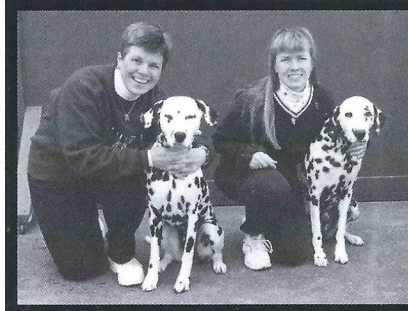


Ask the Obedience Experts

by Elaine Hamill & Amy Stephens



Welcome to our new Q & A column about Dals in obedience competition. We'll be happy to answer your obedience questions and look forward to the interesting and challenging subjects you propose.

To begin, we need to introduce ourselves. Together, we have over 35 years of experience in obedience. We own Dalmatians that have AKC OTChs and UDXs, as well as OTChs in Canada and the United Kennel Club. We currently own the #1 and #2 Dals in most obedience rating systems.

Elaine's current Dal, Alvin, was owner/handled and finished in breed from the puppy classes, with 4 BOB awards, and she is actively showing him in AKC agility besides continuing his obedience career. Amy's Tux is a registered (and very active) therapy dog, as well as pointed in breed, and is learning agility while still actively showing in obedience. And we both have real lives outside of dog activities, with two daughters each and jobs and husbands and houses and well, you get the idea!

Our methods have been proven over and over again by our students' dogs, as well as our own dogs, with various breeds of all seven groups and various ages of dogs (and handlers). We base our training on a balance of fun and hard work, praise and correction. There is no magic pill, and often new ideas take time for a Dal to work through.

We don't train with gimmicks; preferring the simplest approach for the clearest understanding, and fewer tools to have to wean the Dal off of before showing. Therefore, Elaine will probably never recommend prong collars, clickers, jumping chutes, front boxes, etc. Amy will probably never recommend clickers, but has used prong collars and jump chutes in special cases. However, neither of us will ever recommend electronic collars (geesh!).

We are not identical twins, but our basic premise is the same. (But we'll "never say never", as Dals are creative and sometimes need very creative solutions.) We do recommend a flat buckle or quick release collar, a short lead (30 inches or so), and lots of good food treats and toys, with variety being the most important ingredient. Other than that, all you really need is a healthy Dal and some of your own quality time, with generous amounts of energy and happy expectations.

Training usually progresses in direct relationship to the time and effort devoted; our methods can help your Dal earn his titles quickly if you commit to his training. Conversely, sloppy, haphazard

training schedules develop sloppy, haphazard results. It's up to you. Please recognize that answering questions about obedience in print is far from an exact science. Such a physical activity is much easier to explain and understand in person, but we can't do that for all of you, so we'll do our best here at the keyboard.

OK - Question #1

How do you stop a Dal from sniffing while heeling?

Elaine H - I have two answers for this. First, teach your Dal a "no sniff!" command. That's a really easy one, too, as you'll have plenty of chances to catch him sniffing, while he's on lead, and supposed to be doing something else, like paying attention to you. Here the old fashioned "pop" on the collar while you sternly say "No Sniff!" works well, immediately followed by praise when your Dal looks up at you.

If he ignores your command and/or lead pop, you are not putting enough force into it (sorry). However, the best way to deal with sniffing is to avoid it; that is make yourself and the job your Dal is supposed to be doing with you more exciting to him than the smells in the grass. How? In heeling, I'd recommend picking up your pace, surprise turns and halts, yummy treats at unexpected times (Food rewards are not only for halts, you know), extra long fasts into a halt, etc. We're trying to be unpredictable here, while still being consistent with your cues and commands. You'll also have to concentrate to come up with different combinations as you're heeling along and you'll find this FUN for both of you.

Amy S - Along the same lines as Elaine's answer, I would go one step further. Get your dog's interest level off the floor. By rewarding at or above his eye level, he won't want to look down at the floor. So "pop" and praise UPWARDS when needed, and reward upwards randomly for proper positioning. Make sure to praise when he is correct, not wait for him to be wrong. This keeps the fun going.

To contact us email at: Otdhdal@comcast.net (Elaine H) or Dalcollie@comcast.net (Amy) or send your questions via snail mail to *Spotter* Editor Elaine Gewirtz.