

Water Work

Canine Water Sports Welcomes New Dogs

Lisa Norris

Photos by Deborah Lee Miller-Riley

WATER TRIALS HAVE LONG BEEN OFFERED by many breed clubs to test the qualities desired in field hunting and working dogs such as Newfoundlands and Portuguese Water dogs — more fondly referred to as Newfies and Porties. Deborah Lee Miller-Riley, Portuguese water Dog trainer from Bridgeport, Connecticut, previously co-authored the rules and guidelines which became the first National Portuguese Water Dog Club Water trials.

Now Miller-Riley has started an organization called Canine Water Sports and there are new dogs on the dock. Conspicuously different from any other water trials were the varied sizes and breeds of dogs entered at the first Canine Water Sports trial held last summer. Along with the more traditional Retrievers and Portuguese Water Dogs, this field of entrants also included Hounds, Herding Dogs, Terriers and Shepherds — all of whom were eager to take the plunge and tackle the Team Swim!

Canine Water Sports, founded in 2001, began when Miller-Riley recognized that the love for water was not breed specific and that dogs of ALL types could benefit from and enjoy the challenge of water work and games. Her new Canine Water Sports (CWS) guidelines expanded the scope of water tests to include the varied body types of different dogs. CWS adjusted swim distances and towing weights to be proportionate

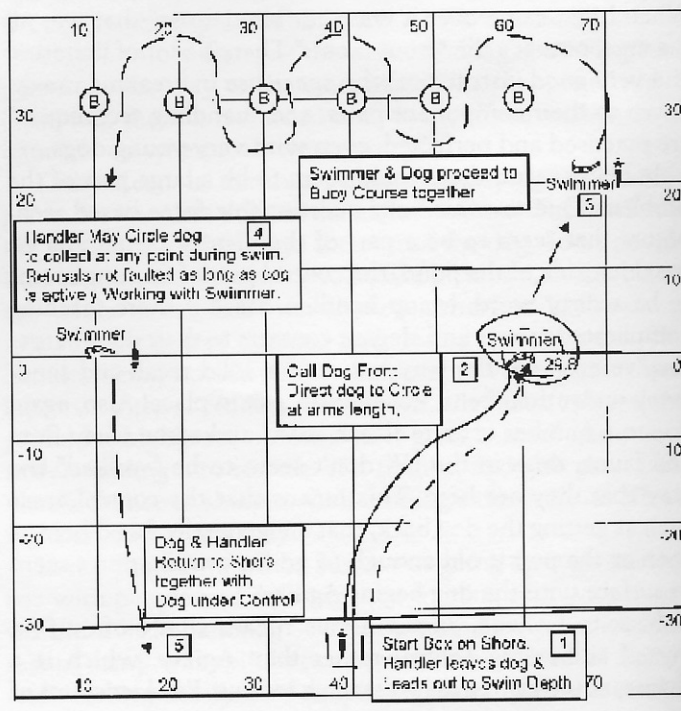


Handler Pat Morris and his Lab, Boomer, are training toward performing a platform jump from a boat. In this photo Boomer's jumps were just above the water, but by day's end he was launching confidently off a boat platform.

to different dogs' sizes, and placed the most emphasis on safety and fun for both dog and handler throughout the Water Tasks and Games divisions. In CWS dogs are permitted to wear float vests, a dog-friendly option added to the rules to assist the "buoyancy challenged" breed and types of dogs willing to dive in and demonstrate water behaviors that are both instinctive and learned.

On August 9, 2003, Canine Water Sports held their first water trials in Monroe, Connecticut, just two years after the organization was born from Miller-Riley's first Splash Camp.

The Team Swim test is the core requirement of the CWS training program and title structure, and serves as the pre-requisite for entry to all other CWS tests; the Water Tasks, Games and Service/Rescue work. The Team Swim is a test of both a dog's enthusiasm as well as handler control of the dog for water tasks. Judging requirements ask dogs to combine their zeal for water play with safety, and call for focus and ability to work under handler direction for an approximately 2 to 3 minute long swim.



Melinda Harvey and her Portuguese Water Dog demonstrate a bold jump off a boat.



Diane Sumrall and her White German Shepherd Dog, Bear, show good form in the Team Swim.

Teams begin their test in the start box, a 6' x 6' square on shore into which the handler brings the dog off-leash to set up for a lead out to swim depth. While neither a sit or down is dictated, the dog must remain inside the start box until called into the water by its handler upon direction of the trial judge. Leaving the box, wandering the shoreline or entering the water prematurely are safety faults and can fail a team before their swim even begins. Dogs must be able to demonstrate their focus and self-control, waiting to enter the water only with handler permission.

With dog left on shore, the handler is required to walk into the water, facing forward until they reach "swim depth" — a place where they are in water up to their shoulder height allowing the dog sufficient room to swim without touching the bottom. As a safety point, handlers may not walk backwards into the water while keeping an eye on their dogs, and may turn back to their dog only once they are in swim depth and then look to the judge for permission to release the dog.

Once released, the dog is then asked to swim forward to its handler eagerly and to swim a 30 second circular "holding pattern" around the

handler. This is the only portion that is timed by the trial judge. Unlike humans, dogs cannot tread water. The stationary swim phase of the test is designed to demonstrate the dog's willingness to stay with its swimmer without compromising their safety. Dogs must remain in working distance, within or just slightly beyond arms' length of the human teammate. Any pawing or attempt to climb onto the shoulders or back of the swimmer is a major safety issue and is faulted, since even a small dog can quickly compromise a swimmer's ability to remain afloat. Incidental contact, so long as it does not aid or hinder either dog or handler, is not faulted.

Once the 30 second holding pattern is completed, the team is waved on by the judge to enter the buoy course portion of their swim. Six floating water markers, weighted at bottom, are spaced 8' apart in a line 60' out in the water parallel to shore. Both dog and handler swim in unison through the buoy line in a serpentine pattern. The swimming team of



Sam, a Fox Terrier, along with owner James Cocchia, show that even breeds not traditionally thought of as swimmers or retrievers can take to water training.

dog and handler must enter each set of buoys together, demonstrating the dog's eager working manner and directional ability to navigate water hazards such as floating debris. Dogs may be faulted if they pass a buoy ahead of the swimmer, lag behind or cease working the buoy line with their handler.

Once clear of the buoy line, dogs still need to remain with their handler and return to shore at working distance or by the side of the swimmer until both have returned to the shoreline. During each phase of the Team Swim course, dogs with backgrounds in other performance events found the transition over to water work to be a pretty easy switch. Basic Obedience work was tested in new measure by requiring dogs to stay on shore until released — even with fish schooling underwater mere inches from their noses. This proved to be a great proofing tool for Agility dogs to practice their start line stays for lead-outs. The stationary swim takes the 270 degree turn from Rally-O and asks the dog to circle the swimming handler about three times around.

Having a dog willing to work with its handler off leash with only verbal direction and minimal body language proved to be the biggest key to success throughout the test. Other sports on land allow the dog to cue from our body language; direction of our shoulders, hips and feet. In the water, the handling is taken to a minimum, as only the handlers' head, shoulders and perhaps a hand are visible to the dog above water.



Victor, an Afghan Hound owned by Cynthia Fox, takes to the water.

Continued on the following page



Irma, an English Shepherd, tows her owner, Jennifer Wiegand, to shore via a water harness. Towing is a more advanced water skill.

The judging for Team Swim requires a technical merit on a pass/fail basis, so only a zero fault or "clean swim" earned a qualifying score. On a more subjective basis, teams are also judged on their coordination of effort and teamwork. Here, the dog's enthusiasm, attitude and confidence are evaluated. Judge Melinda Miller gave extensive feedback to each handler following their swims, critiquing where faults were incurred and offered handling suggestions for future training.

Handlers are also judged on their leadership of the team and their sportsmanship in maintaining their dog's trust in the water. Once out of the water, every team was met with personal step-by-step feedback of their performance by the judge before the next team took to the start box on shore.

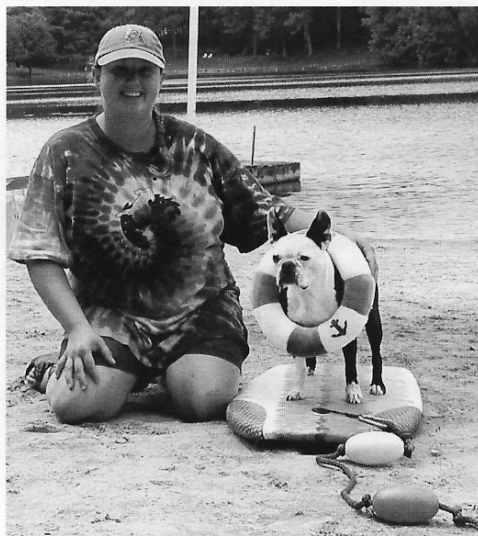
The inaugural CWS Water Trial saw great swims turned in by many teams brand new to Water work. The course yielded approximately a one third qualifier rate, very comparable to average Agility trial results. And as in Agility, where just a knocked bar or missed contact can leave you with a non-qualifying (NQ) effort, Team Swim course faults that caused NQs were mostly due to just one or two mistakes such as the dog passing a buoy ahead of its swimmer or breaking the stay at the start-box. Some over-eager Labs tried to retrieve the swim line buoys and certain Terriers could not resist chasing and trying to catch fish instead of waiting on shore!



Victor is wild about water!

However, qualifier or not, all of these eager water dogs demonstrated their new-found joy for water play and were most eager to catch the next wave.

Lisa Norris of New York state has been involved in training animals all her life. She began her partnership with animals training and riding horses in the hunter/jumper rings, rehabbing retired racehorses, teaching riding lessons and training various Terriers and barndogs along the way. In 1998 she became active in dog Agility and clicker training and traded her reins for a leash. Her dogs, two Boston Terriers who don't know they're supposed to be non-sporting breeds, have earned their USDAA Agility Dog Champion (ADCH) and Master Agility Dog (MAD) titles and Pandora is the first Boston Terrier to make the USDAA's National Top Ten^[SM]. Lisa joined Canine Water Sports (CWS) in 2002 for water training and has since been invited to be a CWS Splash Camp Instructor and Water Trial judge. Her dog, Pandora, is the first ever Boston Terrier as well as the first mini-dog titled in Water Work, while Mr. Peabody prefers to Surf. For more information go to website: www.caninewatersports.com.



Author Lisa Norris poses with Pandora soon after becoming the first mini dog team to earn a Passing score at last summer's Canine Water Sports trial.

Canine Water Sports Results:

Team Swim, Single Task Division

August 9, 2003 Monroe, CT

Judge: Melinda Miller

GROUP 1 — LARGE DOGS 14 ENTRIES. 4 QUALIFIERS

Dog	Breed	Handler	
Nova	German Shepherd Dog	Sheila Booth	*PASS*
Vino	Belgian Malinois	Sheila Booth	*PASS*
Kohl	PWD	Deb Miller-Riley	*PASS*
Nikki	PWD	Deb Miller-Riley	*PASS*
Victor	Afghan Hound	Cynthia Fox	
Lacy	Australian Shepherd	Lisa Pattison	
Dingo	Australian Cattle Dog	Anne Smith	
Lance	Labrador Retriever	Mary Horne	
Tar	Labrador Retriever	Midge Krisak	
Remy	Labrador Retriever	Jennifer McGrane	
Skyler	PWD	Deb Miller-Riley	
Darth	PWD	Dick Kraus	
Brisa	PWD	Dick Kraus	
Cari	PWD	Denise Milanese	

GROUP 2 — MINI DOGS 3 ENTRIES. 1 QUALIFIER.

Dog	Breed	Handler	
Pandora	Boston Terrier	Lisa Norris	*PASS*
Sam	Fox Terrier	Jim Cocchia	
Mr. Peabody	Boston "Fish" Terrier	Lisa Norris	