpoint due to the different rate of speed with which dogs mature. But, somewhere between that fourth and seventh month of life, the dog is going to enter into what is commonly called “fear of new situ-



ations” periods. One day your pup will be working like a dream and be a well-adjusted dog, and suddenly the next day his training seems to have gone to pot, and he becomes fearful of almost everything that is new to his environment. This is a very difficult period for the dog. While the common belief is still prevalent that you should not begin training a dog until it reaches six months of age, this is the worst possible time to introduce a dog to a training class. He is going through a fear period and nothing could be more of a “new situation” than a training class to a dog who has never been exposed to large numbers of dogs, large numbers of people, plus noise and confusion. Dog shows and trials are set up to admit pups only when they reach six months of age. If you plan to show, then make sure your pup is exposed to matches and training classes prior to this period, so that it is not a new situation to him when he reaches the “proper age.”

This period can last well into maturity, and if an event occurs that frightens the pup badly, it may permanently stay with him. So be cautious in handling him during this time. Don't insist that he make friends with your long, lost “Uncle Harry” if he appears afraid. Take him with you when you visit new places, but if he appears fearful, let him stay in the car, or keep him where you can observe him at all times, so that you can reassure him if needed.

What makes this period even more difficult is the fact that many pups are reaching sexual maturity, which again alters their personality. This is a time when once again the pup is going to try to assume what he considers to be his rightful place as “pack leader.” You must be firm in insisting that you will retain this position, while at the same time avoid a real trauma which is going to remain with him if he is in the “fear of new situations” period.

If the pup has been raised according to the charts on the preceding pages, you are going to have fewer problems with the sexual maturity than you would have with a pup that has been raised permissively. According to Dr. Michael Fox, “When permissively raised pups reach sexual maturity they may become even more difficult to handle, showing extreme indifference to their owners and violent aggression when disciplined or forcibly restrained. Humane destruction is the fate of many such dogs; owners who wanted to raise their pet permissively should have chosen a more submissive and social breed or have had it castrated early in life to reduce the chances of sex-related aggression and dominance fighting that is associated with maturity.”

As stated at the beginning of this article, raising a litter of puppies properly is difficult enough, but multiplying that by six or ten or even twelve means devoting full time to the task. But, the rewards are great, especially when your new puppy owners call you to state, “I never knew owning a puppy was such a joy. Other dogs I've owned were pests, but this one is so good, and so obedient, I can hardly believe it!”

If it is true that puppies respond so readily to obedience training then why haven't people recognized this in the past? Why do so many trainers today still insist on waiting until a dog reaches six months of age (or older) before beginning actual training? And why are there so many who announce, “I doesn't work. I tried it and I ruined my puppy,” when they give it a try? Why did it fail?

There are many reasons, but let's look primarily at the two most common. Many years ago, before the advent of distemper vaccines, people who took puppies out “into the world” at an early age were exposing them to almost certain death from this dread disease. By waiting until the puppy was older he stood a lesser risk of contracting distemper. Through repeated exposure as he grow older his “natural”



immunity became stronger. Although older dogs can contract distemper, it is not as prevalent as it is among puppies. As the years passed, waiting until a dog reached “maturity” was a common practice, before showing or training began. After the discovery and widespread use of distemper vaccines, it was slowly forgotten why the “Year” or “six” month rule came about—but because it had been in existence so long it persisted. When questioned as to why, and at a loss for an answer, the reason gradually changed to include: “You must wait until a puppy matures, he can’t learn before then.” “A puppy must be allowed to be a puppy; you can’t expect them to act like adults.” “Puppies can’t learn because they can’t remember.” “Their attention span is too short.” And on, and on, and on.

But perhaps the only excuse that had an ounce of truth in it was the one offered by those who had tried and failed and ended up with a “ruined” puppy. How was he ruined? He became a nervous, cowed, unsure specimen in the ring, when and if he ever reached a ring. And it was true. Why? Because the harsh methods called for punishment, scolding, and extremely harsh corrections, widely accepted when obedience was introduced to this country cannot be used on a puppy. Even when the methods began to change, getting away from pain as a teaching tool, they still relied primarily on correcting a dog into each position. Even before the dog had a basic idea of what he was expected to do, he was firmly corrected. This is still true today. The average trainer and training book, for instance, still rely heavily on teaching the sit via the “push/pull” method. A firm upward tug on the leash while pushing or slapping the dog’s rear. The dog, in the beginning, hasn’t the foggiest idea of what is expected. He hears the command and he is jerked and shoved. No one has shown him what was expected, yet he is being severely corrected. Eventually he learns, because with this method he cannot escape the sitting action. His head is snapped up and his rear forced down, and he sits. He learns to avoid the pain after awhile by associating the word “sit” with the fact that the pain will quickly follow—so he beats the trainer and quickly lowers his rear. So, if he learns to sit, what is wrong with the method? If the dog is a dominant, outgoing sort his pride may be momentarily injured, but he will get over it. But what happens when it is used on a shy or inhibited type of dog? He too learns to sit, but obedience has become a fearful, or at the least dreaded, experience. He obeys, but in a dejected, unhappy manner.

Look at many dogs in the obedience ring today. Although there are some who perform so happily it is a joy to see, there are many, many more who work with tail tucked, apprehensive and jumpy, or just plain cowed. Their unhappy manner plainly states, “I will do the exercises, but I will do them only because I am going to have my neck jerked, my rear hit, and be yelled at if I don’t.” This, of course, is not the only reason dogs work this way in the ring (which I will discuss later), but it is the primary reason.

While an older dog can accept these methods using punishment (he learned long ago his owner was not always the most consistent in the world—and as soon as the training session is over he can pretty much do as he pleases) even though it is clear he doesn’t like them, a puppy cannot. A puppy is a submissive creature. In the wild he remains submissive to all adult members of the pack until he reaches a point when he ventures off with his littermates to form a new pack and finds his own place in the social order (usually already developed as part of the “pecking order” established when they were in the fourth and fifth critical periods). If he should happen to remain with his mother and become part of the established pack, he remains submissive for a long time until he finally reaches a point where he is subordinate to some members, dominant over others, and submissive to the leader figures—and someday he might possibly hike his position to the top and become leader.



A puppy learns quickly to submit to survive. A puppy who fights back is not going to last very long, so he readily gives in to a bigger, stronger, dominant looking individual (canine or human).

If we attempt to train a young puppy using the methods so widely accepted today, he immediately submits, not just polite submission, but total submission. If he is jerked along on a leash in the same manner used to train older dogs he not only stops walking, but rolls over on his back (belly up or total submission) and is scolded, hit, or jerked repeatedly, he will often urinate; the final act of submission. He becomes so frightened he cannot perform. The fear clouds his mind. He neither hears nor comprehends what is going on about him. His mind is consumed with thoughts of survival. The more he is corrected, the harder he tries to submit. If the puppy has inherited aggressive tendencies, and has met with success in attempts to dominate his littermates, he may fight back as he attempts in his baby way to show his human “tormentor” he is not a coward. This will include vicious little snarls and lunges at the hand with pinpoint teeth. An experienced trainer will quickly snap the little beast up with the leash (in a classic stringing up position) or will quickly grasp him by the scruff of the neck and give him a thorough shaking; being a puppy he will quickly recognize he has met his master and when released will submit. If the tormenting continues (jerking, tugging, loud command, and scolding) he will probably do one of two things. His puppy nature will take over and he will do as the average pup; submit even harder, or he will reach a point where it is “do or die” and will attack as savagely as his baby strength can muster. Now we have created a fear biter, or a cringing coward. We have “ruined” our puppy.

Why Persist?

Then why persist in trying? Why not wait until the pup reaches the accepted age of six months?

Look back at the critical period chart. You will see that a puppy’s brain is fully developed at seven weeks of age. All he lacks is experience (learning) to make him act as an adult. And whether we like it or not, whether we teach him or not, he is going to gain experience. He is going to fill that little puppy brains with many new experiences. He is going to learn, and each new experience is going to reduce his ability to change his way of performing.

Let’s take a quick look at the results of those scientific studies again. Fuller, Easler, and Banks (1950) in their study of the development of learning, concluded that around 18 to 19 days of age a puppy could form associations as rapidly as an adult! Before this time the puppy could not remember what he had been shown (taught), and therefore in reality could not learn anything that would be retained for any period of time.

The importance of early training for puppies becomes increasingly clear when we read further into these scientific words and discover that there is actually a critical period for learning! Scott and Marston (1950) clarified this as the time immediately after the onset of learning ability. Why? Because a dog learns through variation and habit formation. To state it simply, when a dog first encounters a new problem he will try to solve it in what he considers the most direct manner. If this doesn’t work, he will try another method, and if this doesn’t work, he will try yet another. (Variation).



Once he hits on the correct solution (at least correct for him—even though there might have been an easier more simple way) the next time he is faced with the same problem he is not going to repeat each of the incorrect actions he took the first time to try to solve it. Chances are he is going to immediately try the behavior which provided the solution in the first place. If it succeeds again, then he will no longer try a variety of solutions; the behavior used to solve that particular problem becomes fixed in his mind and limits any further learning ability. He will cease to try new, variable ways and there we have fixed actions (or habit formation).

Once the dog has learned how to do something, it is very difficult to teach him to do it in a different manner. It can be done with determination and patience (which is clearly illustrated by the number of older dogs which are capable of learning the obedience routines) but even though he learns a new way you can never erase the old habits and they are liable to crop up at any later time in life.

Conversely, if a dog repeatedly tries to solve a problem and never meets with success, no matter how many different ways he tries, the motivation to try fades and the dog finally gives up and will refuse to try again. How does this relate to obedience training? Let's use the recall as a classic example, and throw in a common bit of misbehavior as an additional problem: digging under fences to escape.

Hypothetical Puppy

Let's assume our hypothetical puppy was purchased at eight weeks of age. He enters his new home and quickly accepts his substitute mommy (the human) as his leader. He readily follows her around the house and outside, because his allelomimetic behavior (doing what other members of the group are doing) has developed. Although he is going through traumatic times (housebreaking, etc.) let's skip those and follow his development to approximately 12 weeks of age.

Housebreaking has been going very badly. The owner is tired of puddles in the middle of the floor and telltale stains and so our hero has been unceremoniously dumped into the backyard (it is fenced) each day and left to his own amusements. He doesn't really mind because by this time he is becoming increasingly independent. He likes to wander and explore; besides the back yard sure beats all that yelling and screaming and having his nose rubbed in those awful puddles.

The nextdoor neighbors have recently purchased a puppy and are going through the rigors of puppyhood as well. Their new friend doesn't have the liberty of a fenced back yard so he has been tied to a 25 ft. length of heavy chain. He voices his disapproval at being restrained and howls attract our independent friend. At first he cautiously peers through the fencing, prepared to run if need be. But the chained puppy shows no hostility, merely keeps up a steady howling. Our friend joins in by barking, which momentarily halts the neighboring howls. Our friend becomes more determined to investigate his new friend; becomes braver and begins pawing and/or leaping at the fence—after all, the shortest line between two points must be straight over. He's not quite tall enough or agile enough and all he manages to do is catch his paw momentarily. It hurts and he howls. He won't try that again! He sits and cocks his head and surveys the situation. He begins running back and forth along the fence. Surely there must be a way to reach his howling friend, who is now cautiously and curiously eyeing him as well. His friend creeps rather hesitantly forward in a submissive greeting pattern and comes within a foot of the fence. The chain will stretch no further and the two spend a few minutes sizing each other up before going through typical play movements. The heads go down, the rear up, and tail



wags and the tongue hangs crazily from the side of the mouth as each tries to figure out how to get together. The feet move back and forth in little pawing motions—a typical play gesture. The paws touch as our chained friend stretches as far as his foot will reach. That's more like it! Contact at last. The two claw clumsily at each other and the dirt around the fence begins to shift. They paw harder. The dirt begins to fly and suddenly they are digging furiously. The two have found a new, fun game they can play together. As the dirt continues to fly, our unchained friend discovers he can stick his nose under the fence. Great fun! The two mouth and chew at each other and in silly puppy manner begin digging furiously again. The hole grows larger and before we know it, success!!! Our hero is through and the two spend several happy minutes romping in the grass before they are discovered.

The owners appear. Our chained friend is dragged away as the 12-week-old puppy is called. He readily runs to the house and is helped through the hole where he gives a silly grin and waits for his patting to begin. What's this? A swat on the head; on the rear; dragged to the hole, shoved against the fence and a sound spanking as his face is repeatedly shoved in the dirt.

So what happens the next time our friend is let out in the yard? Does he remember the beating for digging? Not at all, as far as he is concerned that beating occurred because he responded to the word "come". Digging on the other hand was fun—plus he got to be with his new friend. So now he knows exactly how to go about it. He doesn't race up and down the fence, he doesn't jump up (that hurt, remember), he quickly digs another hole and spends happy minutes with the chained pup. Only this time when he is called he makes a mad dash for the street (the neighbor's yard is not fenced); he's not about to endure a repeat of yesterday. The flight instinct has developed, and if ever his instincts told him to take flight, now's the time!

He quickly learns he is much faster than his human friends, and from that day forth it becomes a fun game—catch me if you can. He knows their cries of "Puppy come" are all a trick. Puppy comes means scolding and hitting if you're caught. So what have they produced? A puppy who tried a simple variety of ways to reach a desired object. When he hit upon a successful method his trial and error ways vanished, as he learned digging means reaching his goal (his friend and freedom) and he has also learned the command "come" does not have to be obeyed. When it was given, his owners had no way of enforcing it, they can't catch him—and furthermore he has learned to distrust his owners. They used very appealing tones that first time to get him to come, but when he responded by happily racing to them, he was spanked. He has learned "come" means punishment, and anyone would be stupid to fall for that again. He's certainly not stupid. He learned how to escape and run away in just one short lesson. If he lives long enough he could become a truly smart dog. His repeated success each time he tries to escape soon leads to fixed habits. No matter how many times the hole is filled and blocked, no matter how many times he is caught and punished (after the fact), he is motivated to keep trying because he always succeeds. Even when there is no reason to escape, he makes a beeline for the fence, digs a hole and away he goes out of habit.

Now let's look at a littermate of our friend. He too was purchased at eight weeks and lives in a typical pet home; housebreaking isn't going too smoothly. He too is placed in the back yard to save soiled floors—but there is a major exception. His owner wants to be a good dog owner; she wants an obedient dog, and she is concerned for his safety. The yard next door houses a gigantic All-American with a very nasty attitude. He loves to bark ferociously at any moving object and has been known to kill small animals when they got within his reach. Fortunately he



is tied to a strong chain. Aware of this danger, our small friend is watched from the window. The dirt around the fence is inviting, and the moment those small feet begin to dig the owner leaps out the door and yells, “NO!” She snatches him up and brings him back inside. Each time he is put out to relieve himself, he is watched and is always reprimanded if he attempts to dig under the fence. He is fascinated by the barking dog on the other side and tries to climb the fence; quickly earning himself a strong “NO” and a swat on his backside. Concerned over his repeated attempts to escape and other small behavior problems creeping into their life, the owner purchases a book on obedience training and begins back yard sessions. The book said the dog must be on leash, so all training is done with a leash. Each time he is told to come, because the leash is attached. The book (fortunately) is a modern book which relies primarily on praise as a teaching tool, so our young friend is praised each time he is tugged into his owner. He doesn’t really care for the tugging, but it’s fun once you get there. He quickly learns to race to the owner before the tugging begins—which earns him a hearty laugh and a big hug. This is fun! All attempts at fence digging and climbing are thwarted, and as our friend grows he learns digging and climbing are unrewarding; they do not succeed in gaining anything, and so the motivation to try ebbs, and eventually is gone. His owner is spending time with him in the training sessions and he gains confidence as he understands his social position; he understands he is a member of the pack, and as a member one must follow the leader. His training continues until the day when the recall is attempted off-lead. He doesn’t even think about running away. He knows the only response he can give to the word “come” is to hurry to his owner—after all, that’s the only thing he has ever been allowed to do. He hurries in and receives his praise as usual, which he enjoys immensely.

What Have We?

So what have we produced? A puppy who tried a variety of ways to reach a goal and failed each time. His motivation to keep trying ended after repeated failure. The flight instinct has developed in him as well, but there is no reason to flee from his owner. He is treated with kindness and praise. The response to the word “come” has become a fixed action (a habit) because he has never heard the word without the owner assuring that his response was correct, and therefore he is unaware he can do anything but come. He is motivated by keeping responding to praise.

While our first puppy can still be taught to come, we can never erase the memory of his earlier learning (his bad habits) i.e.: if he runs fast enough and far enough he does not have to respond.

Habits

By never allowing bad habits to develop, we never have to worry about our puppy not responding correctly. By assuring that each command we gave met with success, and that the success was an action we desired, the behavior patterns become fixed habits to our dog, and his motivation to try different patterns of behavior (variation) are reduced almost to zero.

As Scott, Stewart, and DeGhett (1974) state, “...learning itself is a group of organizational processes. In a typical learning sequence a young animal confronted with a problem will at first attempt many different solutions. Finding one that is successful, he quickly reduces his behavior to a stereotyped habit, and thereafter shows little or no improvement. Once the behavior is organized it is difficult to change.”



If further proof against waiting until six months of age to begin training is needed, let's look again at the Critical Period Chart. You will see six months is a very bad time to introduce a puppy to new experiences—especially painful or traumatic ones. Often, dogs who have been trained with kindness still respond in an unhappy manner in the obedience ring (as we stated earlier). The owner is puzzled. He has never abused his dog. He praised him enthusiastically and all corrections were gentle if used at all—why then does he look so scared and dejected in the ring?

Chances are he entered a training class between the age of six and ten months of age. This is the worst possible time to enter a training class for the first time. As the chart indicates, this is the time when most puppies enter what is commonly called the “fear of new situations period”. The training class is filled with barking, lunging dogs, shouted orders, unusual smells. A choke collar and leash are supplied and as all these frightening sights and scents descend upon the pup he is jerked this way and that. Even if the methods used do not require forceful jerking and pushing, the pup is still overwhelmed with this strange new situation filled with more people and dogs than he knew existed. The trauma of the situation can remain with him for the rest of his life if it is handled improperly and even though his training proceeds with kindness, he will forever fear the environment which reminds him of a training class, i.e.: the show ring.

Although AKC rules do not allow a dog to be shown until it reaches six months of age, again this can be such a trauma to the pup that he never becomes the outgoing show specimen you thought you had. If he is to lead a life of shows, training classes, and trials, the importance of introducing these elements to him at a very early age cannot be stressed enough. The rules do not allow you to bring unentered dogs to shows, but matches provide the same atmosphere. Training classes also provide this type of environment, and even if the training class in your area does not allow training for dogs under six months of age, most will allow you to bring along a new puppy and sit on the sidelines with him.

Home Training

More and more training groups are beginning to accept the idea of puppy training, but if yours still stubbornly clings to the old-fashioned notions, then begin your own training program at home.

Take your puppy out often to acquaint him with strange new experiences and strive to make each one a positive experience. Take him to the shopping centers, training sites, and matches. If unentered dogs are not allowed on match grounds, enter him in the breed ring (so he's not a show specimen—who cares, he's at least getting the exposure he needs. If this irritates other exhibitors, it will just have to be; better to irritate a few complaining specimens than end up with a puppy who is fearful). The main point is do not wait until the fear period has begun before introducing all these things. If introduced early, by the time he enters that period of fear, training and show situations will no longer be “new situations”. He will be a young “veteran”. He will be able to breeze through this period as it pertains to training and showing, because he is familiar with all that goes on. If he should show fear at any time during this age, of the training class or match rings, then discontinue training class or match rings, then discontinue training and showing until he has adjusted and the fear period is past. Reassure him with praise and gentleness when anything new is introduced during the fear period, so that he learns he has nothing to fear. You, his leader, are always at hand to make him feel confident and unafraid.



How can you train him at home when there are so few books on actual obedience training for puppies and when there are no classes which offer special training for young puppies. Many offer Kindergarten Puppy Training today, but this deals primarily with socialization and a few simple behavioral responses. These classes are great, but the puppy is capable of so much more at this age.

What should his training consist of? How should you go about it? The two major points in puppy training are patience and consistency. Consistency is vital if bad habits (behaviors you do not want) are to be erased completely before they rear their ugly heads. If the pup is never allowed to do anything we don't want him to do as an adult, and if the pup is only allowed to respond to a given command by obeying that command, the need for patience is easily seen. To be this consistent you will be a very busy puppy owner!

Everything must proceed on a positive scale if we are to retain his happy, outgoing nature and build his confidence to the point where he is unafraid and would gladly try anything we suggest, because he knows we will let nothing hurt or frighten him. Punishment is completely out of the picture (whether we're housebreaking or teaching obedience exercises) if we are striving to mold a super puppy. If punishment is out, then how can we stop bad or unwanted behavior? By giving him an accepted behavior in its place, and with one little command word, "NO". We will also use minor corrections that he can easily comprehend (notice, the word is correction, not punishment).

The command word, "NO", should be the only negative word a pup ever hears. There is no need for harsh scolding, rolled up newspapers, foot stomping, or any other frightening words or movements. He will quickly learn "NO" implies he must cease whatever he is doing immediately. By repeating "NO" each time incorrect behavior appears (in other words by being consistent and never allowing the incorrect behavior to be carried out in full) and by giving him something positive and constructive to do in place of the unwanted behavior, he is going to become a very confident pup. He will know exactly what he is allowed to do and what he is not allowed to do, and because we are using a positive approach with the negative word (our praise and giving him a different behavior which is acceptable) the good behavior becomes a fixed action (a habit) while the unwanted behavior ceases because he never succeeds.

Does this mean a puppy must become an automaton? Far from it. We praise any positive action he does spontaneously, we praise for correct response to our commands, and he continues to learn new and bigger things as his world broadens and his personality develops—a personality we enjoy because we have "created" it to match our own.

How do we administer a correction if our verbal "NO" isn't heeded? We copy his mother and use the muzzle correction. If we repeatedly tell the puppy "NO" and his response is to momentarily halt the unwanted behavior, but immediately resume the moment our back is turned (such as chewing furniture, etc.), he will learn "NO" by itself is not effective. It sounds negative and for the moment interrupts his behavior, but he quickly discovers if he resumes chewing the chair leg nothing happens except a repeat of the word—eventually the word becomes totally ineffective. We prevent this from happening by resorting to the muzzle correction at the first attempts to repeat the bad behavior. This is accomplished by grasping his muzzle (do not squeeze it), giving it a firm shake, and repeating the word, "NO". We release the muzzle and we instantly provide something he can chew, one of his own special toys, and we praise him enthusiastically.



His mother would do the same if he were still with the litter. Unwanted behavior would be met with a growl and a bite on the muzzle as she grabs and holds for a moment. Puppies respect this correction, knowing she means business, and they seldom repeat the unwanted behavior. Mother is very forgiving and within seconds will again be licking and loving her baby. We don't bite and we don't lick, but we can give the human equivalent; we grasp the muzzle, shake it, and vocalize "NO" and then we forgive and love. We go a step beyond his mother and give him something he can do. We substitute wanted behavior for unwanted.

We also praise him when he is being good (rather than just paying attention to him when he is being bad)—if we pass him in the living room and he is chewing on one of his own toys, we praise him. We praise him for any behavior we want to encourage. If we approach the puppy and he sits (or even if he remains standing) we praise him. If we approach and he jumps up in his exuberance to say "hello", we command "NO", place him in the sit and then praise him. An extended right hand (held just over his head) accompanied by "NO" usually halts the jumping action. (And no, he doesn't later confuse it with the down signal—the down signal is an upraised arm and hand.)

Appropriate Substitutes

For every "NO" we must substitute an acceptable behavior and praise immediately. What are some of the appropriate substitutes? A favorite toy can be substituted for chewing on hands, feet, clothes or furniture. Sitting is a substitute for jumping, the recall a substitute for barking—which usually brings a puzzled look from the average pet owner. You should allow the puppy to bark when he hears a strange noise, but after one or two barks teach him to immediately come to you as soon as he hears something unusual, after he has sounded the alarm. By calling him each time he barks and praising him (and insisting that he remain with you), he quickly learns barking an alert is acceptable, but he must then cease and run to find you, and receive his praise for being such a good "watch dog".

A down position (on the floor) is an acceptable substitute for climbing on furniture—or decide upon any behavior you want to replace the bad one. Whatever you choose you must consistently enforce your requirements and give your praise until each action becomes a fixed habit. In this way you will mold your puppy to your lifestyle and your desires, and he will not only be a very capable "working" dog, but a real pleasure; a welcome companion who knows exactly what is expected of him. This requires cooperation from each and every member of the family in order to succeed. It requires close adult supervision of all activities with children.

By the time your puppy reaches the age of independence (anywhere from eleven to seventeen weeks), the muzzle correction may become ineffective, then we move on to the only other correction we will ever use: the collar correction. When the pup does not respond to the word "NO" by immediate cessation of the unwanted behavior, grasp his collar and give a firm upward tug with immediate release of all pressure as you repeat the command "NO". The tug should not be so firm it lifts his feet off the floor. Immediately substitute the acceptable behavior and praise him.

You may also find rebellion in a dominant pup at this age, in the form of snapping at you (when corrected) or growling or what appears to be "playful" mouthing of your hands or feet. He is showing you, in subtle ways, that he is a pretender to the throne—he wants to be the leader. Use the collar correction and the down position



as your substitute (it is a submissive position) to let him know you are still capable of being the leader. Praise him quietly.

Lead Breaking

On the chart you will note some training is suggested at five to seven weeks of age. We're not ready (yet) to begin our obedience exercises, but there is a lot to be accomplished during this period. You can begin with lead breaking. Whether you are working with one pup or a litter, each should be fitted with a buckle collar. It should be lightweight, of nylon or leather, and when buckled in the last hole should be loose enough to allow about one inch of play. (The training collar—choke collar—is not used until the pup reaches the age of growing independence when firmer corrections sometimes become necessary. If the pup continues to respond to commands and corrections made with the buckle collar there is no need to ever resort to a training collar.) By leaving this much space you will have room to insert a couple of fingers yet the collar will still be comfortable for the pup without slipping over his head. As he grows you can adjust to the next hole and so on.

On the same day you attach the collar, attach a “handle”. The handle should be a lightweight piece of single strand rope (a strong shoelace is fine) and should be cut off so that it does not hang below his elbows. By cutting it this length and leaving it single strand, he will not trip or get his foot caught (as he would in a double loop), or have to walk in a clumsy fashion to keep from stepping on the line. By attaching it to the collar the pup will ignore this new feeling around his neck (the collar) as he concentrates on the “handle”, grabbing it and chewing it and tugging himself around. Other pups in the litter will quickly spy the handle and as they pull and tug each other around the whelping room with this fun game, they are effectively lead breaking each other.

If you are working with a single pup, reach down and give a playful tug each time you pass his way, and praise him when he responds by glancing in your direction. Leave the handle attached (replacing it if necessary if it is chewed through) until you begin the actual leash work.

Examination

You can also begin teaching him to accept examination in a quiet, mannerly fashion. Each day (as part of your individual socialization) place him on a table. At first just set him there and pet and praise him. Advance to gentle examination of his teeth, his ears, his testicles (if a male) and pose him if you are planning on a show career. Begin foot caressing. Gently pet and stroke his feet, lifting each one and praising. Later introduce the nail clippers by touching his nails and praising and still later snipping just the tip of each tiny nail. You will probably find he will accept this easily in a sitting position, but if you desire you can lay him on his back and rub his tummy, therefore, all four feet are easily reached. This works very well for small breeds of dogs. My Cairn Terrier is perfectly content to lay on her back as her nails are trimmed. This method was used when she was a baby, and even though she is now approaching eight years of age, she enjoys a good tummy rub as part of the nail trimming procedure.

Teach your puppy to accept a dental tool in his mouth. Purchase a tooth scaler and at first just touch it to the teeth while praising. Later begin a gentle scraping motion so that he learns to accept the feel of the scaler against his teeth. In this way you



will be able to remove tartar accumulations as he ages, without the expensive procedure at the vet's office which requires anesthesia.

Practice pilling. Open the mouth and insert an index finger in the manner you would use if you were giving a pill. This makes heartworm pills and other medications a snap when the time arrives.

Brush him. If he is a breed that will require clipping, introduce him to the noise of clippers and blow dryers by just turning them on and letting the motors run while you examine, poke, probe, and praise. Later hold the clippers near his face, his feet, etc., as the motor runs.

The beginning steps of retrieving are easy at this age. Puppies love to run and chase. Start with a moveable object—a rolling ball, and praise any interest he shows. If he picks it up make a big fuss over him—don't worry if he doesn't bring it back. Go to him, take it gently from his mouth and roll it again. Begin bouncing it and when he is happily chasing a bouncing ball introduce all the other items he'll be required to handle later: wooden dumbbells, metal and leather scent articles; don't forget cotton gloves. Remember we're molding a super dog! Open and Utility work will be a snap for this fellow. He's done it all his life! And he's learned it's fun! No force, no scolding, no corrections, no frustration for you or him.

It's important that these retrieving sessions are free from other distractions—just you and your pup and the item to be retrieved. It should begin in the house, not outside where there are too many interesting sights and sounds. When he is happily chasing after each item thrown and picking it up, begin patting the floor and coaxing him back to you (you should be sitting or kneeling on his level). Even one step in your direction (or just a glance) earns lots of praise. If he continues to run around the room, happily mouthing the object and tossing it about, sit perfectly still. Don't call, coax or even move. Sit with your hands extended in your lap. After several moments the average pup discovers this game isn't much fun alone and will head in your direction with the object still in his mouth. When he gets there don't grab for the article. Sometimes it may take quite a while before he decides to come near (but remember, we promised we'd be patient!). Just sit still, play coy. Let him beg you. Again the average puppy will be prancing all around you, nudging you with the article, or extending a paw and tapping your hand, and occasionally wonder of wonders, will drop the article into your outstretched hands! If this occurs, praise him enthusiastically and toss it out again. If he continues to prance about but shows no inclination of trying to get you to take it to resume the game, take his collar in your hand and praise him. Gently remove the article from his mouth and toss it out again. Build upon these movements until he is racing to you each time he gets the item. As with all puppy work, this doesn't take long at all. Many puppies will master it in a couple of days.

As stated earlier, puppies love to mouth and chew and all will respond to this game. If his toys are made of items he will be expected to retrieve later (leather, metal, cloth, etc.) and are used each time he plays with you, he learns to really love the game and will never object to retrieving metal or cloth which often happens when metal scent articles and cotton gloves are introduced to an older dog.

By working with your puppy on the table for examination and grooming, between the age of five to seven weeks, by the time you begin the passive control exercises at eight weeks, table work will be "old hat". He is entering a fear period somewhere between eight and ten weeks of age, and traumatic new experiences should be



avoided. Our previous work assures this is not new, and our patience, gentleness and praise assure it is not traumatic.

We do not use harsh words, scolding, or even “NO” in our training sessions. He will be praised as we show and tell him what to do. We do not use corrections. Incorrect responses are ignored—we simply withhold praise and immediately place him in position again and then praise. And we repeat the passive exercises over and over until each action becomes a fixed habit in response to our command.

Exercises at 8 weeks

How do we begin teaching the exercises at eight weeks? We place him on the table, on our left side, just as we’ve done every day for the past month. We face him in the same direction we are facing, and we begin brushing him, or examining him, something familiar he already knows—and then we introduce the sit. We don’t jerk on his collar and we don’t push on his hips. We sit him by gently inserting our right hand (palm up) in his collar, on top of his neck with our fingers pointing towards his tail. We place our left palm on his shoulders. We give the sit command and at the same moment slide our left hand along his back, over his rear, down his legs until we reach his hocks. We apply gentle backward pressure on his collar at the same moment we apply gentle forward pressure above his hocks. This is done rapidly—and the end result is he sits on our left hand. We remove the left hand and we stroke his back gently and praise him, “Good sit”. Our hand remains in the collar but all pressure is relaxed. We keep him sitting for a count of twelve, praising him repeatedly, and then we immediately stand him by turning the collar so that our right hand is under his chin. If we turned the collar correctly our palm will now be facing down. We place our left hand just behind his right front leg (palm down). We give the command “Stand” as we gently pull forward on his collar and slide our left hand along his tummy until we touch his back leg. This should bring him into a stand. If not, apply slight upward pressure with your left hand—but keep it gentle. Keep the right hand in the collar, but turn the left hand over (palm is now up) and apply little tickly touches (very, very light) with the tips of your fingers and praise him, “Good stand”. Continue praising and applying the “whisper” like touches to his tummy and count to 12. Once again turn the collar in position for the sit, place the left hand on his shoulders and go through the steps for sit once more.

It’s simple, gentle, totally positive. If he breaks the position we simply reposition him. We repeat the sit/stand sequence several times and then resume our table examination. The table examination and exercises will take less than five minutes of your time.

Over the next weeks increase the count and as your pup begins to respond by spontaneously starting to go through the required motions, gradually discontinue any unnecessary steps. If he is sitting before your hand reaches the hocks, just place it on his shoulder. If he sits with slight pressure on the collar, try just inserting your hand and eliminating the pressure. Gradually discontinue inserting the hand until he responds to the command alone. It doesn’t take long. The average eight week old will master “sit” in less than a week. I have had puppies sitting on command after two sessions. Stand will take considerably longer. It is not an easy exercise to master.

After several days of the sit/stand exercises, if all is going well, we add the “down” to our training sessions on the table. When the pup is seated on our left side, we place our left arm over his shoulder and our left hand behind his left front leg. We place our right hand behind his right front leg. Our palms should be facing the back of his legs.



Then we begin caressing his legs in an up and down motion—we talk to him softly, telling him what a fine pup he is. He is mesmerized by the soft, caressing tone of our voice, just as the gentle stroking relaxes him to the point of “collapse”. On one of those down strokes we gently slide his feet out from under him (making sure not to grab his legs with our thumbs and fingers) and at the same moment, in the same soft, caressing voice, we command, “Down”. We can apply gentle pressure with our left arm on his shoulders if necessary.

Most important is to keep the same soft tone rather than snap him out of his reverie by using a demanding, loud voice. Our praise should be quiet and gentle and we should continue stroking his legs, holding the down for a count of 12 initially.

To get him out of the down (so that we can repeat it again) we begin teaching him his first utility exercise—the sit from a down position. This is accomplished by inserting our left hand (palm down) just behind his *right* front leg and our right hand (palm up) under his chin. We bring the right palm up to the chin in a sweeping motion (the hand signal), give the command “sit” and apply gentle upward pressure with the left and right hand.

Don’t slide your left hand under his tummy—it will make him stand. Keep it in the position described above and be very gentle. Praise him! Although many trainers neglect the sit from a down until the dog has completed Novice work, it is rapidly learned. The pup learns this command and signal long before he learns to stand or down on his own.

Again discontinue all unnecessary help as soon as the pup is responding—BUT, never be afraid to regress and place him in position if he fails to respond to *one* command! We are not going to become ineffective nags; all commands will be responded to immediately—either voluntarily, or we will place him in position. Remember: we are not correcting him into position with collar jerks in the passive exercises.

Leash Work

Leash work begins when he is accustomed to his collar and “handle”. We attach the leash, take him outside (carry him if necessary) and we play the waiting game. We do nothing. That’s right. Nothing. If he begins to walk, we follow. And we praise him when he walks. If he just sits, we just stand and wait. No tugs, no pulling, no force. When he has learned to move freely on leash, and has discovered the outdoors to be a fun place to run and explore, we introduce leash control.

You have another important point to remember now. You are working with a very small, lightweight puppy. When the instructions tell you to tug, it means a very gentle, quick, tiny tug. It does not mean a forceful correction such as the type often used on stubborn adult dogs. We do not want to frighten the puppy, nor hurt the puppy—we want to send him an effective message, telegraphed down the lead. Do not use force that would jerk his feet off the ground, spin him around, make him yelp, or do anything other than glance your direction and cease pulling. To do otherwise will cause the pup to respond in an intimidated, fearful way. So keep smiling, and do it properly!

To introduce lead control we go outside with our pup as usual, and we stand still. Today we aren’t going to follow him immediately. Let him move around. When he reaches the end of the leash and it grows taut, give a gentle, quick tug and immediately release all pressure and praise! No commands, just tug, release and praise. We



want him to learn pulling is undesirable, but we don't want him to realize we are correcting. Because there is no command, only praise, he does not associate the tug with us. He "thinks" he caused it. If this is repeated each time the leash grows taut, he quickly learns just how long six feet is. He learns pulling is slightly unpleasant, and he learns when he comes back within the confines of the leash boundary he is praised. After several moments, if he has stopped pulling, move along and follow him—or let him follow you. As you walk, if the leash grows taut, correct in the same manner and praise.

Over the next few days begin to teach him the left side position. This too is accomplished in a positive manner by constantly turning your body position so that he remains on the left, and praising him when he is there (either of his own accord, or because we turned). By the time he has learned leash control we can begin utilizing the passive table exercises he has mastered, outside.

Let's back up a moment. Why did we start on the table? Two reasons: first is the fact we don't want to be a threatening figure, towering over him. By putting him on the table we are much less threatening, because he is almost as tall as we are.

Second is the fact he feels just a little insecure when he is first placed on the table. He won't be a wiggly, playful fellow (as he usually is) because he senses he might fall—therefore he looks to you, for you are his security. He knows you have never hurt him. He leans against you, his attention focused on the one who is reassuring him with praise and petting. We need this focusing of attention before we can begin training. We are gentle, we are praising, and we are not so tall and threatening, so he gains confidence as he learns, and soon feels perfectly at ease on the table. When he is sitting on command on the table (when all help other than the right hand in the collar has ceased), and when he is responding to the leash control lessons, we begin our actual heeling.

Outside

Still using a buckle collar, we attach the lead and take him outside. Give the sit command (be prepared to bend over and insert the right hand in the collar as a gentle reminder). So far he has associated "sit" with being on the table, and he may not understand the command in a new situation. Help him if necessary, be gentle, and praise lavishly. When he is seated, gather up the excess leash in your right hand, taking care that he has about two feet of slack. Grasp the slack portion with your left hand.

Give his name, the command "heel" and step off walking. Praise him. If he hesitates, bend down on his level and encourage him to follow. He has already learned a taut lead caused a correction, now we are merely shortening his boundary. Instead of six feet of slack, he has only two. If the lease grows taut, we give a quick tug/release of pressure (without a command) and we praise him immediately, "Good heel!" We continue to praise as long as the leash is slack. (Don't worry about the exact heel position yet, that comes a little later.) If he lags behind as though apprehensive or unsure of what is expected *do not tug!* We coax him up with joyful hand clapping, vocal encouragement and if necessary we stop and tickle him under the chin and tell him what a fine pup he is. When he takes a step we praise and encourage him more. Corrective tugs are only used for forging or heeling wide. Again, he will not associate the corrections with you. He will assume it is his fault (just as he would assume it was his fault if he were tied to a tree and raced to the end of the line only to be jerked back. He doesn't blame the tree. He blames himself, and then



is more cautious in the future). He will quickly learn that two foot boundary just as he did the six foot boundary.

When he is working well at two feet (no longer making the lead taut) we shorten the boundary to one foot of slack. This will put him in the proper heel position. We continue to praise with “Good heel” when he is there on his own so that he learns this is the behavior we desire. And we continue to praise (without an extra command) when we correct for a taut leash.

This same principle is applied to each new exercise we teach. In the beginning we show him exactly what we want. In the passive exercises we place him in position. In active exercises we offer vocal encouragement and tiny corrective tugs without commands, accompanied by praise. And we smile a lot as our super puppy takes shape.

When he has mastered the one foot boundary at heel, we toss that lead over our shoulder and we begin working him “without hands”. When we are sure he understands (and we are sure when corrective tugs are no longer needed), we are ready to advance to off-lead.

This will come much sooner than you expected. Most puppies who begin their table work at five weeks and their obedience exercises at eight weeks are working reliably off-lead by the time they are sixteen weeks of age. Many are ready by fourteen weeks. (Don’t let this statement create frustration if your pup is not ready in that time frame. Remember, all pups are individuals—we are not after speed. We are after total reliability and a happy worker.)

If we have taught the recall before the flight instinct is developed, and have enforced it *every time* the command “come” has been issued, our pup will be unaware he has an option. He will come because that’s all he’s ever been allowed to do. The recall training should begin as soon as the pup is leash broken.

Sky Is The Limit

Just what can we hope to accomplish? How far can we go with our puppy training? The sky is the limit! You can start his training; lay the foundation for any tasks you wish him to do as an adult. While most trainers insist the dog must learn the beginner’s routine before pushing on to Novice, then learn the Novice routine before attempting Open, and totally omit Utility until the dog has his CDX—if the obedience ring is your goal, the puppy is the place to start. Instead of learning each level after attaining the previous title (CD, CDX, UDT), our pup has “learned to learn”. Therefore, he is capable of learning more, and more, and more. We can teach the very young puppy the utility routine just as easily as we can teach the beginner or Novice work. That doesn’t mean we teach jumping at full height; that doesn’t mean drop on recall. What it does mean is we can teach jumping over a tiny height, just to learn the command and the act of jumping; not striving for height and perfection. Retrieving a dumbbell over a four, six or eight inch board erected in a hallway becomes an exciting, fun game for all puppies. We discussed earlier teaching retrieving as a fun game; retrieving of gloves and metal articles as well as wood. Once sit is mastered beside the handler and at a distance, the send-a-way becomes a snap, when it is combined with racing out to grab a white hanky or paper towel. It’s fun because it becomes a game as you try to beat him to the object. He hardly notices when you suddenly stop accompanying him—because that praise and urging him onward are still present—and the game still ends the same as you command, “Puppy sit!”



Once down is mastered we don't need to stop with "down" beside the pup. We venture out and give down in front, later down in a distance, and then we begin dropping him as he races about the yard in play. He is learning to drop while he is in motion and while he is away from our side; a separate exercise from the drop on recall, yet already learned and merely waiting to be put together as a routine when we wish to enter Open competition.

A puppy delights in using his nose. We start out tossing favored toys to be caught, then tossed into tall grass so that he learns to use his nose to find them, and we help him every step of the way until we have a puppy capable of scent discrimination or tracking. We teach hand signals along with voice commands, alternating until he responds to both equally as well. We teach the utility stand for examination—we can extend the time he must hold it later when we need it.

We teach him to take directions (in preparation for directed retrieve and jumping) by leaving him in a sit stay and facing him we toss out a toy to our far right or far left and then direct him to it with a wave of the hand. A fun game that can be altered for directed jumping—or we can play "drop the hanky" and teach him to race back in the direction we indicate to retrieve it (a basic beginning for the old "seek back" and the updated directed retrieve). This then is the difference between an obedience trained dog and a super puppy and the only way we can achieve this is to begin at the optimum age of five weeks; introducing desirable behavior as we prevent formation of bad habits, and making his environment a fun, exciting adventure of learning every day of his life.

