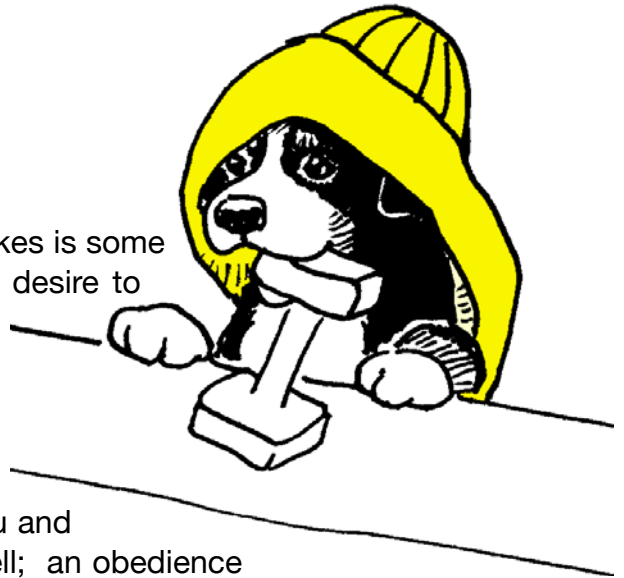


Wish *MY* dog listened like that!!!

It can! Obedience training makes it happen and all it takes is some time and a willingness to learn. Berners come with the desire to please built right in ~ our contribution is learning how to communicate what we want in a way they can understand. Obedience training is a fun way to spend time with your dog and enhances your understanding of each other. Throughout the training process, you are building a path of communication that takes the relationship between you and your dog to new heights. There are fringe benefits as well; an obedience trained dog is welcome where ever it goes and any dog that can happily perform these exercises is truly a pleasure to live with and love.



A word about training...or is it teaching?

Most people who are involved with Berners have moved away from the heavy-handed, militaristic, style that was the norm for dog training in years past. Contemporary trainers take seriously the adage that, “you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar”. Positive motivation and reward are now the norm with praise, food, and play being used to far better effect than pop and jerk. Obedience is not about a stressed dog performing a robotic routine out of fear of reprisal. Obedience training and competition are about teamwork and mutual respect. It’s a joy to watch a snappy, focused dog in the ring...especially when his whole body says, “I’m happy working with my person!”

What are they doing out there?!

AKC Obedience competition (the trial) is a sport designed to “demonstrate the usefulness of the purebred dog as a companion of man, not merely the dog’s ability to follow specified routines”. The exercises show that the dog has learned basic manners, the handler has control, and the dog can behave both at home and in public... even when surrounded by strangers, dogs, and other distractions.

In order to receive a qualifying score at each level (Novice, Open, Utility), a dog and handler team must receive at least 50% of the possible points for each exercise and a total score of at least 170 out of a possible 200. Each time a dog earns a qualifying score, it has gained a “leg”~ there are lots of “1-legged” and “2-legged” dogs around the obedience rings. Three-legged dogs are titled! When the dog has qualified at three different trials, it receives the title appropriate to the class it has been competing in and is entitled to move up to the next level.

Dogs in Novice gain the title “Companion Dog” (CD)

Dogs in Open become a “Companion Dog Excellent” (CDX)

Dogs in Utility are entitled to be called “Utility Dog” (UD)

Different *stuff* in different rings... the classes

Obedience is broken into three levels of competition, like elementary school, high school, and college.

Novice

The Novice class demonstrates basic control for everyday life situations. Exercises are performed both on and off lead but when on lead, it must be kept loose and not be used to guide the dog. For each exercise, either a verbal or hand signal may be used but the command can only be given once. In the heeling exercise, the dog must walk quietly exactly at the handler's left side in "heel position" through a series of turns and changes of pace. The dog is expected to sit quickly when the handler stops and move again with the handlers first step~ as if walking down a crowded street. Then the dog stands still for an exam from the judge (or vet or groomer). When called, he comes and sits in front, then returns to the handler's side, ready to start moving again. The dog also holds a stay with the handler moving to the other side of the ring (sit for one minute and down for three minutes); very helpful when a visitor comes to your home or during dinner. Don't you wish your kids could wait as quietly?

Open

Additional exercises are added in the next level, the Open class. The same "one time" rule applies to commands but at this level, all exercises are done off lead. Many of the exercises utilize skills that would be required in a hunting dog but are quite useful around the house. For example, retrieving on command or jumping to get an object he can't see are obviously useful skills for hunting dogs but around the house they can be even more welcome when the morning paper's at the end of the driveway and the snow's a foot deep! The "drop on recall" (stop moving and lie down where you are) works equally well to keep a dog from running into dangerous traffic as from prematurely flushing game. In Open, the 3 minute sit-stay and 5 minute down-stay test the dogs self confidence and willingness to respect a command without the presence of the handler (the handlers leave the ring and are out of site to the dog).

Utility

Utility is the third and most difficult level of obedience competition. Utility incorporates skills from many of the jobs dogs have performed in their role as man's helpmate. In utility, the dog works entirely by hand signals (no verbal commands) to heel, stand, down, sit, and come. He is then called upon to pick out an article (leather and metal) from a pile of identical ones. The dog must choose the one article which has been touched by the handler ~ same scent discrimination skills as those used in disaster, search and rescue, bomb and drug detection work though it's also said that with a utility trained dog, you'll never loose your car keys! He does a "directed retrieve" of a specific glove (one of three) as would an assistance dog for the handicapped, or when we don't feel like leaving the couch... but really want that TV Guide. A more detailed exam by the judge, then "directed jumping" round out the useful Utility class.