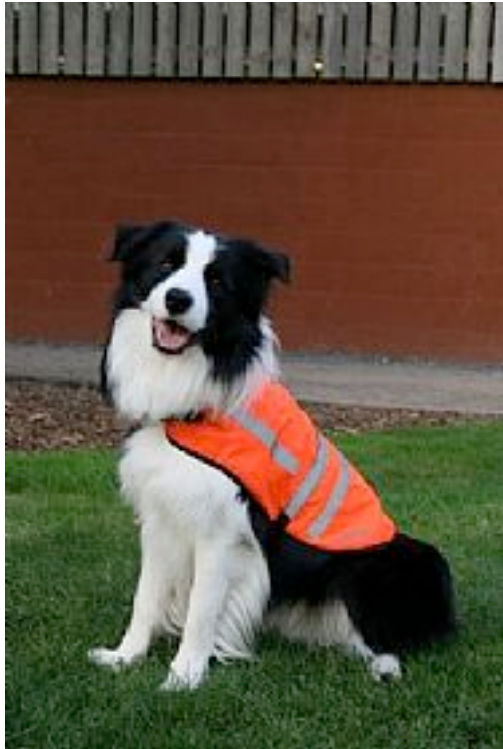


Show Dogs Article

Bodger and Mist train to become Berks SAR dogs



Eighteen months ago two little squeaking Border Collie bundles came into the world. Little did I know that eighteen months later they would grow up to be trainees for Berkshire Search and Rescue Dogs.

Their mum, Breeze only had two puppies in the litter and were given the names of Bodger and Mist. At first only Mist was going to be kept but as many will tell you Bodger grows on you and the decision was made to keep him thus the Shemella clan grew from seven to eight.

These little bundles of fluff grew and for the first year only did puppy things. They socialised in many different places and made their debuts in the show ring winning best puppy dog and bitch in open shows and Bodger qualifying at his first championship show for Crufts 2009. He has since gone on this year to qualify for Crufts 2010. Both have also started agility training and are progressing well.

The characteristics of both dogs are totally different. Mist is a busy girl and always on the go while Bodger is more laid back and likes to work things out.

Both the dogs and I joined the team in late January this year. They took to search work from the first night. I was really impressed. It is important with any form of training to have a reward. Both dogs

reward for search work is treats. I have tried toys but treats work especially for Shemella Border Collies! I have used this method right through training and only use one type of treat for search work. My wife and I use a different type for agility and the show ring. The dogs also get used to wearing a training jacket and again this is only used when they are going out search training.

The first few weeks was spent on a seen send away finding people at varying distances and once the instructors were happy they moved us on to the alert phase. I could not work out what to use as their alert but I need not have worried as the dogs worked out their own alert. I suddenly became a flyball box for Mist as she ran back bounced off my legs and returned in the direction she came from. Bodger was a little more difficult as I tried with ball and tuggy without success. Then one day he came in placed both paws firmly on my knees and thus Bodger's alert was formed. They both cottoned on to the alert phase very quickly returned and alerted me to the MISPER (Missing person) Over a period of time we worked and worked on the alert phase until I and the instructors were happy for us to move on to the next phase.

The next stage of training was the refind. Both have worked well on this and have had no problems with seen searches. They have now progressed to partial seen and unseen searches which really tests them as they have to use their main weapon, their nose. Although they are still at the stage of doing medium to long refinds I still find it absolutely fascinating that a dog can find a person by this means and it gives me such a thrill when Mist and Bodger find that MISPER.

It is not only training that Bodger and Mist have carried out for the group. They have been out and about at fetes and events this summer raising money. The two have also been on a school visit to four classes of eight year olds who have kindly sponsored them. Both Bodger and Mist love contact with people. The pair both appeared at Discover Dogs last year and will also be making an appearance again in November this year, only this time they will be proudly wearing their orange search jackets.



I hope Bodger and Mist continue the way they have started and go on to search work and qualify as operational dogs. It will take time, patience and guidance from the instructors but I am sure they will make it. They are an exceptional pair and little did I think that after years of working in search and rescue in the past I would be returning once again only this time with my two canine buddies and enjoying every minute of it.

Iain Lewis

Operational Member of Berks SAR

Mist - Berks SAR

(posted 24/09/2009)