



Training for the Pet or Performance Dog: Does it Matter?

By Carrie Rzewnicki

Last August I brought home a new puppy with the sole purpose of training him to be my agility partner. As he started to grow, and our training relationship deepened, everyone wanted to know is he jumping yet? When will he do the weave poles? Are his contact obstacles trained? To every question my answer was always the same, “Not until we have built a solid foundation.”

But what does a solid foundation consist of? Well take a look at any beginner puppy or adult class and you’ll have your answer. Sit stay, down stay, coming when called, walking nicely on a leash, leave it/impulse control, being handled and groomed and crate training. Without these skills we would be completely lost in any canine sport! Most importantly to me though, was that at the end of the day I still had to live with this exuberant puppy, and basic skills would make that happen harmoniously.

Basic skills can be life saving to our canine companions, but they also make for happier, calmer pets! Taking a look at a few basic skills taught in most puppy and adult classes, we can see how much we rely on them in not only our daily routine, but in our performance canine as well.

Skill	Daily Routine	Agility Dog
Sit/Down Stay	Needed in the vet’s office, greeting people nicely, waiting at street corners, being examined, not rushing out doorways, etc.	Needed at the start line, stopping on contact obstacles, waiting for turn in the ring and exiting the ring.
Leave It / Impulse Control	Dog learns to have self control around distractions such as debris on the ground, other dogs, people, food, and toys. Most importantly dog learns to look at owner to get permission to get what it wants.	Self control is needed in an agility ring surrounded by many other dogs, people, and food. Most importantly dog learns to look to owner/handler to get permission to get what they want, most often this is a chance to run the course!
Coming When Called	Coming in from outside, in the dog park, to get dog’s attention, and most importantly, to save his/her life when running towards a street.	Used for obstacle discrimination, changing direction and getting attention.

Walking Nicely on Leash	Daily walks (especially when icy out!), tight areas such as vet's office, and most importantly, for the owners safety.	Walking through tight venues, crowded with many other dogs and people. Not being pulled into the agility ring at the start of your turn.
Handling	Vet's office, grooming salon, administering medications and putting on/taking off leashes, collars and harnesses.	Vet's office, grooming salon, administering medications, putting on/taking off leashes, collars and harnesses.
Crate Training	Potty training and management for any dog. Makes traveling easier and safer for any dog that is used to being crated.	Travel to agility trials, being crated during trials, often used in training to create drive.

So whether I own a pet dog or a performance dog, they will both learn the same skills in order to be successful in life. Pet dog or performance dog, it doesn't matter what title your dog has; they should both have the same foundation.