

BOOK REVIEW:

"In Focus: Developing a Working Relationship With Your Performance Dog"

by Deborah Jones, Ph.D. and Judy Keller

REVIEWED BY TARA CHOATE

With canine sports evolving so swiftly, there is certainly a need for detailed programs for bringing out the best in a performance dog. Though geared specifically for agility, *In FOCUS: Developing a Working Relationship With Your Performance Dog* by Deborah Jones, Ph.D. and Judy Keller is a big step toward this sub-genre of dog books. *In FOCUS* is an excellent, common-sense approach to a consistent way to train and prepare any dog (fast and driven to shy and tentative) for competition.

In Focus outlines an overall method to apply toward getting the most from the individual dog using the FOCUS program (FOCUS stands for Fun, Obedience and Consistency lead to Unbelievable Success.) The format is dense, but interspersed with pictures and other materials that make reading more interesting. The intermix of scientific knowledge with stories was engaging; "Sabre's Story" was parceled out throughout the book in little insets, and helped keep the book practical and insightful. Jones, the author of several treatises on formal clicker training, is well paired with Keller to create an excellent, balanced lay-person's agility book.

Fun, the first of the FOCUS points, covers what your dog is motivated by and how to adjust this to suit your performance needs. While many books and articles cover getting dogs more motivated, *In FOCUS* pointed out that a dog having too much fun can ruin a performance just as affectively as an unmotivated dog. "Sabre's Story" was specifically geared toward this particular problem.

Obedience, the next point, is a chapter long needed in the agility community. Self-control, stationary and moving exercises; targeting, clicker training and crosses were covered in this section. Flatwork obedience exercises, called "agility heeling" was a great segment.

The final point, consistency, is best summed up in the following quote:

"Often handlers will ask (and receive) advice from others on ways to change their dog's performances. Most dog trainers are happy to share their advice and opinions with others, but it's important to take that advice selectively... Jumping from one training technique to another looking for the perfect solution may simply end up frustrating you and confusing your dog." In Focus, page 95.

Jones & Keller suggest using the first two chapters to get to know your dog and then sticking with a program until it works. In this age of quickly evolving cynosports, opinions can abound; ultimately, however, your dog's performance depends on his teamwork with you.

In conclusion, *In FOCUS* comes very close to doing what it sets out to do: outline a method for improving any performance dog. The only thing that kept me from really getting behind the book totally was that the authors attempted to keep the material very cut and dried, whereas I think of agility and dog training in general as a very creative sport.

Tara Choate's behavior is shaped by her three dogs: Sean, Ginger and Finn. In her off-time she runs a self-serve pet wash in Portland, OR, and is occasionally let loose to judge for USDAA and TDAA.

Obedience...

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