

Working Trials Association

Newsletter January

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Dear Members the Committee wishes you all a good 2003 year. Our AGM is planned for the 16th March at the Kennel Club and we would like you to attend to support us, we have a full committee who is willing to stand, but any one who would like to come in is very welcome. To cut costs, here is the notice for the AGM:

“Notice is hereby given that the 35th Annual General Meeting of the Working Trials Association of Zimbabwe will be held at 08.30 hrs on Sunday, the 16th March 2003 at the Kennel Club of Harare, Hampden Street, Belvedere, Harare.”

Minutes of the 34th AGM on 10th March 2002 as well as the Agenda of the 35th AGM will be mailed to you by E-mail and the members who have no E-mail will be handed out these minutes & agenda. No other minutes & agenda will be available at the AGM

1.3 Jumping Qualifying Certificates

A ZKC Jumping Qualifying Certificate will be awarded at Championship Shows to the winning dog with a clear round in Grade 1 provided either Table A or Table B has been applied and provided further that not less **than three (3) different handlers and dogs** competed in the Grade 1 competition.

The above rule in our DJ rules has now changed and accepted by ZKC and will read as follows

1.3 Jumping Qualifying Certificates

A ZKC Jumping Qualifying Certificate will be awarded at Championship Shows to the winning dog with a clear round in Grade 1 provided either Table A or Table B has been applied and provided further that not less **than two (2) different handlers and dogs** competed in the Grade 1 competition.

Dogs are probably much cleverer than most people think, according to a new study.

Scientists are convinced that dogs can count and researchers at the University of California, Davis, say they try to convey different messages through the pitch and pace of their barks.

“Animal behaviorists used to think their bark was simply a way of getting attention. Now a study suggest that individual dogs have specific barks with a range of meanings”, New Scientist magazine said on Wednesday. Dogs usually use high-pitched single barks when they are separated from their owners and a lower, harsher superbark when strangers approach or the doorbell rings, according to Sophia Yin, an animal behaviorist at the university. Playful woofs are high-pitched and unevenly spaced. Dogs also know when they are being short-changed on treats because they have a basic mathematical ability, which enables them to tell when one pile of objects is bigger than another. “But to count, an animal has to recognize that each object in a set

corresponds to a single number and that the last number in a sequence represents the total number of objects”, New Scientists added.

Tasty Treats

Robert Young of Brazil’s Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte, tested the theory on 11 mongrels, using dog treats.

The canines were shown treats and then a screen was lowered and the goodies were left as they were or some were added or taken away. If a treat was added or taken away the dogs looked at the treats much longer than they did when the goodies were not disturbed, presumably because they had done their sums and the numbers did not meet their expectations. Dogs are descended from wolves, which not only have a large neocortex—the brain’s center of reasoning—but live in large social groups.” The magazine said.

Young believes the mathematical ability could have been used to work out how many allies and enemies they had in a pack.

Follow up of the Stress article:

The Effects of Stress on the Performance Dog

Causes and effects

It is my belief that the underlying primary cause of stress is lack of socialization. Jean Donaldson defines socialization as 'a term which means habituation or getting used to environmental elements through exposure.' (CC p 60) Without proper socialization a dog may display all of the aforementioned signs of stress when thrown into a new environment.

We should

not, therefore, expect an improperly socialized dog to perform at his peak in the face of new stimuli.

A lack of socialization can lead to many excuses as to why the dog performs poorly. Some say that the dog is 'unforgiving' or 'soft'. This implies that the dog does not forget, recover from or move on from unpleasant experiences (Jones 2001). Another excuse might describe a dog as having an over-active 'fight or flight' response. While this may be true to a certain extent, it is still a product of lack of socialization.

Another common comment is 'Why can't my dog just act like he does at home?' To answer this, when everything in the trial environment, including the handler, is vastly different from the friendlier training environment, there is suddenly a breakdown in performance. This breakdown is due to stress, which is caused by lack of socialization to these stimuli. This level of stimulation was probably never experienced prior to the dogs' debut. Good indicators of an unfinished training/socialization process are all of the aforementioned signs of stress. While lack of socialization may be the primary cause of stress, it is not the only one. Other causes might include: Poor training or training style Handler pressure Fatigue Genetics.

Poor training is related to lack of socialization, much of which is accomplished unbeknownst to the trainer. Since dogs are innocent subjects of learning laws, and since behavior is under the control of its consequences, we can manipulate consequences to control behavior in training. For example, we inadvertently train our dogs to behave a certain way under these circumstances: start line, show ring, obedience class, etc. We are quite proficient at unintentionally classically conditioning a ring-wise dog.

Stress can be attributed to another training problem, which is lack of feedback from the handler. This decreases motivation and helps the behavior along the road to extinction rather than fluency (Duford, 2001). Poor trainers often expect too much from their dogs too soon by asking them to perform under pressure prematurely. Since training is not allowed in the competition ring, behavior goes unreinforced, which equates to a lack of feedback from the handler. As a result, the dog quickly learns that in a trial environment, there are no consequences for his behaviors and the stress level increases as a result of confusion. Performance often deteriorates immediately or over a series of successive trials.

Our first show of the year will be Dog Jumping on 16 March 2003 at the Kennel Club and will be held well before the AGM, so enter and have a day full of doggy happenings. Schedule for this show will be mailed to you in February.