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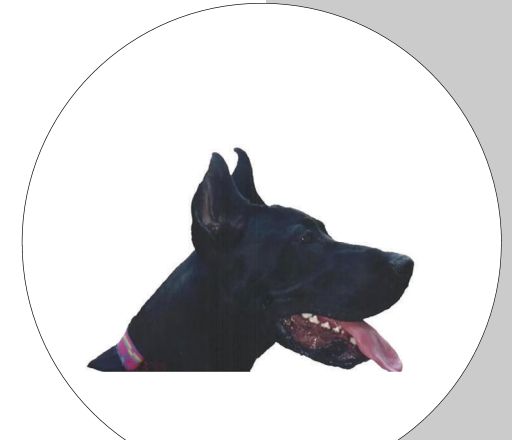
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Mid-Atlantic Great Dane Rescue League, Inc.



Are Great Danes Intelligent?

*By Mrs. Paddy
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Many people believe that Great Danes do not have much in the intelligentsia department, especially when it comes to AKC obedience exercises. Having owned and trained Great Danes over the years, I disagree with the insinuation that Danes are stupid.

Danes are a large breed and have a lot of body to move when they perform obedience exercises. It is physically impossible for them to perform as fast as the small finer boned breeds, but I have never experienced any learning problems or inability to comprehend the exercises. In-group training, if your Dane stands next to a Poodle or Dobe, on the command "sit", the Poodle or Dobe will slap its bottom down in one to three seconds, whereas the Dane, with its long legs and tail, will take four to six seconds. This is not to say he is a slow learner, it is a physical not a mental problem.

EARLY GUIDANCE

In actuality, I believe the "trainability" of any puppy, regardless of breed, begins in the whelping box. The puppies should be the progeny of physically and temperamentally sound parents, and the puppies should be healthy and physically sound. Also, the breeder or owner of the litter should handle the puppies from day one, and start "environmental guidance" as soon as the pups are weaned. Five to ten weeks is a very important age in shaping a puppy's future. The more new experiences and exposure a puppy can enjoy in these five weeks, the better chance he will have to reach his full potential level of intelli-

gence as he matures. He should be exposed both with littermates and individually. Walks in the country where they can run and hunt, car rides to the village where they visit in the shops and get lots of attention and many handouts, visits with all two legged or four legged visitors to the house, etc.

All this "early guidance" is shaping the puppy's future and should be done as unobtrusively as possible. The puppy is being guided, not forced, to become an intelligent, acceptable member of society. That is why I refer to this early learning period as "environmental guidance" rather than obedience training. The latter is more structured, and requires a much greater span of attention than a five to ten week old pup can muster.

UNDERESTIMATING INTELLIGENCE

The biggest mistake people make is underestimating the intelligence of their puppy. Most puppies are over-protected and mollycoddled by their owners who are afraid they will get hurt. They are not allowed to explore and develop their inborn instincts and awareness. Just as a mother raises her cubs, be it a bear, cat, or whatever, the puppy should be allowed to develop the intelligence it is born with, and the owner, like the cub's mother, is there to love, guide and impose the boundaries of the civilized world the puppy must adapt to. Many people believe the so-called "mutt" is more intelligent than any pure-bred dog and in many cases they are. Mutts are not generally pampered, they often grow up with kids who take them everywhere with them,

love them, sleep with them, and develop that special bond - they own each other. They are not trained - they just learn from being and doing. No pure-bred, pampered, kenneled, protected dog will ever develop the intelligence of such "mutts".

PATIENCE AND FAITH

When puppies receive this early guidance they transfer to their new permanent homes at 8-12 weeks with minimum trauma, and once they are settled in and become a family member, the more structural obedience training may begin. With each new exercise the puppy comprehends, he is learning to learn, listen, think, and to use his innate intelligence - not just obey. Credit him with having a great deal more intelligence than you think he has, and he will rapidly surpass your credibility. Think of him as stupid, and he will, no doubt, reflect your thinking.

If one approaches training in this manner, and is lucky enough to have a puppy that has been given early environmental guidance, I don't believe they will have any trouble training Danes in the most rigorous obedience exercises.

Remember, they do not take well to harsh punishment, but will always look for praise and attention, and will do their darndest to obtain it. Patience and faith in your puppy's intelligence is the secret to successful obedience training.