

Remembering Why Obedience Training Is Important

Submitted by Tom Mauter, Member Northern Virginia Brittany Club and Central New Mexico Brittany Club

I've learned that working with your dog daily on obedience is the foundation for enjoyable and safe activities ranging from field work to frolicking in the park and you name it in between.

I admit that my focus in obedience work with our Brittany Ollie has been, to a large degree, earning titles. And he has been successful beyond my expectations. In about a year of us being together, Ollie has earned a Rally Novice (RN), Junior Hunter (JH) and is one qualifying leg away from a Companion Dog (CD) title.

In fact, if he could have held a sit stay for sixty seconds he would have earned his CD three weeks ago.

We competed in back-to-back-to-back obedience trials in Albuquerque the second weekend in May. Ollie was the first dog scheduled to compete in each trial. This required us to be on the road by 5:45 a.m. to travel the 80 miles to the match each day. This competition marked the only the second weekend we've competed in Novice Obedience competition.

Ollie qualified both Friday and Saturday making me very proud. Of course my expectations were then raised that we would complete the "trifecta" for his title on Sunday. After completing the healing on and off lead, the figure-eight, stand for examination, and recall and finish, Ollie was well on his way. Entering the ring with the other dogs, the one-minute sit-stay and three minute down-stay were all that was between us and another title. Ollie had been letter perfect on his sit-stays and down-stays Friday and Saturday.

I left Ollie on his sit-stay, proceeded across the ring and turned to face him for what is "the longest minute" in Novice Obedience. I noticed his eyes getting heavier and heavier. Uh-oh, the early to rise three days in a row had taken its toll. Plop! In a matter of seconds Ollie dropped down. Poof – no title today.

Disappointed, I reminded myself how far we have come in our year together. So we have two more Novice Obedience trials in Colorado Springs the first weekend in June. I'm optimistic that Ollie will "get it done" there.

It was the very next day that Ollie put all this obedience work into its proper perspective.

With the front door open enjoying a comfortable breeze, I was e-mailing some friends when I heard Ollie barking rapidly and persistently. I immediately left my computer and went out to the courtyard to find Ollie barking at a snake. Standing in my stocking feet I was at about twenty feet away from Ollie and a coiled snake. We were separated by a long gravel pathway. Without moving I told Ollie to: "Leave it", "Back", "Stand" and "Stay". He followed all commands quickly and to the tee putting some six to eight feet between himself and the reptile. I then walked by the snake to take hold of Ollie until I could identify it. It was a bull snake - not poisonous but still capable of inflicting a painful bit with its teeth. From a distance they look like rattlesnakes.

It's great to qualify and earn ribbons and titles in obedience trials but the real purpose of obedience training is to have your dog obey in critical times. Ollie's performance brought that sharply into focus.

On a related note, Ollie's been vaccinated against rattlesnakes. I'm also working with other members of the Central New Mexico Brittany Club to hold a rattlesnake proofing clinic. In the event of a venomous rattlesnake bit, anti-venom shots for dogs alone may not be enough to save your dog and can cost \$600 to \$800 each underscoring the importance of vaccination. Additionally, my veterinarian informed me in early May that there has been a back-log on anti-venom injections for some time. Living in the high desert of New Mexico rattlesnakes are part of the environment.

In Maryland there are two poisonous snakes: the timber rattlesnake and copperhead. Both are not that common. Virginia has both of these snakes along with cottonmouths. Both copperheads and cottonmouths, as in Maryland, are not that common in Virginia. Timber rattlers are more prevalent in the mountainous sections.

If you travel with your Brittany for hunting, field work, or hiking vaccination should be considered as well as rattlesnake proofing. A rattlesnake clinic's cost of between \$40 and \$60 maybe one of the best investments for you and your Brittany.