

meet
the
trainers



Melanie & Romney pause for a photo op

MELANIE MARTIN, ALL BREED DOG TRAINING

By JEAN KIRSTEN JOHNSON, PHD

Melanie Martin of All Breed Dog Training is new to Portland, but she's been in the business since the 1970s. She got her start apprenticing under Bill Taylor, then-owner of Nationals Dog Training in Chicago, and now, she's trained more than 20,000 dogs.

"I'm a total dog nut myself," Martin confesses. "My English Setter Romney is so spoiled and sweet and good. Some people think it's silly, but I'm darn serious. You can have a totally spoiled dog that's perfectly obedient. A lot of trainers have these easy 'push-button dogs,' but I've

always gone for the breeds that are considered hard to train. English Setters have that reputation, but Romney is an angel, and he's still his goofy self."

Martin thinks animals enjoy richer lives when they know what the limits are to impulsive behavior. "Dogs who behave as nuisances aren't happy," she explains. "Owners who tolerate inappropriate behaviors are misguided.

It's not kind to the dog because then only the aberrant aspects of the animal's personality show. It's a shame to ignore the hidden potential of a fine companion pet."

So how does Martin suggest getting one's best friend on board? Lots of spoiling balanced with good limits. "There's no limit to the amount of praise. I'm totally for good food and sleeping on the bed and being on the couch if that's what people are comfortable with. I like to assure my clients that good manners and stability are perfectly compatible with spoiling."

To work on calming a dog who is used to charging out the door, for example, Martin advocates using a collar and light line so that clients can "give the dog a check or quick snap at the open door."

"My training is very traditional and humane," Martin says. "I use metal training collars and leads for teaching obedience commands."

She goes on to explain that "lots of folks don't want to carry around food and clickers.

because the dog becomes calm and attentive. Also, I like the dog to be focused on the owner rather than the treats even when surrounded by multiple distractions. I do use treats, but only after a training session, not as a bribe for every little thing. Dogs are really smarter than that."

Martin offers six-week individualized programs in which she travels to clients' homes in the greater Portland and Vancouver area. She focuses on all the manners and basic obedience commands for home, business, and travel. "I offer a unique, comprehensive training resource that allows dogs to perform according to their personalities. It's a bonding process in which the dog is the center of attention. There's no punishment. My thing is indoor and outside life with the family where comforts are never out of place.

"Good manners and stability are perfectly compatible with spoiling"

"Usually people start calling a trainer when dogs are in adolescence and things are out of control. Furniture is scratched, the rug is stained, and the only thing they can think to do is punish the dog or put it outside, neither of which is instructive to the dog.

"Instead of sending the dog outside or punishing it for everything, I have clients start involving the dog in normal everyday situations." Say a dog steals the pizza from in front of the television, Martin says. "Instead of letting the animal wander around aimlessly, we put the light line and training collar on and then have the dog go into a 'down' and 'stay' command. That way, they're thinking about the command rather than the pizza, and if they start moving in on the food, you are ready to catch them in the act."

some kind of deterrent on [the trash] so the dog smells something unpleasant when it goes for the trash. The point is, we've made one option pleasant and the other one unpleasant for the dog. That way they learn by getting frustrated in the act."

"It's a shame to ignore the hidden potential of a fine companion pet"

Martin has earned considerable credibility in the show and confirmation rings. One of her first show dogs, Champion Baroness Bamboo von Tadellos, CDX, otherwise known as Bamboo, was one of the top 10 Weimaraners in the country. In addition to show ring handling, Martin has done judging, temperament testing, grooming, boarding, and consultations on breed selection and personal protection. She also does presentations on dogs for schools and businesses and has been involved in some foster and rescue care. Finally, she has served as an expert witness on several occasions in dog-bite cases.

Training, though, remains her preferred activity. "I do everything myself and particularize methods to the clients," she says. "I've found that the way you talk to people is at least as important as the way you relate to their pets." 🐾

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paw Johnson writes from Portland where Pug says he can't imagine not sleeping on the bed on his puffy yellow comforter.

📷 Photo courtesy of Melanie Martin