

TRAINING: TOP TIPS

by **TIM FROBERG**



Most dogs won't be ready for the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show after graduating from a local training class or two, however, the majority will be easier to handle and will likely share a stronger bond with their owners.

All dogs should receive some type of formal training, the earlier the better. Most classes are reasonably priced and the time commitment usually isn't considerable.

Owners should initially focus on the basics: walking properly on a leash, sit and stay, and breaking problem behaviors like jumping, excessive barking, or chewing on household items. Results aren't always immediate, but the vast majority of dogs take to training well.

"Dogs are incredibly intelligent," said Shannon Tischer, director of training at Winnegamie Dog Club. "I know of a border collie who has learned more than 100 words for toys. I always say the dogs are smarter than we are, otherwise, we wouldn't be here."

Various collars and no-pull harnesses are common tools used when teaching a dog to walk properly on a leash, but perhaps the most important aspect is to show patience. "Some people think a couple pops on the collar and your dog is going to be walking slowly by their side," Shannon said. "If you watch Westminster, dogs are trotting at their normal pace around the ring. When we ask them to slow down to our natural pace, it's just not natural for them to walk slowly by our side. It's something we need to teach them."

The best way to keep dogs from jumping on people is to turn around, fold your arms and ignore them. "Dogs want attention, they don't care if it's positive or negative," she said. "If you're telling them, 'Off,' they're still getting attention. Sometimes, there's just as much training with people on how to react than with dogs."

When dogs chew on household objects like slippers or couches, they're bored. Physical and mental exercise can work wonders to prevent such behavior. Interactive toys such as puzzles, which allow them to move pieces to find treats, keep their minds busy and away from slippers.

Most owners don't need classes to achieve one of the most popular objectives of dog training: getting them to understand where and when to go potty. Crate training is advised for most dogs because they generally won't pee or poop where they sleep.

"The key is taking them out enough to where they can go and developing that habit," Shannon said. "If they stop for a minute in the house, or starting circling, those are cues they have to go."

Food treats remain the number one motivator in training dogs, followed by toys, play opportunities, petting, and verbal praise. The reward should be delivered immediately after the desired behavior. Owners should make sure they don't turn rewards into bribes. If a dog won't come in from the yard without a treat, it becomes a bribe and the dog may not listen when a treat isn't available.

