

Training Your PBGV to Perform for Entertainment

By Janet Hopper

Most of you are aware of the Amazing Al. Al performs tricks and routines with a group of other trained dogs in Fresno, California called 'Paws for Fun'. Before Al could take the beginning performance class he had to successfully pass Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced Obedience and Utility classes. Your dog does not need an AKC title but these obedience skills are essential to teach more advanced entertainment skills. The Obedience background is very important. If you have no control over your dog and they have no elementary training skills, then your dog will be confused and have no clue to what you want him to do. Without basic heel, sit stay, down, come, etc. knowledge, you will have a dog that barks, doesn't listen to you, will not stay or do what you want him to. We have had dogs join our performance group that did not have Basic to Advanced obedience classes and the owners would always have a hard time controlling their dogs. Both you and your dog need to be trained so your dog will pay attention to you, not be confused and you will know what to do to get the desired behavior from your dog. This article is going to explain why obedience skills are important for the performer.

We trained Al to do voice, hand and body commands. Once they have mastered a skill you can give a very subtle signal to your dog and say whatever dialog you want and your dog will know what you want from him. Al was introduced to clicker training in intermediate obedience. Our instructor feels the amateur beginning trainer is not capable of dealing with the clicker in beginning obedience and she waits until intermediate to introduce the clicker. From then on we use the clicker to teach and refine new skills.

Besides all of the obedience and performance skills your performer learns, he will need special socialization training. He needs to be able to tolerate a variety of environments, performing surfaces, buildings, noise and odor distractions that he may encounter during a performance. He will need to have been exposed to different people situations. He cannot perform before a crowd if he is frightened or upset with people. He will need to be exposed to the elderly, children, babies, people with physical disabilities, large overbearing people, and even men, which some dogs have a problem with. The elderly may be using wheelchairs, walkers, canes, etc. and young children may be very unpredictable and active and startle a dog that is not

conditioned to their behavior. You will need to practice his skills in different locations and with audiences. You can use neighbor kids and relatives to help socialize him. Always be cautious with your dog in new situations. These socialization skills are also used in training therapy dogs. All of the dogs in our performance group are certified with TDI (Therapy Dogs International).

Your dog will need to be able to sit and stay so you can leave him in the middle of a room with distractions and he will stay. Your dog will also need to automatically heel next to you, on either side of you, or you will have to use a short training lead in some situations. He will also need to be reliable with recall to you and retrieving.

Basic and intermediate skills he will need to master include attention exercise, stand for exam, come and finish, come from distraction, sit on command and automatically, "down" on command, long sit and down stays, the figure eight exercise using people with their dogs as posts, stay on the move, and basic hurdles.

Advanced obedience skills are necessary for more creative performing routines. These skills include retrieving, retrieving to hold the object and sit, moving with a retrieved object, weaving the weave poles, drop on recall, broad jump, directional jumping, out of sight stays for at least 5 minutes, and the go away pole.

To be a top performer your dog should take at least the first part of Utility classes. Two of the most useful skills we learned in Utility were scent discrimination and directional retrieving.



Al Practicing pulling the rope.

Al also was lucky to learn some beginning performance tricks in every obedience class he took. These skills included wave, bow, crawl, march, spin and turn, circle and around, roll over, play dead/side, push the ball to target, and pull the rope. So you can see that Al already had a lot of basic performance skills mastered by the time he finished Utility class. Not all obedience instructors add the performance skills, but you could ask them to. Melody did this to keep the classes fun and encourage us to create new skills. Al had at least another year of just basic performance classes before he could audition for the "Paws for Fun" group.

One of the first skills we taught Al was to go to his mark or rug.

He was trained to go and sit or go and down. This teaches the dog his home or returning point.

The down command is useful for performance, besides being a good controlling tool for your dog. Knowing the down command will enable you to easily train your dog to lie on his side or play dead. We used the term side. After that is mastered we taught head down. This was also taught in a normal down. The side progresses to teaching roll over. If your dog can roll over and hold a blanket in his mouth, he can then sit in front of his blanket (that has a knot in one corner for him to grab) and you can call him to retrieve the knot in his mouth and then command roll over. He is now wrapped up like a burrito in the blanket. You then tell him head down and stay until you release him. Of course the skills required to achieve the cover up have to all be broken down and mastered individually. This is a little time consuming. If you find yourself getting frustrated and losing patience, then you need to end the session on a positive behavior with your dog and start training again later.

The long sit and down stays, with the trainer out of the dogs' sight, help build confidence in your dog. The stay command is important in every phase of a performing dog. The stay command is essential for distance work. For example, I sit Al next to his skateboard, leave him and then give the hang ten (come) command and he skates toward me. I also sit Al next to me, have his skateboard 20 feet away or so and give the command "go hang ten". Al goes to the skateboard, turns around and skates. To teach this I told him to turn when he reached the board, then paws on and come. Stay is also used when you want your dog to pull a wagon on command. The wagon can be next to you and you run with the dog or the dog is by your side and the wagon a distance away facing you and your dog. For the later you will tell your dog to go, bring or whatever command you have taught him to pick up the rope attached to the wagon.

Sit stay, down stay, drop on recall and go away all contribute to distance work. Distance work is necessary so you don't always have to be next to your dog or on top of them. The performer looks a lot more professional if he does his tricks in the middle of the stage and not with you hunched over him, clicking for every move, etc. This



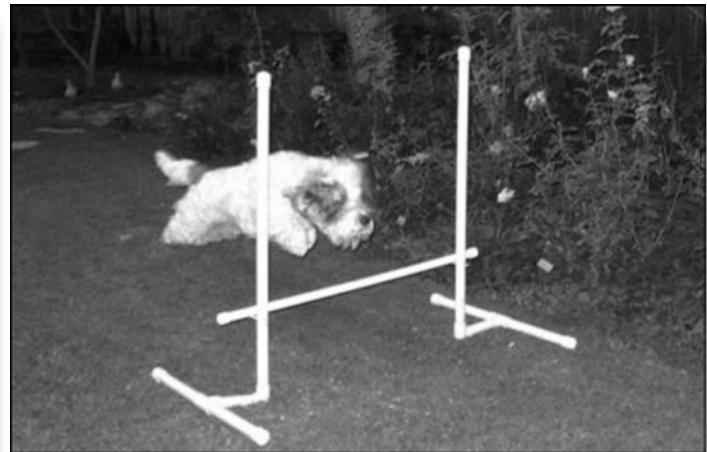
Al retrieves a cone, a foreign object.

really 'wows' the audience, having them wonder "how does he do that?" To teach distance your dog first has to master the skill you have taught him. Once you have accomplished close work perfectly then you can gradually take a step back and work on that distance until he is once again flawless. Just keep adding distance between the two of you in short increments. Your dog will be tempted to come towards you. Using your dog's rug, used in the go to your rug exercise, will help keep your dog from lunging towards you. If he starts creeping toward you, then you have gone out of his comfort zone.

Retrieving is an important basic skill needed for the performer. Your dog must be able to retrieve and hold different objects, textures, sizes and types of material that he is normally not comfortable putting in his mouth. Your dog will need to become familiar with plastic, wood, metal, long objects, oversized, and anything unnatural to him, not just his fuzzy dog toys. A good place to start is with the dumbbell. At first your dog will not like the feel of certain materials in his mouth. It just takes a lot of patience and practice. Make the retrieving fun for your dog like a game. When you want your dog to carry a bucket or other odd hard material object with a handle, it is a good idea to tape the handle so your dog can get a firm grip with his mouth.

The next lesson for retrieving is directional retrieving. This is a skill that teaches your dog to watch your hand and body motion commands that you give him from a distance. With your dog sitting by your side and the objects to retrieve in front of you, give a hand signal in the direction of the object you want retrieved and tell him 'go, get it, bring'. If he grabs the wrong object you give the command "wrong", do not use no. No is reserved for when your dog does something really bad. Try to avoid "No" in training.

The go-away post is important for the performer. Your dog will need this skill so that you can send him to a spot, have him sit and then do other skills. I used the go-away skill to help in teaching Al to solo ride his skateboard, when it was 10 feet or more in front of him and me. The go to your rug, which is a part of the go-away skill, is very useful when you want to send your dog to a spot to sit or down and helps with controlling your dog at a show.



Al goes over a hurdle jump.

Obedience



Al jumps trough agility hoop.

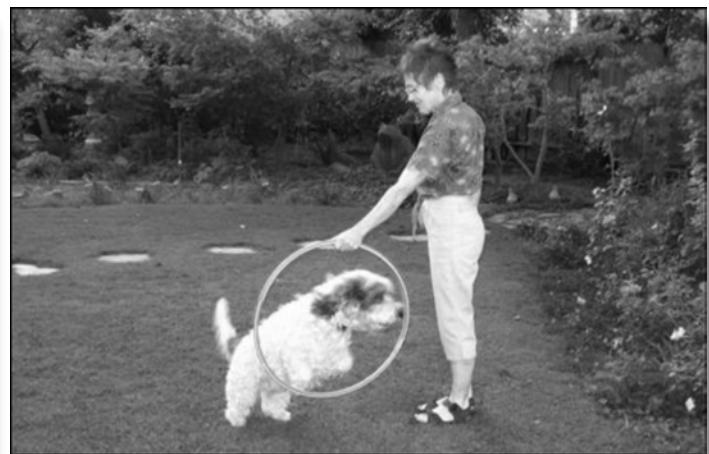


After mastering hurdles and hoops, Al jumps swinging rope.

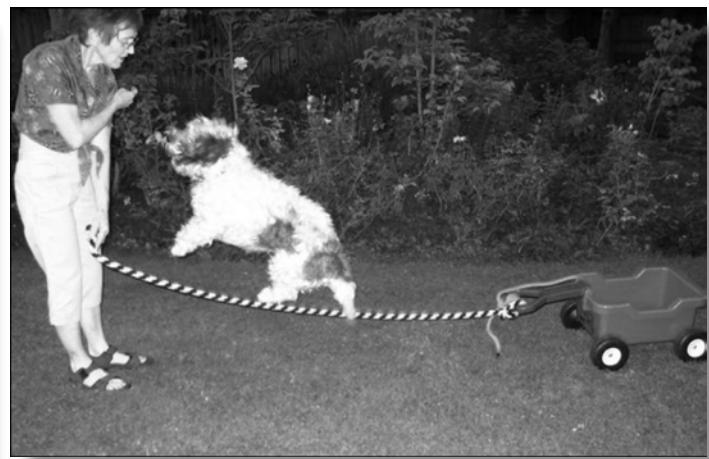
Jumping hurdles gave Al the skill he needed to jump hoops, lassoes, a jump rope and other obstacles. The directional jumping, taught in Advanced Obedience, is another good exercise to train your dog to follow hand signals from a distance.

Pulling is not exactly an obedience skill, but it is very basic for a lot of 'tricks'. After learning to pull a rope, your dog can pull open a door with a rope attached to the handle, a wagon with a tape on the handle and other props by giving the pull command. We taught Al to pull with something he already liked as a puppy, socks. I tied numerous socks together creating a tug toy.

The Utility Class may seem excessive for a dog performing tricks, but some of these skills are the most important and basic skills for the performer. Scent discrimination is a good skill to use to fool the audience into thinking your dog is exceptionally smart. For example, you might have a group of blocks with numbers on them. You ask your dog to get a certain numbered block and he retrieves the block . . . how? You have put your scent on the block with that number and the other blocks have been isolated from your scent. You have to be careful not to touch the other objects. Maybe have them in a bag and throw them on the ground without touching them and place the one you put your scent on last. Your dog is just retrieving



Al practicing jumping hoop.



Al jumping rope in a straight up jump instead of over.

your scent, but it looks like much more.

You never know what basic skill will later benefit your dog. Learning the weave poles made it easy for Al to adapt dancing around the poles (I used toilet plungers) for his Mexican Dance. Also incorporated in his dance are the circle and around (you or an object) commands.

Training your performing dog is an ongoing challenge. Once you start the training it will be a fun activity for both you and your dog. The performance skills are really limited to your imagination and your dogs' capabilities. You will find they love to train and always want to learn something new. It is hard to keep on top of that. So get started with your obedience skills and make it fun by adding simple performance tricks. You will finally want to incorporate music into some of your routines. I have found it hard to teach Al a "dance" and have him be reliable with it at a show. He needs the props to keep motivated.

Now it should be apparent that obedience classes are to dogs as elementary and high school are to people. Once he has mastered obedience he can move on to "college" and have fun continuing to nurture the bond between the two of you.

The Day of the Trial (or Looking Ahead to Obedience at the National)

By Micki Nesbit

Twas the day of the trial when all round the ring
Each handler was waiting to do his own thing
The rosettes were hung by the ringside with care
Each handler was hoping to bring home his share
The hounds were all nestled each snug in their crate
Where visions of bunnies would just have to wait
And I with my dog, a friend with her bitch
Had just settled down to share training tales rich
When over at ringside there rose such a cheer
For Annie and Holly two hundred were near
Away to the ring I ran like a Rott
Tripped over my lead and bumped into Dot
The stars in the eyes of the newly-placed class
Put a joy in my heart that would not quickly pass
When what to my wandering eye should I spy
But a steward who signalled for me to stand by
There in the ring, a judge crafty and quick
Each error he'd mark with a flick of his Bic
More speedy than Greyhounds, his commands how they flew
As we heeled without lead and errors weren't few
"Now forward, now halt, about turn and slow
Keep your hands off your hound, now this you should know
To the end of the ring for the Drop on Recall

Hurry up, hurry up - BE CAREFUL - don't fall"
As food scents sailed by my hound - did their deed
When they met with his nose no command did he heed
So out of the ring my Roughie did flee
As he snatched a kid's hotdog, I wondered, "Why me?"
And then in a moment I heard the judge say
Twenty dollars you've wasted, at least for today
As I slinked from the ring, wondering what I should do
My most happy hound returned with "Aroo!"
His moustache was covered with crumblets of bread
Satan's very own horns seemed to sprout from his head
His eyes how they sparkled with mischief a'calling
With saber tail high, his glee was appalling
The bar of his dumbbell he grasped in his mouth
Soon had me wishing I'd never come south
He was tousled and carefree, a true happy hound
I laughed as I watched this fine friend I'd found
A gleam in his eye and a toss of his head
Soon showed me clearly I had plenty to dread
He uttered no sound as he planned his next game
Those laughs from the gallery seemed to be his sole aim
So tossing the dumbbell aloft with a bark
Open class for my hound was no more than a lark
He pounced on the stewards and gave them sweet kisses
Joy for life, not his titles, shows me what bliss is
But friends heard me exclaim as he flopped down in his crate
"Ah! The National next year, I'm sure he'll do great!"

Written for Annie Esperance and her obedience partner, Holly

What is Rally Obedience Anyway?

By Megan Esherick

If you have been to an AKC show or obedience trial in the recent past, you may have seen dogs competing in a new form of obedience, where instead of waiting for instructions from a judge, the handler is responsible for guiding his dog through a numbered course. This new Companion Event, called Rally, has been a titling class since January 1, 2005. Since then, many PBGVs have competed successfully in Rally, earning titles through Rally Advanced Excellent, the highest level title offered in AKC Rally. Unlike regular obedience where a handler is limited to one command in most situations, nearly unlimited communication between handler and dog is permitted in Rally competition. A handler may praise and encourage his dog using both hand and voice signals at all levels. In the Novice and Advanced levels a handler is also permitted to clap his hands or pat his legs if desired to help the dog stay in position.

Rally obedience will be offered for the first time at a PBGVCA

event in April 2007, at the National Specialty in Nashville, Tennessee. Who will be competing? Hopefully you and your PBGV! Maybe your dog has been through basic obedience or Canine Good Citizen classes and you would like to show off your training or maybe you have a champion sitting at home who would love another chance in the ring. If you are reading this, you probably have a dog in your life who could be ready for the Rally Novice class by April. If you think that you would like to give Rally a try, begin by visiting the AKC website www.akc.org and downloading or purchasing the Obedience Regulations and the Rally Sign Book. These publications will give you an overview of what will be expected of you and your dog. Rally is very much a team sport and it is very important that the handler be prepared by understanding the rules of the game and the requirements for each of the signs.

A Rally Novice course would include between ten and fifteen stations (signs). The course is done ON LEASH, but the leash should remain slack at all times. When you check in with the ring steward at a Rally trial, you are given a copy of the course for the class. Before judging begins, you will also have a chance to walk through the course

Obedience

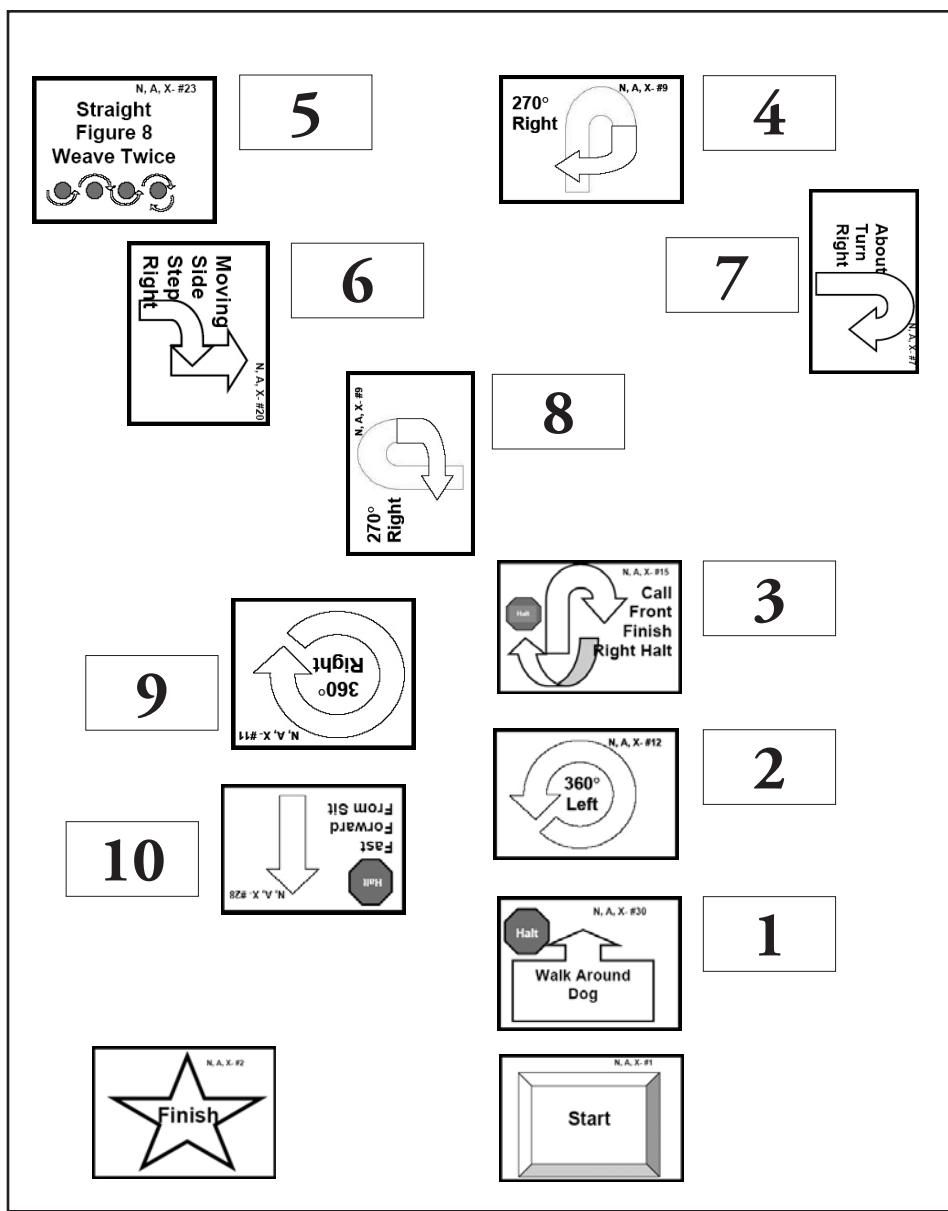
without your dog to get a feel for the "lay of the land". The course shown here is an actual Rally Novice course from a trial and is used with the permission of the course designer, Nancy Withers.

Station 1 requires that the handler stop moving and that the dog sit and stay while the handler walks around him. Station 2 would have the handler and dog heel in a fairly small complete circle to the left. At Station 3, the handler would call the dog, backing up as needed, and have the dog sit in front of the handler. Then the dog would be told to move back into heel position by moving around behind the handler and sitting once he is back on heel side. Then the team would move on to Station 4, where they make a $\frac{3}{4}$ turn to the right. At Station 5, the team will perform a figure pattern around four traffic cones. Just past the sign for Station 6, the handler will take a step to the right and the dog will move with him to remain in position. Station 7 is an about turn, where both the handler and dog turn to the right. Station 8 is another $\frac{3}{4}$ turn to the right, followed

by Station 9, which is a full circle to the right. At Station 10, the team stops and the dog sits. The handler and dog would then move forward at a fast pace until they cross the finish line.

As you can see, the course is mainly a test of the handler's ability to keep the dog moving with him on a loose leash. Since the handler can talk to and praise the dog throughout the course there is plenty of opportunity to keep the connection between the handler and even the most attention-challenged PBGV. The regulations allow up to two retries at each station, with a three point penalty assessed for each. Ten points are deducted if a station is not performed correctly. The maximum score in Rally is 100 points, with a score of 70 required to qualify. Unlike most other dog sports, it is possible to perform stations incorrectly and still earn a leg, but every station must at least be attempted.

Hope to see you in the Rally ring soon!



*Top: Megan & Chili in Rally
Middle & Bottom: Megan and Rory in Rally*