

Organized Sports & Activities for Family Dogs

By Kathy Lang, President & Training Director
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Cable and satellite television, live broadcasts of the glamorous Westminster Dog Show, reality TV shows about show dog families. The broadcast media is just now recognizing what "dog people" already know: there are lots of fun activities around for dogs and their owners to enjoy together. And, with a little research, you and your canine companion can explore new activities throughout the Puget Sound.

(Note: This listing is not intended to be complete. It just touches on some of the more common organized dog sports and activities. If you're interested in something not referenced here (such as lure coursing, weight pulling, etc.) contact the author and she'll attempt to help you find what you're looking for!)

- **Conformation dog shows.** Dozens of American Kennel Club (AKC) dog shows are held in this area every year, attracting thousands of dogs and their owners as they compete for breed championship points. Considered by some to be the "beauty contest" of the dog world, these events help recognize purebred dogs with the necessary physical and mental traits worthy of the title "Champion."
- **Agility trials.** Chances are you've seen this fun sport on TV. Dogs climbing, jumping, zipping and zooming over, under and through various obstacles. Agility is fun for all shapes and sizes of purebred as well as mixed-breed dogs, and there are competitions nearly every weekend within an hour or so drive from Seattle. (And it's great exercise for the humans, too!)
- **Obedience competitions.** Heeling off leash. Retrieving a leather article that the handler has touched (while ignoring the eight others handled by a stranger). Performing flawless hand signals from 50 feet away. Jumping and fetching. They're all exercises from competition obedience, and the sport is a fun and challenging way to build a strong relationship with your dog, as well as achieve a marvelously trained companion.
- **Rally Obedience.** The newest sport to grace the dog world, Rally combines the coursework of agility with basic obedience commands. Handlers maneuver their dogs through a series of stations, executing turns, sits, downs and stands.
- **Water trials.** A number of different breeds were bred to assist humans in the water. From Newfoundlands that help rescue swimmers to Portuguese Water Dogs that help with fishing nets, there are many activities to showcase what water dogs were originally bred to do.

Teaching your family. Training your dog.

Classes, private lessons & problem solving for puppy manners, home obedience, competition obedience, off-leash control, conformation handling, agility, flyball, tracking, tricks & games, therapy work, canine good citizen & more! Behavior problem solving. All breeds. All ages.

Mixed breeds & rescue dogs welcome.

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- **Field work.** Retrievers and spaniels of all types participate in field and hunting events, earning titles for their abilities to retrieve on land and in the water or to point and flush birds for their masters.
- **Herding.** Dogs with herding instinct can earn a variety of titles, or just have fun, doing what comes naturally. Remember the movie Babe?
- **Tracking.** Dogs who like to sniff and pull LOVE this sport. They learn to follow the path of a person who walked through a field or across a college campus, and the serious trackers can even earn titles.
- **Therapy Dog training.** Interested in something a little less active, a little less competitive? Therapy dogs work solo or in small groups to provide companionship, rehabilitation assistance, therapy and even entertainment in all types of settings. Only dogs with the best manners and best personalities need apply, but for those who meet the qualifications, it's heartwarming and rewarding for dog and handler alike.
- **Junior Showmanship and 4-H groups.** Many of the groups who sponsor the activities listed above also offer classes for juniors – children and teenagers and their pets.

The wonderful search engine Google makes it easy to find local clubs, professional organizations and national registries that sponsor the events described above, as well as groups and individuals who assist with the training required. Here are some resources to get you started:

- **American Kennel Club:** Search their events listing for AKC-affiliated clubs sponsoring events for purebred dogs at www.akc.org. The AKC offers information on everything described in this article.
- **Washington Mixed Breed Dog Club:** This active group in the Seattle area sponsors a wide variety of activities for mixed breed dogs and their owners: <http://mbdca.org>.
- **Delta Society:** For information on obtaining therapy dog certification: www.deltasociety.org.

About the author: Kathy Lang has been training dogs and teaching people since 1977. She and her staff at Family Dog Training Center offer a wide range of training classes and private lessons at their facility in Kent. For more information, contact them at (253) 854-9663 or visit their website at www.familydogonline.com.