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Dogs really make splash with couple

November 11, 2005

'Dogs, all of you get back. And down. And stay. Good,' says Ralph Darrow to his three border collies while on the phone with me. He speaks in an extremely calm voice, and I wonder how he's able to make three excited dogs realize their boundaries and gently lie down to wait for him to get off the phone. But he does, until about 10 minutes later, when one of them forgot her task. He said to her, "I think you forgot you were staying back." And she moved. Very dog-whispererish.

"It's like having three toddlers around," said Darrow laughing. "You just have to remind them of what they were doing and keep them on task."

He and his wife, Barbara, have started a new venture in the national sport of DockDogs, and all of their toddlers participate.

Darrow explains it this way: A long jump competition and dog drag race. The dog races down a 40-foot dock and hurls himself as far as he can into the water. The distance flown between the dock and the water landing is measured and winners are based upon that.

The month-old club, ShastaSplash Dock Dogs, is looking for new and active members.

It's important to Darrow to keep dogs active, and the club is one way to do that.

"I basically believe that dogs are more than lawn furniture," he said, "And those that don't get to have fun and exercise, well, it's a doggone shame."

Also, one doesn't have to be an expert at this sport. Novices are welcome. One simply has to want more fun and bonding time between owner and canine. The important thing to remember is that it's activity for both. And dogs don't always do what they are supposed to. For example, Darrow would have won a competition with his border collie, Einstein, if the dog hadn't started the leap six feet from the edge of the dock.

But it's about the fun and as Darrow tells the story of puppies learning the sport, one can tell just how much of a good time is had out on the Whiskey Creek dock.

Those interested in learning more about Dock Dogs can visit the Web site www.shastasplash.com. Novice and experienced dogs and owners are welcome.