

Water Safety - Canine Life Jackets

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From: Deborah Lee Miller-Riley, Splash for Joy <k9waterfun@aol.com>

To: CanineWaterSports@yahoogroups.com

Sent: Wed, 6 Aug 2008 8:40 pm

Subject: Re: [CanineWaterSports] Canine Life Jackets

" <k9waterfun@...> wrote:

>

"Deborah - etal - How do you help a dog that carries herself low while swimming -- not working the back legs enough. She is just getting to me from Canada and her owner says she doesn't know how to help her. My plan is to train with her this week, and I thought I would start with having her wear a life jacket. Do I want to show her to kick her legs by gently moving them for her in the water? or will she figure it out on her own? Other / better ideas, anyone? Thanks much, N"

Hi Nigel

Looks like you got lots of good answers to your questions. And thank you for telling us the dog is only 15 months.

Low swim posture can mean a few things.

Puppies have less body fat and swim experience and usually have to work harder to stay buoyant.

Dogs with injury or structural issues (neck/spine) may swim lower as they are compensating or fatiguing.

Dogs who are not conditioned for swim work will fatigue sooner and swim lower in the water as they slow down.

Some dogs are simply less buoyant - they may fatigue sooner. Buoyancy factors include muscle to fat ratio and lung (air) capacity.

OA

Energy levels vary among dogs and it is expressed in the water too. Energy and effort may effect swim posture.

Propulsion is another factor.

Some dogs do not need to use their rear legs for anything other than balance when canine "drive" is in neutral. They are buoyant and have the structure

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for easy swimming - these are the dogs traditionally bred for water work. Look at their paw size and leg length in proportion to body size. Energy and drive effect propulsion as you can see by just watching a dog who wants something in the water - ALL paws are moving with purpose. Dogs also PACE in the water - I find it fascinating. It does not seem to correlate to fatigue either.

K9 Life jackets protect your dog, help build confidence and because they create water resistance they are serving to create a more challenging workout (building muscle and aerobic capacity). Put your pup in a life jacket, make water contact fun and easy, gradually build swim time (5 minutes of swimming is equal to 20 minutes of running) so the dog gradually gains strength without the aches of muscle overuse from too much swim time. ALWAYS let dogs return to shore or a place where they can stand up when introducing swim programs. If you remain concerned - trust your instincts and have your dog checked by several vets and or certified canine physical therapists.

Even when using a canine life jacket young/inexperienced dogs may need you to gently lift their rear from under the belly if they are stroking too high with their front legs. Do this until the pup levels off and becomes confident in the new position. I don't like putting flotation under the dogs belly, I like being right next to the pup so I can monitor and provide the appropriate support as needed, which might be for only a few trials. If you use a lure (food or toys) be sure to keep the lure at the water's surface and moving with the dog, allowing the dog to swim into the lure for the capture. Avoid holing the lure above the dog's muzzle or dead in the water as this will throw off the dog's swim balance and the rear may sink.

Happy splashing,

Deborah Lee Miller-Riley

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From: unifourk9sar@aol.com

To: CanineWaterSports@yahoo.com

Sent: Thu, 7 Aug 2008 8:09 am

Subject: Re: [CanineWaterSports] Canine Life Jackets

I have been reading all the talk about life jackets and wanted to supply some of my thoughts on the subject. Please bear in mind that I am new to formal watersports-I train scent dogs-and that this is just my take on a subject I feel strongly about...my dogs wear life jackets every time they enter the water except when we work on submersion stuff obviously! They wear a harness then. I outfit them as such for several reasons. #1, They can be seen better as bright orange than as a sleek glistening black-mostly just head and ears-I have had boaters come to me and say so. #2 They can in the event of an emergency possibly be lifted from the water and therefore saved-removing an unconscious or limp dog from the water seems unlikely to me without the assistance of a vest! I have carried sedated dogs before and they are extremely difficult to hold on to even on dry land...I hope never for that emergency to occur but would rather prepare ahead than wait and see. #3 The dogs are marked for the public as trained and safe-believe me the non dog owning public are looking and do notice. #4 The dogs are made to feel safer and more confident. Sometimes I have seen confidence ebb and flow as I worked with a dog and sometimes I do not know ahead of time when the animal will feel worried....I have seen in all the dogs I work with a definite increase in confidence and psychological safety because we use the vests. #5 They gain more muscle with the increase in muscle work by wearing their vests-I think you see much more 4 legged swimming with the vest on than with it off....and yes they may tire with it on a bit quicker but both the **dog** and handler know that there is no risk of drowning! #6 It takes years to train one of my dogs for their respective tasks and if you can keep the animals healthy and safe over time, then age and experience can be a definite benefit! My 8 yr old shepherd is quite something at the scent games she knows how to play! Any increase in safety see ms a plus to me. I do not want to train a new dog a hundred times...I want to train and keep one dog for as many years as possible! The life jackets for me are one small step toward that goal...

We in our group in NC work out on fresh water lakes formed by dams on a

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river. I have on occasion been quite a ways out and in impressively deep water-my scent has been suspended on a 60-100 ft rope! Even the 9 month old shepherd will fly off her boat without thinking twice! They I believe are supremely confident that between the equipment, their handler, and themselves, we will all walk away safely from the water each time...

I feel very strongly about safety and being constantly safety conscious! And for me, after I spend 2-3 years training a dog just to a beginner level, I do not want to loose it in an accident that was preventable or frighten i t so it will not work anymore! I forgot to put my pup's life jacket on one time when I was working on the team swim-something she technically did not need the vest for as we never went out in water over my head...well something in the experience frightened her and it took several times after that to build back the confidence I had before.

I am going to hop off the soapbox now. Thanks for letting me say my piece.

I provided the above to stimulate thought.....it is my take on things only.

Good luck in your training and most of all have a lot of f un! Al and the SAR Dogs