

## General Article

### All Dogs Can Sniff



When Paul and I embarked on a new venture of training dogs for sniffer work we had no idea how difficult it would be to find the right dogs.

Having been lucky enough to watch

sniffer dogs training both within the Prison Service as well as at the Defence Animal Centre at Melton Mowbray, we had taken on board that the breed was important. Gun dog were always a first choice, although there is no doubt that some GSDs and Collies make very good candidates for training, but in the main it is the Springers, Cockers and Labradors that excel in this role. We were so inspired when we spent a day watching passive detection dogs training that we were determined to try to do it ourselves, but had no idea at the time of the lengths to which we would have to go to enable us to fulfil this ambition.

Firstly we had to apply to the Home Office for a licence to hold controlled substances, and in order to meet their criteria had to have a monitored alarm system fitted, install a safe and undergo CRB checks. All of this took several months which gave us the time to erect extra kennelling in anticipation of our new "lodgers," but once we had our licence and had our substances the search was on for a dog. In this we were very lucky as within a very short time a local gun dog kennel that I had approached came up with a 14 month old fox red Labrador looking for a home, and Jack came into our lives. To say that Jack was easy is an understatement, and this super keen dog with an amazing temperament taught us all about sniffer work

and we soon felt like enthralled observers rather than trainers. I remember the first time he offered us a passive indication and Paul and I danced around the garage in excitement, and over a period of time he went from passive indication to body scanning and then on to pro-active searching. When he left us to join the Leicester Constabulary we were felt bereft but so proud and when at the invitation of the Force we went to watch his assessment and he passed with flying colours we just wanted to do it all again, but it turned out that this was easier said than done.

After a couple of months of looking and not finding anything we had another call from the same gun dog kennels and they had another fox red dog for us to look at. Dex's story was a sad one in that he had gone to a home to be a gun dog but had been sadly abused by a man who, by his own admission, hated the dog and at 17 months old he couldn't stand him any longer and got rid of him. I will never understand what there was to dislike about Dex who was the nicest, friendliest and keenest dog you could ever want.

Despite obvious harsh treatment Dex retained his sunny nature and other than cringing if you moved too quickly and running away if you went towards his food bowl when we first had him, he showed no ill effects from what had clearly been several severe beatings. He soon forgot his fears after spending a couple of weeks with us and realising no-one would hurt him and he blossomed into a happy and willing dog with a fantastic nose and an impressive hunting ability.

After spending a couple of months with us and learning his searching technique he went on to become an explosive search dog at Luton airport with the Bedfordshire Police, so another success story, and we started to think it was all very easy. Unfortunately we discovered we had just been lucky and when we went on to a couple of spaniels Buddy who was nervous and had difficulty controlling his bladder, Lily who could only hunt outside and could not come through a door, and then Labrador Charlie who was totally self employed, fearless and bull headed, we started to realise that it is not about the training but more about the dog.

Yes of course all dogs can sniff, and all have the ability to hunt, but not all have the drive and tenacity that make a good sniffer dog, and when we find one our job is very easy.

More recently our faith has been restored in Spaniels when Sam the Springer came to stay and proved himself a star. He has already made several fans in his new role as an explosives search dog with the Prison Service National Dog and Technical Support Group, and another of our Springers, Bob, has just left us to join him. However, we still have Moss and Rob two new recruits and two new Labradors Danny and Bomber, all of which are showing great promise but all still need work and in addition to these four Woody the GSD has also come to stay, so we are more than a little busy, especially as we still have five Border Collies of our own to care for and work!



As a child I used to dream of having a stable full of horse and going out each day to choose which one I would ride – well I am nearly there, but it's dogs instead of horses!

Sam

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