



Spotlight on a Participant

Debbie McMurdie

My name is Debbie McMurdie

I live in Shingle Springs, California on Spoiled Danes Estate with my husband Mark, and our 4 Great Danes; Xena who is 8, Druantia or “Dru” who is 4, Cassiopea or “Cassi” who is 2, and Viola who is 1 ½. We are just outside of the little town of Latrobe.

Getting Started in Danes

How did you get involved with Danes?

In my early 20’s I went in to our local animal shelter in Los Angeles to get a puppy. Well, they had 2 Great Dane puppies. I left with the chocolate brown one, and I

named him Thor. I have had at least one Great Dane in my life ever since!

When you started, what events were you involved with? How did those events change over time?

I started with just having them as companions. I was single, and very involved in competitive sports. They were the perfect dog for me; my jogging partner in the morning and then we just hung out and did errands together the rest of the day. And I always felt safe too! I worked nights so they just slept until I got home.

Was it a natural transition to Dog sports/What started you with dog sports?

Once I learned about Dog sports, it was a no brainer! I was already very involved and active with my Danes, then to find out we could compete in something together was like icing on the cake! I started looking into the different types of sports to see what would fit us best.

Performance Events

What would you say it is, in your opinion that makes dog [agility/obedience/rally/etc.] such a great activity for dogs and their owners?

For me, it’s the one on one interaction. Looking at me, in the eye, moving with me, working together, getting to do the different exercises, it really is fun and rewarding!

When you watch someone performing with their dog and you see the teamwork and partnership, it can be



quite intimidating to think about getting started and achieving those levels of partnership and success....what would you say to someone sitting ringside at the Great Dane Nationals who has never competed with their Dane and who has just watched the High In Trial team run?

How exciting it is when you and your dog connect. Even over something as simple as them looking at you when you ask! Danes are already so in tune to you, that once you start asking them to do things, and they see how happy and excited you get when they do it, it's all downhill from there! My girls can hardly wait for their turn when it's time to practice! They scramble all over each other to be the first one.



Training

What is your training philosophy? How has it developed/shifted over time? What resources do you recommend for others to read?

The one thing I always say is to just have fun. Be happy, talk happy, act happy. Even if they're not doing the exercise correctly, sound happy when showing them how to do it the way you want them to! As far as resources, I haven't read anything. However, I do go to training classes to learn how to do the exercises, get ideas on how to work with and interact with my dog, and to just keep practicing. The training classes are also great for distractions, having other people and other dogs around talking, etc. I definitely recommend doing that!

How would you recommend that folks get started in class? What skills—if any—should they have prior to

joining a class?

I think it depends on their dog. How active is he/she? How responsive? Do they want to go out and "play"? Or do they just want to hang out on the couch? One of the things I did was to take a Sports Sampler class. I already knew we loved Rally, but I was also interested in Agility, Nose Work, and Freestyle. Taking a sampler class gave me a little look into each of those. I found out that we also like and are good at Agility and Nose Work, but Freestyle not so much! As far as skills, I think just being confident in yourself and being the team leader is a great start.

Most folks do some training at home. Purchasing all the equipment can be quite costly. What is your list of equipment that you would recommend for folks training in RALLY who want to train at home? Where would you recommend that folks purchase equipment?

I printed out the Rally signs from the AKC website and inserted them into plastic sleeves. My husband is a painting contractor so we have an abundance of 5 gallon paint buckets. I use them to hold the signs when I design a practice course. For jumps, I use planks of wood. Another way is to purchase the orange cones from a home improvement store, and get Velcro to put on the cones and on the back of the signs for attaching.

Over the years, what has changed about your approach?

I haven't even been doing this a year yet, so I haven't changed anything!

Competing

What do you think makes a successful performance competitor in performance events?

I think having the confidence in yourself is what makes you successful. Our dogs already get it; we're the ones that usually make the errors!



What are some of your favorite rally achievements?

Getting a Rally Novice title on my 3 Danes at the same time was my favorite! Then scoring a 96 on our 2nd leg in Rally Advanced was pretty awesome!

How do you condition your dogs for competitions?

We do a lot of off-leash walking and running, and I use those times to practice heeling, and staying while I walk away. We also do short on-leash walks adding in different Rally exercises. Once a

week I try to set up a Rally course to go through, usually with 15-20 stations, and go through it twice.

Future

What does your future look like? Any plans that you can share with us?

Having 3 Danes competing at different levels, I'm still working things out. But I will most likely move my very shy Dru over to Agility. Cassi I will work on getting a Rally Advanced title, then maybe move her to Nose Work and Agility. Viola I am planning on getting a Rally AE title, and hope we get invited to Nationals, and are able to go!

Other

Is there anything you would like to add?

I thought I was content just "hanging out" with my Danes, until we started practicing and competing in sports. Having a goal to work towards makes every outing so much more fun! I look at rocks to see if we can use them as tables, like in Agility. At walls to jump over or walk on. Pillars and fence posts to weave through or walk around. And so on. We don't ever just "go out for a walk" anymore!