

Min Pins in Obedience

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I am happy to introduce my Guest Columnist for this issue, Gretchen S. Hofheins.

Gretchen, of Sultans Miniature Pinschers from Minneapolis, Minnesota has been training and exhibiting her toy dogs for the past 15 years. She has earned a UD on a Yorkie and a Min-Pin, and just completed a CD on another Min-Pin. Gretchen also shows in conformation, where in 1995 she made a sweep at the Miniature Pinscher Club of America National Specialty, winning the Futurity, Junior Sweepstakes, High in Trial and Best of Breed, all owner handled! To my knowledge this has never been done by one person at a National Specialty.

Yes, a Min-Pin can be obedience trained. How do you go about it? Where do you start? Here are some helpful hints for you to train your dog. If you live in a community where they have obedience classes, go to the training quarters without your dog, and just observe some of the classes. Answer some of these questions to yourself: Are dogs responsive to the handlers? (of course, this depends on the class and the amount of training the dogs and handlers have had). Does the instructor seem confident in instructing the class? Does he/she seem to know what they are doing and seem confident instructing ALL the dogs and handlers in the class, large as well as small dogs? Does the training method being taught seem like something you could use to train your dog (does it seem fair to the dog)? Talk to the other people there training their dogs. Are they happy with the progress that their dogs are making? What do they think of the instructor?

If there are several schools/clubs around, go to a couple different ones and compare. The most important thing about training your Min-Pin is YOU must be comfortable with the trainer and the methods used. Min-Pins are tough little dogs and they can take a little firmer training method than just coaxing with food. Whatever place you decide to train at, stick with it. Do your homework between classes. Ask questions when you are unsure. No question is foolish if it is sincere. One word of caution for ANYONE with a smaller sized dog starting an obedience class, KEEP YOUR EYE ON ALL THE OTHER DOGS IN CLASS. Many beginning handlers do not watch their dogs. The large dog that could be "just making friends" may be the one that ends your sweet little dog's life! Also, do not let your little Pin antagonize the larger dogs. Picking a fight with a German Shepherd is NOT a good idea, besides they have come to obedience class to behave!

If you don't have obedience classes in your town, too bad, but all is not lost. Check a nearby town. I know people I train with that drive 60 miles one way to come train their dogs. If that is not feasible, then there are many good books and video tapes on the market. A couple that I can recommend to a Min-Pin fancier are "Training the Competitive Small Dog", by Geriane Darnell and Barbara Cecil; "A Utility Dog, Through Class Instruction", by Mary Lee Whiting; and "Beyond Basic Training", by Diane Bauman.

When you start training your Min-Pin, be consistent, whatever method you use. Progress at a pace that is fair to you and the dog. Dogs are just like people, and they learn at different rates. I generally do not start any formal obedience training with my dogs until they are at least 6 months old, and more likely around 9 or 10 months. I find it mentally hazardous to the dog to train them before they are more emotionally developed. Some puppies are just too squirrely to start any earlier. I show my dogs in obedience, and I don't want to "burn them out" by starting too young. For heck sake, let them be a puppy! If you have a dog that is older, say a year or more, he/she might be just right to start. A dog is never too old to learn.

Your Min-Pin will be a much better dog to have around if he is obedience trained. You will notice how much more fun it is to take him out in public when he behaves. You may even find that you have found a new hobby, showing your dog in obedience! Good luck and have fun training.