

Patty Terrio, a good friend, obedience trainer, instructor, and owner/trainer of Ace – Multiple-BIS Am Can CH Avatar Luck of the Draw, CD, RN, wrote the following article. Ace is the 2006 #1 Rottweiler, Group 3 winner at Eukanuba, BOB at Westminster, #9 Working Dog, plus two obedience titles. Ace was bred by Johann Emedi, Debbie Uren and Roxanne Robertson. He is handled by Johann Emedi and loved by Patty's two children, Michael and David.

GREAT STARTS

By Patty Terrio

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Breeders and owners of new puppies have a responsibility to start them out with the best possible chance to succeed in life, in or out of the ring. The people who decide to bring puppies into this world have a minimum of 8 -12 weeks, usually more, of work ahead of them. A great puppy is first bred by informed conscientious breeders, but the job doesn't stop there. The new owners have a lot of work to do to continue on the same path of greatness. The best puppy in the world put into the wrong hands will not live up to its potential. How many times have you seen a puppy at his first show at six months old that is very afraid and not having fun? Then you find out that this is the first time he has been out of the kennel or house. What a shame! At that point the owners/handlers have a ton of work to do that should have been done already. Show dogs need to "show" and it is very hard for a dog to be flashy when he is afraid and unsure of himself at the same time. A puppy is like clay in your fingers. You have the ability to shape, mold, train, and influence your new puppy into the dog that you want to have around all the time, even after his show career is over. These are easy but very important guidelines to follow so that all puppies make great confident working dogs.

Puppies need to be socialized from the beginning. The radio and TV should be played at different volumes, pots and pans should be dropped occasionally. A quiet house is not the best house for puppies; the outside world is not quiet. If possible, even different species of animals like cats should be in the picture. Different people should come over to play with them. These individuals don't have to be "dog" people, but nice, trusting friends who just love puppies. They should also be different sexes, different sizes, different ages, and if possible different nationalities. The owner of a shy puppy will have significantly more work to do than that of an outgoing puppy. A breeder that is in tune with his litter will be able to tell you the intricacies of each puppy's personality. Puppies are like children; in the right environment most will flourish. Some just need more help and guidance. I think that puppies are about 60% breeding and 40% environmental. Considering these numbers, not all dogs can be completely rehabilitated or trained. Sometimes bad breeding and genetics cannot be overcome. The right person can usually take an aggressive or even shy dog and make it into a very confident dog who knows the rules.

Once your puppy is eight weeks old and has had a least two sets of vaccinations, you should begin to take him out of the house for socialization trips. During your hectic schedule, find the time to take your dog in a crate for short rides while you run errands. Take your new puppy to schools or parks especially if there are no small children around your house. It is best to start out with "pet-friendly" stores for his travel experiences like hair salons, feed stores, hardware stores – and don't forget that leash! Any little shop that you frequent is usually fine, especially if you carry him. Keep a pocket full of puppy kibble to hand out to people to feed your new puppy, and he will love it. After you leave the stores, put the puppy down and walk him in front of the stores on the sidewalk. There are usually people that will want to pet your puppy. Most people will coo over a puppy even if you have a large breed of dog that people are leery of as an adult. Use them and teach them

how to approach a new puppy. This can also be an opportunity to educate people on your breed of dog, or just dog education in general. The bigger your puppy will grow, the more important it is to start this as soon as possible. It is really difficult to carry a four month old Great Dane anywhere. Once he is too big to carry, some of the stores will be off limits. As they grow bigger, find other places to take your puppy. Pet supply stores make good field trips and the staff will usually give your dog a treat. Make everyday a new and exciting experience.

These outings are the time to educate and show the puppy how to react to the exciting world we live in. The puppy should see traffic, big trucks and hear noises that are probably not heard at your house. Give lots of praise when he is brave or could care less at new and unexpected experiences. It is your responsibility to make sure nothing really frightening happens to him. If something out of the ordinary happens, don't make it a big deal. Curiosity, cautiousness, and being interested in new things are acceptable emotions and reactions, but fear is not. If there is an incident where he is scared, tell him to knock it off – do not coddle him or tell him it will be alright. Wait for him to compose himself, and try to show him that life goes on. The best thing to do after the incident is to set up the distraction again as soon as possible so the puppy can relive the experience again, maybe just a little farther away. When he experiences it again with no fear, give lots of praise. Work toward having the most confident dog you can have. One thing to remember is that a dog that is stressed might not play, but sometimes will still eat. Don't rely on food for everything. Take toys along on these trips and play tug, fetch or whatever the puppy loves to do. Make these outings fun for both of you.

As a dog trainer, I cannot overemphasize the importance of dog school. A puppy obedience class can bring problems to light that might have gone unnoticed until too late. Dog aggression, stubbornness, shyness or even being overly attached to you are a few examples. None of these are desired traits and should be corrected or redirected. The earlier these problems are confronted, the easier they are to resolve. A confident dog will go with another person without being stressed. They know that they have been left in capable hands and that mom or dad will come back. Dogs that are required to learn new behaviors their entire lives also tackle new experiences with gusto, not stress. Dogs that are only required to stand on a table might be confused two years down the line when the owners want to try obedience or agility. They have never had to learn new behaviors (conformation training was long ago) and they might think that they are being punished. Constant training of new behaviors, even tricks, and high expectations on the owners part will keep your pets mind sharp. Remember; a good conformation class is also worth its weight in gold. Your puppy gets to run around the room, get cookies, and play with new friends. The ability for a dog to focus while distractions are going on around you is a must, but doesn't happen overnight. A good instructor will challenge you and your dog to be the best that you can be. Any type of dog school should be fun and rewarding. If the attitude and willingness to please are nurtured, then the puppy will be unstoppable in any venue.

Dogs that are exposed early to all aspects of life do better. They enjoy the outings, make friends, and are not as bored. Our goal is to have dogs that are not afraid of people; rather they can't wait to be petted or get a treat. Dogs in the show ring that say *"LOOK AT ME! You came here to see me, here I am"* truly enjoy the dog show experience. All breeds of dogs benefit from proper socialization and training. This includes people, places, things, other dogs and other species. It is our job not to coddle, but to train our dogs and give them the tools to enjoy life. The bonding, respect, and trust that you will get with your dog when you do these things will be incredible. The ability to take your pet anywhere so that he becomes an ambassador of his breed is a great feeling. We can all do it. All it takes a little time and love.