



Spot light on A Participant

Susan Davis Shaw

My name is Sue Davis Shaw and I'm from Hanover, Massachusetts. My kennel name is Daviddane and I've always had harlequins and mantles. I primarily consider myself a conformation exhibitor, but I always like to dual-title my dogs. I am not one of those high-scoring, driven obedience people. I basically just like well-behaved Danes and that led to my showing in obedience and rally and becoming a CGC evaluator for AKC. I have taught basic obedience classes and AKC Star puppy preschool programs, as well as conformation classes.

Getting Started in Danes

How did you get involved with Danes? How long ago did you get started with Danes? When you started, what events were you involved with? How did those events change over time? Was it a natural transition to Dog sports/What started you with dog sports?

I got my first harlequin from Pat Ciampa, Maitau Great Danes, in 1976, as a housewarming present from my husband. At that time, Pat bred harlequins and showed them in obedience as well as conformation. At that time, almost no one else did both. The common thinking was that obedience would ruin a dog for the conformation ring. Danes are not stupid, and have different collars and leads and different commands for obedience and I've never had one be confused. I do make sure that I also teach them to stand and stay for treats. That just makes sense for conformation training. I always shake my head when I hear a handler tell a dog in the conformation ring to heel and then gets aggravated when the dog sits when he comes back to the judge. The dog is obviously smarter than the handler.

I found that it was fun doing both. Great Danes are very smart and trainable and when you have your championship, the dog doesn't want to stay home and neither do you, so obedience (or agility) is the perfect outlet. They really need to be obedience trained anyway so that you can enjoy a well-behaved dog, so showing in obedience just takes it that little bit further.

Performance events have come a long way in the last 30 years. They have added rally and new obedience titles and started the Canine Good Citizen and Star Puppy Programs. Dual titling is much more accepted and encouraged today.

I belong to a dog training club and, when rally started a few years ago, they had a Rally Show & Go with a rally judge judging the event. I knew absolutely nothing about rally but my dog, Cousteau, knew how to heel, so I entered him. We got a score of 94 out of 100 and I was hooked. It wasn't hard; it was fun.

Performance Events

What would you say it is, in your opinion that makes dog performance events such a great activity for dogs and their owners?

Performance events are all about you and your dog. The training is a very bonding experience. You are competing for a score and not against another exhibitor or dog. YOU earn your scores and your titles. It's so unlike conformation, where you are totally at the mercy of the judge's opinion.

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?

Some people are obedience obsessed. They train constantly and do such a great job when they compete. That's sure not me. I need a well-behaved dog and I do go to classes at least once a week, but I do it because it's fun and it's such a great feeling when they 'get it'. Our club, the Great Dane Club of New England, just ran our first all-breed obedience/rally trial and it was very well attended by exhibitors who show pretty much every weekend, the same way we go to conformation shows.



Training

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

My training philosophy is that it must be fun. If you're not having fun, the dog isn't having fun. Learning needs to be a happy experience for both of you. My training is treat based, which makes it a very happy time for my guys.

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

I strongly recommend starting out with your puppy in a puppy kindergarten or Star Puppy Program. I have taught both. It gives the opportunity for your puppy to learn the right way from the start.

If you wait until your puppy is 6 months old, they have probably already learned by themselves and usually the wrong way. It's so much easier to teach them the right way from the start, rather than trying to correct and change the behavior in a dog that is doing things wrong. Once they get a good start, you need to go on to a basic obedience class to keep up the learning/training experience. If you like it, try rally to start out and get a title. The Rally Novice is all on lead and not difficult.

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 Obedience/Rally who want to train at home? Where would you

recommend that folks purchase equipment?

Obedience equipment doesn't need to be expensive. You can go online and learn how to make jumps. I was fortunate to be given a complete set of obedience jumps and equipment from a friend, but sometimes you can purchase them secondhand. I bought a set of portable obedience equipment very inexpensively secondhand through an ad. I needed a tire jump and we went online for the directions, bought the materials at Lowe's and my husband made it for me very easily.

Rally is very inexpensive. You can go online and print out all the signs and instructions at no cost. The metal stands are very expensive, but we just use inexpensive folders.

Over the years, what has changed about your approach to performance?

I have relaxed about it. If you blow an exercise and don't qualify, it's not life or death. I used to get very stressed out and nervous.

Competing

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

Practice, practice, practice. Just a couple of minutes every day will make a difference. It's easy to throw in a little training while you're going through your daily routine. Do a sit stay or a down stay while you're watching TV. Call them to come front in the house at any time. Make them sit and wait when you put on their leash or put down the food bowl. I could go on and on.

You can see the folks that have a really good relationship with their dog. They truly work as a team.

What are some of your favorite achievements?

At the National in Atlanta many years ago, my Willie, CH Amherst-Davidane Roadrunner, CD, CGC, qualified in Novice Obedience much to my surprise. During the off lead heeling my normally very serious Willie decided to do a little zoomie and then ran right back up beside me in heel position and continued to heel and complete the exercise. I thought we had NQ'd but the judge told that he loved seeing a dog that was having so much fun in the ring and since he came right back to heel position and finished the routine, he qualified him. His son Spock, Can CH Davidane Live Long N Prosper, CD qualified as well. That was fun. We had a family picture taken. Ducky, CH Davidane's Definitely a Duckling, RN, CGC, got her rally title and second place in a large all-breed class. She was #4 Novice Rally Dane in the country never having gone to a training class. She was just naturally in tune with me.

Lisa, Davidane's Lucky to be Ducky, CD, RA,CGC, completed her obedience title going Highest Scoring Working Dog two days in a row at the Wampanoag Kennel Club trials. That was nice!

Do you have any stories about your early days in competition as you entered the ring for the first few times to share?

How do you condition your dogs for competitions?

Future

What does your future look like? Any plans that you can share with us? What events do you hope to compete at in the future?

Breeding and Puppies

What should people look for when choosing a competitive dog? What do you look for in a puppy? What are the goals you have for puppies and how you reach them? How old are the puppies before you start training them? Words of wisdom for people who have their 8 week old puppy coming home soon?

Other Is there anything you would like to add?

My first 'showdog' didn't turn out to be finishable. I did train her in obedience but she was dog aggressive and really made me crazy. I never knew what she was going to pull in class, and she was so bad that the obedience instructor told me that I would never be able to show her in obedience because she just wasn't a good candidate. Well, that did it for me. Senta went to obedience class every week for 3 years until she was reliable. I went on to show her to a CD, and I was so proud!

I used to be petrified to show in obedience. There is nothing like standing across the ring from your dog in the long sit and down and feeling your heart pounding. I'm less stressed about it now.

It's never too early to start training a puppy. Their minds are like sponges. Just keep the training sessions short and fun and socialize the puppy as much as you can with positive experiences. Everything you do with a puppy will stand in good stead later on. Train early before they have a chance to learn their own way.

You can talk to anyone who does Dane rescue and they will tell you how many dogs they get in as unruly teenagers. By the time that cute puppy is 6 months or a year old, he weighs 100 lbs or more and it's much harder to train them when they are so darn strong and difficult. That's when people throw up their hands and get rid of the dog and it becomes Rescue's problem. Great Danes can never know that they are stronger than you. That's why you need to start early.



I am now starting to work with my Sami, CH Davisdane's Rubber Ducky You're the One, RN, CGC, in novice obedience. One of my Dane friends wants to form an obedience team for this year's national in Lancaster, so we'll see.

When choosing a puppy for performance, most people would pick a pet-quality Dane. The problem with that is that, in order to be able to jump and have endurance, a dog must be made correctly. So, if you want to participate in obedience or agility, don't go with the pet in the litter. Go with a puppy with excellent conformation who is outgoing and trainable and maybe doesn't have that perfect color that we prefer in the show ring.

I'm so pleased to see that there are now so many activities that we can do with our dogs. More and more people are getting involved in performance events and realizing that anyone can do it.