

race training: 101

by Don Papin

Training 101 for *Whippet Watch* will deal mostly with training Whippets that come to our ranch. I will be happy to answer questions in these articles, so if you would like to ask something I will try to answer any questions in the next issue. The best way to do this is to email me the question at: windyglens@aol.com.

This dog thing started for me as a child in Hibbing, Minn. My sister had asthma, and I was not allowed to have a dog. Several times over the years my sister's asthma would get worse and my folks would go looking for the cause. It always turned out to be the puppy I had hidden down in the basement. It was easy to do since I had the honor of being the oldest and therefore the furnace tender.

Training is a challenge to me. I love working with dogs and have never met a bad dog. You can always tell what is on their mind by reading the eyes. A dog will never lie, or stab you in the back, and they always want to please, the trick is to be able to let them know what is expected and reward when a good job is done. It does not need to be a physical treat just a word will do the trick. Everything that is done with a dog at our ranch is part of their training.

Socialization is one of the most important things for a pup. It is heart breaking to see a young dog that is scared to death of everything except the owners yard. Getting the dog to respect you and listen is very important. Very often you will see folks talking to the dog and the dogs just will not listen. Most of these the folks are not talking to the dog they are talking at them.

Playing with the youngsters and letting others play with them does a world of good. I let my pups run together, and with adults, from the time they can stand up. I never did subscribe to the philosophy that playing leads to bumping. Playing and running builds the muscle. I can get a pups head on right and get 100% from them, but their ability will be only as good as the body will allow. Good muscle can always be tuned up but they will not put on new muscle as an adult.

Just running in a small yard or a little jog is fine, but to develop a real racing muscle the dog has to run. There is a fine line as to how much to do without endangering the pups because the growing bones and joints can only take so much. I am fortunate to have miles of land behind the ranch that allow me to free run the dogs. We do a seven mile runs to the creek and back over some rough terrain that really builds muscle and feet that hold up very well. I turn half a dozen or so, loose and jump on the quad, in the old days I used to run with them, now I ride. I am sure many owners would be shocked to see the ground their youngsters run over and do not get injuries.

Having a permanent track gives us an advantage in training when the pups are young. I put them in out door kennel boxes that are located near the starting box. This gives the pups time away from people where the only thing that is happening is the loading and running of races and training dogs. They can see and hear all the noise the boxes make and see the other dogs run. The holding boxes are a bank of six that came from Flagler Greyhound track in Florida. They are big enough for greyhounds to stand up in and move around. The same thing can be accomplished with a regular Vari Kennel. The kennel crate can be set out of the way, off to the side, a ways in front of the starting box and the pup left there for a while to observe. This prevents the dog from having human interference for short periods.

Toenails are a real important aspect of puppy training. I do the nails about every 10 days to two weeks and they learn this from when they are babies. If the nails are too long, the dogs can injure the bones and ligaments in their feet when they run, and if the nails interfere they will not give you 100%. I have some folks that I do nails for the day of the meet, which is not good, but it is better than nothing. When this is done there is no doubt who is in charge, when it comes to nails anyway.

There are many opinions on the function of Dew Claws, and I believe the only thing dew claws are good for is a down payment on the vet's Porsche. I have seen dew claw injuries that could have been avoided and I do not believe they are there to use as a stopping or turning device for the animal. In the early years I did my own dew claws, unfortunately I did a terrible job and some grew back. The southern California folks started calling me dew claw Don. I have a vet that does a great job and a year ago he was not available so I did it myself and guess what? I do not do any better now than I did then. Racing Greyhounds do not remove the dew claws but they run on a sand track and only once every five days or so. The worse injuries I have seen have been open field coursing where they can get ripped off very easy, then you have bone problems.

I like to give pups a short sprint, from 25 to 100 yards depending on age and interest. I go much slower with training pups than most folks for a couple reasons. I don't think most puppies are mentally ready at seven or eight months to be expected to learn the game completely. At that age it should be a fun game, not getting serious for national competition. More important the body is not ready for pushing to the limits as is expected of the adults and they can hurt themselves which in turn can lead to a lack of interest. Some folks use the fish pole method to teach keenness on the lure which is good also especially when training tracks are not available. Putting a fur or rag on a string and using

a pole to swing it around will get an interest up in going for the lure. I do this but only with one pup at a time as they will eventually go to the other dog if you do more than one.

Remember nothing in racing or training is in concrete and everything I say is a generality. There have been some dogs, like Amplifax, who was winning meets at nine months and just kept on winning. I do not attribute this to training. He was one exceptional dog when it comes to straight racing. Every dog that comes here is a challenge to us. If I cannot get a dog to do what I want, that is give me 100% on the track, they are smarter than I am. I enjoy running the meet winning dog as much as anyone but I am fortunate enough to realize when the kids are giving me 100%. I am just as ticked with a dog that gets last as long as he is giving his best. Sally and I work as a team on trying to read these guys. Some times I come to a cross road where I think the dog should be a certain level, and it is great to have a partner with savvy and dog sense to work with.

I relate dog racing to going to the Olympics. Imagine the officials announce that today all the events have been canceled except for the 100 yard dash and everyone will have to compete in the 100 yard dash! Of course the 100 yard dash guys are going to kick butt, it means nothing more than that, they are just the better sprinters. I have been very fortunate in my life to have some great dogs. I have also been fortunate to have some of the best Oval, open field, and lure coursing dogs like Blur who was one of the top oval dogs for years. An excellent dog in the field CC and CM also an LCM in lure coursing yet he never got so much as one point in straight racing. He just did not cotton to it like he did the events that had more than a sprint to the finish. I do not endorse one type of event over another. Not all dogs will win straight race meets and not all can will an open field hunt. As long as you and your dog are enjoying what you do, have at it. They will let you know when they do not enjoy it any more.

I have not written so much since my last letter to the IRS and I hope this more productive. In the next segment I will get into working young dogs and the steps we take to training from never seeing a lure to first race.

— Don

Don and Sally Papin live in Anderson, CA on their Ranch which is set up to train and race sighthounds. Don is a past president of the Southern California Whippet Association, National Open Field Coursing Association and is the current National Director of the Large Gazehound Racing Association. He is the founder of the Rapid Transit Greyhound club and a licensed judge for ASFA, AKC lure coursing, NOFCA, NACA, TCC, and currently host race meets for CWA, NAWRA, WRA, NOTRA and LGRA. 🐾