

Media Hound, *Front and Finish*: March 1995

I had intended to devote my entire column this month to Barbara Cecil and Gerianne Darnell's new book *Competitive Obedience Training for the Small Dog* (available directly from T9E Publishing, RR #1, Box 176, 11092 240th Street, Council Bluffs, IA 51503--\$20 U.S, \$22 in Canada). Yet I decided in addition to use this column as an excuse to read British trainer R. A. Foreman's *Small Dog Obedience Training*, published in 1987 (by Nimrod Press Ltd and available from Direct Books). Since the authors of both books work with papillons, and since (to the best of my knowledge) these are the only two works currently available specifically devoted to the challenges of small dogs, comparison is inevitable. The two books are separated by seven years and the Atlantic Ocean, which helps to explain the rather different training philosophy that each espouses.

R. A. Foreman's *Small Dog Obedience Training* is a collection of and amplification upon articles published in British dog magazines over the last twenty years. Although "tit-bits," as she calls them, are occasionally used, most of her training consists of physical positioning with collar and hands, coupled with lots of praise (actually, the comparative lack of food might be just as well: Foreman tells us that when she uses food she boils the cheapest heart that she can find, cools it, and cuts it into tiny pieces to use. Blech! But hey--human beings eat kidneys for breakfast over there!). I do not want to imply that her methods are rough in any way; they aren't. Yet the simple fact is that food and toys (the staples of the motivational training which has developed over the last ten years) play only a minor part in her training plan.

Foreman, for example, teaches the finish by gently guiding the dog into place and then praising. (Incidentally, Foreman explains that the finish to the left is known as the "Continental Method" and that the right finish is the "English Method." The things you learn!). The retrieve is taught by gently placing the dumbbell in the dog's mouth and praising and waiting patiently until the dog initiates a take on its own. Foreman introduces heeling (or "heel-work") with her papillons on a choke collar. She does not jerk the dog but stops the instant the collar tightens, soothes the frightened animals, and offers a treat. She (and she confesses that she HATES teaching heel-work more than anything else) repeats this process until the dog figures out that, so long as they stay close, the choke chain will never tighten. Foreman urges her readers to understand that the choke collar must never tighten for more than a split second; it is for stopping the dog rather than for choking him. In the wrong hands, she claims, a choke collar is an instrument of cruelty for a toy dog, but used correctly it can be an excellent tool. Foreman uses food as a reward rather than a lure as more formal training in heeling progresses; the food tends to be offered at halts, after the dog sits.

Small Dog Obedience Training is more than a book about competitive obedience; chapters also include tracking, agility, tricks, and a wry look at some embarrassing moments. Foreman clearly enjoys working with her small dogs in obedience competition, but she just as clearly does not believe that one can be genuinely *competitivewith* a toy: "Obedience is great fun, but if you want to *win* in Competitive Obedience then *do not* get a Toy! But if, like us, you already have a Toy Breed then do not be put off by his size" (21). Although the pictures of the papillons in the books are charming, and although the book is well written, it would not be the most useful addition to the library of the competitive trainer of small dogs--particularly with the availability of Cecil and Darnell's new book.

So we must return to the land of the free and the home of the brave in order to consider *Competitive Obedience Training for the Small Dog*. (And both Barbara Cecil and Gerianne Darnell seem *very* free and *very* brave!). They, quite simply, have written the book they say they wished they had on their own shelves when they began training their first papillons. Unlike Foreman, Cecil and Darnell do believe that a small dog can be competitive--and they have records to back it up (Darnell has two and Cecil one of the very few Ch-OTCH-TDX dogs that exist in any breed). They list the advantages of the small dog early in the book: small dogs are fun, easy keepers, have long life spans, you get more credit for your success than you would with a more typical "obedience breed," and there are few enough small dogs in competition that there are still records to be broken. Although they also judiciously list the disadvantages--small dogs can take longer to train, training options are more limited since anything more severe than a gentle collar correction is not an option, finding an instructor capable of advising on the training of a small dog can be difficult, the AKC regulations were not written with the small dog in mind, and many breeders of toy dogs view obedience work with distrust--their own enthusiasm is obvious.

One of the best aspects of the book is the sidebar anecdotes sprinkled liberally throughout. It's there that we learn that Gerianne's feet point out at a twenty degree angle, that someone once spilled a whole bag of popcorn on Barbara's Reina from a balcony while the two were heeling in Open B (and this well-proofed bitch did indeed manage to ignore her favorite food!), that Reina was once smushed by a judge who lost his balance while examining her on the moving stand, that Gerianne's Zack once retrieved a piece of horse manure rather than his glove, and other details that make the training tips come alive. The sidebars also highlight the differences between Barbara and Gerianne when they happen to disagree on certain small points--for example, whether one should give a jump or a retrieve command on the retrieve over high jump.

Competitive Obedience Training for the Small Dog is organized according to the way the authors believe that exercises ought to be taught rather than by the arbitrary divisions of AKC obedience trials. They devise the following categories: heeling, stays,

recalls and go-outs, retrieving, jumping, and scent work, and they urge that trainers follow these basic divisions when training a dog through Utility, rather than insisting on the tradition Novice, Open, and Utility demarcations. Like many "inductive" obedience trainers, Gerianne and Barbara use a pragmatic combination of inductive and compulsive methods, in which correct responses are positively reinforced and incorrect ones are intercepted and redirected. Puppy training is not stressed; since both authors also track and exhibit in conformation, they prefer to concentrate on these activities while the puppy grows up and turn their attention to serious obedience only when the puppy is well into adolescence.

Separate chapters are devoted to training the handler and training the dog to heel (the authors claim that a full seventy percent of the responsibility for effective heeling with the small dog, lies with the handler, and that we might use this lopsided ratio either to our advantage or our disadvantage). Heeling is taught using food as a lure and utilizing both the solid lead and the heeling dowel for correct positioning. Heads-up, attentive heeling is not consciously taught: "First, let's dispel a myth: Heeling *does* require attention but (here's the myth part) it does *not* require the dog to watch your face continuously! Depending on your height and the size of your dog, you are going to have a hard time if you want to emulate the big dog style of watch and wrap. A small dog simply doesn't have enough body to wrap!" (46). The authors believe that most small dogs will find their own focal point, and that the most important thing is *that* your dog watches you, rather than *where* his eyes are focused.

Barbara Cecil and Gerianne Darnell sometimes differ in specific techniques (the book offers both of their methods for teaching go-outs and articles, for example), but both believe in making obedience work fun for both dog and handler. Their book is well written and the illustrations by Randy Cecil (mostly line drawings) are charming. Barbara and Gerianne published the book themselves (T9E Publishing--get it?) and really did a very nice job from the standpoint of book production and design: the cover is both elegant and dramatic, the typesetting is clean, and the layout is attractive. Commercial publishers like Howell and (particularly) TFH ought to take a few notes in how it ought to be done! They've certainly produced a book that belongs on the shelf of everyone working competitively with a small dog in obedience, and it wouldn't be amiss for even non-toy folk who are interested in a solid training manual grounded in motivational methods to invest in a copy.