

### - a very special sport

It's the aim of water education and training dog programmes to use the dog's natural drive to play and splash in the water and to give it useful tasks. Based in traditional water rescue work these exercises become more creative and flexible in waterwork as a dog sport discipline. The main aspect however is that the action-fun-loving dog can live out his drive in the wet element ...just like in any other dog sport activity....not to forget the positive side effects concerning health and condition.

What seemed to be a privilege of the so-called "waterdog breeds" like Newfies and PWD's has become an exciting challenge for dogs of ANY breed as long as they are able to build up confidence and courage in this new element. Meanwhile dogs of other races are allowed to show and testify their natural need to play and work in the water...some even with much more motivation than on safer ground.

Like in general training the clue to a successful team is a positive enforcing partnership which leads to enthusiastic teamwork when it's fun for both sides. A social interactive team lives on praise, love and mutual confidence which is most important in "rescue" situations. Of course stimulation with toys/ games/ new experiences, regular exercise and proper training methods are required. Hardly any other sport can lead to such a close trustful relationship and mutual orientation to the other's capabilities and needs: Swimming shoulder to shoulder and eye to eye ties up a strong bond between man and animal.

Being exposed to water playfully during puppyhood can build up a desire for canine water play; bad experiences in that period might have a strong impact however. Never force or push a young dog into deeper water unless he doesn't feel like exploring it. A confident puppy may try a lake like a curiosity and pleasant playground; a cautious dog will just need more time to associate water with fun and develop an individual safety zone at his own pace. Do not physically guide the dog in any way while he's still testing on his own. Another important requirement is that the puppy should have experienced different grounds (ball box, seesaw etc.) of different structure, especially moving ones to keep balance and not to feel afraid on water, boards, boats or shaky undergrounds.

When your dog has the desire and ability to swim you can start reinforcing water exploration, curiosity and playfulness with floating toys and leadership-follow-games in progressively deeper water. Already beginners may obtain reward in basic skills or when retrieving "lost" objects or equipment (hand delivery!). Improving your dog's degree of water attraction means improving his canine swimming skills. Constructive exercises and higher demands help increase endurance and ability : a challenge to the physical, emotional and mental strength of your dog! Like in professional water rescue work the dogs are then trained to perform life-saving tasks like retrieving lost paddles, taking a line out, fetching lifebelt/baywatch into the water, towing a person to shore and even towing floating boats.

Of course basic obedience is required, for the safety of both: handler and dog, a certain equipment like floating coat for the dog and skin protection (diving suit against the claws), rescue training articles and ropes for boat work. Besides a training partner is of great advantage, some exercises are hard to handle all by yourself....and it's really fun to work

together!

The land training in winter is comparable to obedience, only the tools are different (ropes, baywatch, boat equipment...)

All willing dogs should get the chance to do waterwork, not just a few races!

Can you imagine how proud your 4paws-partner must feel being able to rescue his "helpless master" and tow him to the shore?

All water-loving dogs should get the chance to win rewards and recognition in this fun giving work: it won't enrich their lives only!