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Imprinting

At approximately 12 weeks of age a pup should begin an imprinting program targeted towards the relevant skills it will need in later training. This should involve patiently showing it how to sit, drop, climb over obstacles, etc... As soon as the pup has completed the desirable action, it must be rewarded with a ball, food or with their drive goal. This should be done within 1 to 2 seconds. Any longer than this and the pup may be focused on another objective. This timing is crucial if you are to maintain consistency in the dogs working performance. Also, it is very important for a service dog breeder to imprint their pups with rag work for proficient bite development. This should start as early as 6 weeks of age and up until the pup starts teething. Then let the pup mature and keep a close eye on how it is progressing. Do NOT do any suit work (I will explain later) and do not lock your pup into prey drive with excessive rag work.

With relation to the conditioning of a serious handler protection dog, I personally feel that after 16 week of age the young dog should have limited human contact. If the pup continues to be handled by strangers, it's perception of people may be altered. Also, this may affect your judgement regarding it's level of aggression and suitability for future breeding. When focusing on this type of work, a pup should not be handled by anybody other than it's immediate owners. This also refers to any children that are not being supervised. The pup can be around as many people as you wish, but do not let them fuss with or touch the dog. If the pup is very confident whilst around strangers then why over socialize it. Carlos says a child grows up needing an education to develop communication skills. A dog also needs to learn to communicate. It is important that all breeds of dogs have proper training, and equally important that the owners are properly taught to handle and understand their dog in order to enjoy their pet to its fullest potential.

At 8 months of age you can begin to introduce some form of threat towards the dog. More appropriately, if the dog exhibits allot of prey drive, active aggression and courage, with "minimal" stimulation from the helper, then you have prepared your dog correctly. At this level of bite work development, the training sessions must incorporate channeling between prey and aggression, they should also be short and explosive always leaving the young dog on a high. Winning is everything in dog training. If the dog can handle a reasonable amount of pressure and shows an offensive disposition towards the helper, then it's time for a 6 month holiday. What I have found is that when a young dog exhibit allot of hostile behavior, it often can't handle high levels of stress. This is why it is necessary to stop, and wait until the dog has psychologically matured.

From here you can begin to concentrate on your dogs obedience training. I prefer to only use motivational methods in all the early stages of training. This can include a pat, a praise or a reward with a ball through prey drive. Obedience involves word association, correction and distraction methods of training. Do not hurry, be patient and let your dog enjoy the training sessions. We can often become impatient and if you have not timed your corrections and praise correctly you may suppress the young dogs drives. This could also create unnecessary negative experiences which will have to be rectified later on.

If you have imprinted your dog correctly then it should at least sit, drop, come to you and climb over obstacles. Your dog will do the exercises when it feels like it , but that's ok as long as it understands the meaning of the words. From here you begin to correction train the dog with a choker chain and your hand. Leave the prong and electric collars for later training. Again make the sessions short and cease when the dog is on a high. Then pull out a ball at the end of your obedience sessions and play a game of fetch. This will channel the dog back into prey drive and relieve the stress of obedience training. This is very important because "the key to proficient dog training is relieving stress via channeling".

As the dog reaches 18 to 24 months of age you can recommence the bite work. At this stage you should introduce distraction methods of obedience into the training sessions. This method of training is called "capping" and will produce frustration in the dog. As a result the dog will bite much harder. Everything should be geared towards the dog showing the desirable actions, for example courage, hardness, clarity between prey drive and aggression, a high avoidance threshold and a fighting spirit. This "balanced" temperament, in combination with the desirable characteristics of bravery and determination to remain calm in a difficult situation, should be the single most important aspect a working dog breeder should strive for. Many people do not consider these attributes when they talk about high prey motivated dogs such as a Labrador. Yes these dogs can do an excellent obedience routine and some of them can even bite a sleeve or a suit. But they CANNOT possess an active fighting spirit.

Dogs that show a fighting spirit are born with the necessary "genetic makeup". In combination with correct imprinting, conditioning, training and maturity, will begin to produce a serious handler protection dog that views a person as a fighting partner. I must point out that this is not a vicious behavior, but instead the desire to do combat on behalf of it's owner. Like prey drive and active aggression, you cannot train fighting spirit into a dog. These particular dogs are either born with these desirable characteristics or they are not. For example, 99% of American bloodline German Shepherds and Dobermanns do not possess the gene necessary to obtain a fighting temperament. This has been selectively bred out from their bloodlines, due to the uneducated beliefs about aggression.

All pups need to be introduced to as many different places and objects before 16 weeks of age. If a young dog is not socialized correctly within this time frame, it may have an insecurity towards certain surroundings for the remainder of it's life. For this reason, a dog bred for service work needs to be socialized very carefully. Initially when a dog is young, most of what it does is governed by genetic traits. But as the pup gets older, the amount of socializing both environmental and human will begin to effect on what the pup thinks of the world around it.