



BMDCA Info Series

Bernese Mountain Dogs And Obedience

2009 #7

Introduction ► All dogs need to have **good manners!** This is especially true for a large breed dog such as the Bernese. A well-trained dog is a better pet, much easier to live with, more pleasant to take places, and more likely to be a welcome guest. As more legislation is passed in this country to control dogs and their ownership, it is imperative that our dogs be trained. The main reason we have a dog is for companionship. Bernese need a job to do. Obedience training helps the owner to gain control, teach manners, create a very special bond, prevent boredom, help satisfy his/her Berner's need to be with and to please his owner, as well as gives the dog a task to accomplish. Obedience training can become an enjoyable sport for both owner and Berner, whether the goal is having a well-behaved pet or earning titles.

How To Train Your Berner ► Bernese are a Working breed, developed to have a strong desire to accompany and interact with people. They are intelligent, learn quickly, and strive to please their owners. Positive training methods help to keep them eager and willing. Bernese are impressionable with excellent memories. Training sessions should be kept short to prevent boredom. Be creative in motivating your Berner by using games and play-training techniques. Try to end each training session with your Berner "wanting to do more." Your primary job is to make obedience training interesting and fun. **Male or female?** Either sex presents its own set of challenges! Personality is unique with every dog regardless of sex. A female may be moody with hormonal surges. A male can be easily distracted by all the good smells in the ring. For competition neutered animals of either sex may be ideal as they have a tendency to be more focused on their handler and less on other dogs.

Where To Start ► The main reason for obedience training is to develop a pleasant adult dog that is easy to live with. This is a gradual process that will continue throughout the dog's life, for in living with dogs, we are training them to live under our rules. Training dogs requires the 4 "P's" – Patience, Persistence, Positivity and Praise.

Puppy Kindergarten (PK): All puppies should attend Puppy Kindergarten (PK) at 3 to 5 months of age with their owners. Conscientious breeders require this. Look for a class that uses food treats, toys, clickers, play, pats, and lots of "happy voice" praise! PK will provide needed gentling and socialization, satisfy doggy needs to play with other puppies, help owners to acquire valuable knowledge to meet a dog's basic needs, and provide a good foundation for more structured training in coming months.

PK instills confidence and helps shy pups to overcome insecurities. PK gives all pups an excellent head start.

Good Manners Class: A Beginners or Good Manners class is a good way to continue socialization as the dog learns to "watch-me," sit, down, stay, come, leave it, wait at doorways or gates, and heel around other dogs, distractions, and people. It is also a good way for owners to meet other dog owners to talk "dog." Adolescence can be a trying time for owners as the dog learns how to meet human expectations and rules. A dog training class can provide information, guidance and support. Attendance with your adolescent puppy is strongly recommended. Select a trainer who favors the use of food treats, clickers, and toys for motivation and reward.

Canine Good Citizen ► With some training and conditioning, a dog should be capable of earning a *CGC* (Canine Good Citizen) certification when the dog demonstrates good behavior for the testers. Exercises are done on leash and include: sitting/staying while the owner shakes hands with and talks to a stranger; walking on leash without pulling; walking comfortably with the owner through a milling crowd of people; being stroked, examined, or brushed by a stranger; doing a sit and down on command; coming when called; walking past another dog in a controlled manner; accepting a distraction, such as a stroller, bicycle, and/or loud noise; and staying quietly with another person while the owner is out of sight. Check the AKC website for further information (www.akc.org).

AKC Obedience Titles ► The basic objective of obedience trials is to recognize dogs that have been trained to behave in the home, in public places, and in the presence of other dogs in a manner that will reflect credit on the sport of obedience. Anyone interested in showing obedience needs a copy of AKC's **Obedience Regulations**, which is usually available at shows or can be downloaded from AKC's website. Read and know the rules.

AKC has several obedience titles that are fun as well as challenging to earn. All titles require the team to earn three qualifying scores (legs) under three different judges. The Novice class is the basic, foundation level. The CD (Companion Dog) title is within reach of the majority of dogs. The dog must be able to heel on and off leash, stand for



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examination by the judge off leash, come when called, and do a group sit and down stay with the other dogs in the class.

Open (CDX—Companion Dog Excellent title) is more advanced and requires greater physical effort on the part of the dog. All Open exercises are done off lead. The dog must be able to heel, retrieve both on the flat and over a jump, jump a broad jump, drop on recall, and do a group sit and down stay with the handler out of sight.

Utility (UD—Utility Dog title) is the most difficult, requiring the dog to make decisions and work away from the handler. All Utility exercises are done off lead. The dog must be able to heel and perform a down, sit, and come on hand signals alone, do a directed retrieve, a moving stand from heeling with an examination by the judge, two scent discrimination exercises, and a directed jumping exercise, where the dog is sent away from the handler and told over which of two jumps to return to the handler.



UDX (Utility Dog Excellent title) requires that a dog must have received qualifying scores in both Open B and Utility B at 10 trials.

OTCH (Obedience Trial Champion title) is the ultimate obedience achievement! This Championship requires that 100 points be won in the Open B class or the Utility B class. Points are awarded by winning 1st through 4th place in these classes based on a scale of the number of dogs entered. The dog must also win three 1st places from these classes, with one 1st place in Open B and one 1st place in Utility B. One of the required first places may be won at a Specialty show. Additionally, the **National Obedience Invitational** is an annual AKC event where the top achieving dogs in each breed are invited to participate. A *National Obedience Championship* is awarded annually to the dog that wins the Obedience Invitational.

In January 2009, the AKC added three new "Optional Titling" classes. They are called optional because clubs are not required to offer these classes at their obedience trials. The required classes are **Novice**, **Open** and **Utility**, which are commonly known as the "Regular" classes. The Optional Titling classes also require three legs under three judges. **Graduate Novice (GN)** is beginner Open exercises. **Graduate Open (GO)** is beginner Utility exercises. In **Versatility (VER)** the dog must perform two exercises from Novice, two from Open and two from Utility.

Also in January 2009, the AKC began the **Obedience Master Program**, which was developed to recognize consistently high scoring dogs. This is for dogs that have earned their UD. The dog accumulates points by earning scores of 190 or better in Open B and Utility B, according to a published schedule of points. Two hundred points earn the **Obedience Master 1 (OM1)** title. Titles are awarded for each 200 points, **OM1**, **OM2**, **OM3**, etc. until 2000 points are accumulated, which

earns the **Obedience Grand Master (OGM)**.

AKC Rally Classes & Titles ► Rally is intended to provide a link between AKC's CGC (Canine Good Citizen) Program and Obedience or Agility. The specific exercises in a Rally course are based on Obedience exercises, but you follow a course as in an Agility trial (see *Agility Info Sheet*).

There are three levels of competition in AKC Rally — Novice, Advanced and Excellent. The handlers are allowed to walk through the course without their dogs at the beginning of the class. Four titles can be earned in AKC Rally competition. All titles require the team to earn three qualifying scores (legs) under two different judges. **Rally Novice (RN—Rally Novice title)** is performed on leash. **Rally Advanced (RA—Rally Advanced title)** and **Rally Excellent (RE—Rally Excellent title)** competitions are performed off leash and include jumps. The highest level of competition, **Rally Advanced Excellent (RAE—Rally Advanced Excellent title)**, requires that a dog must have received qualifying scores in both **Advanced B** and **Excellent B** at 10 trials. A complete list of Rally exercises can be found at www.akc.org.

AKC Non-Regular Obedience Classes ► Titles may not be earned in non-regular obedience classes.

Veterans: The class exercises are at the Novice level for dogs over seven years of age.

Brace: The Novice class exercises are done with two dogs working side by side. They may be coupled at the collar or on separate collars.

Team: In this class, four dog-handler teams execute the Novice exercises together.

Wild Card Novice, Open and Utility: These classes use the same exercises as regular Novice, Open and Utility, however, verbal praise is allowed, and the handler chooses one exercise, the "wild card", for which he/she will receive full points.

Canine Freestyle ► A new sport evolved from obedience in the early 1990s. Freestyle is a creative combination of obedience and music, with choreography and artistry adding a whole new dimension to dog training. Three US freestyle organizations offer widely varying different approaches to this new and evolving sport. Find out more about the Canine Freestyle Federation at www.canine-freestyle.org, the World Canine Freestyle Organization at www.worldcaninefreestyle.org, and the Musical Dog Sport Association at www.musicaldogsport.org.

Obedience References ► Some resources include:

- Volhard, Jack, & Volhard, Wendy, *The Canine Good Citizen: Every Dog Can Be One (2nd ed.)*. NY: Howell, 1997.

Describes the AKC's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) program and presents an easy-to-follow 8-week plan for training any dog to pass the CGC test for certification.

- "Getting Started in Obedience" - Written for the novice, this website provides a comprehensive overview of how to get started in obedience, what classes your dog will need, tips for the first time spectator and exhibitor, titles, and what happens at an obedience trial. A very good, short introduction to obedience competition. (www.akc.org/events/obedience/getting_started.cfm)

- Bernersperformance@yahoo.com - a Yahoo Group that discusses all aspects of performance event training and handling strategies for Berners (obedience, agility, drafting and more)