

K9 KUDOS!



Seeing Spots

By Martha Faulk, photos by Calvin Barnard except where noted

If you're involved in agility competition in the southwest, you've probably seen Jane Winkler of Albuquerque, New Mexico, running her Dalmatians. Jane is a wiry woman who always seems to be on course with a variety of eye-catching "Spotty Bodies," as she likes to call them. She has had astounding success with a breed some have described as hard to train. Over the past 12 years, Jane has rescued, rehabilitated, and re-homed over 120 Dalmatians. She has trained and handled many of them to over 230 agility and obedience titles in AKC, ASCA, NADAC, UKC, and USDAA. Impressively, Jane accomplished all this while working full-time as a dental hygienist.

MF: How did you become interested in Dalmatians?

JW: When I was about 10 years old, I was given a wonderful Dalmatian puppy that I named Prince. I trained him to do many tricks and took him to horse shows and the barn where I kept my pony. Prince helped me earn a little money to support the pony by amusing spectators as he led horses around by the reins and also jumped onto the pony's saddle. I taught him over 40 commands and never thought he was hard to train.

MF: When did you begin training Dalmatians?

JW: When I moved to Albuquerque after a 20-year career in the military, I found Koshare, my first Dalmatian rescue, in 1992. Koshare, who had been returned to the breeder because of both dog and people aggression, was a spirited "double patch" (two black ears) puppy. I tried a couple of different obedience classes with him, but I was discouraged by the instructors' attitudes toward Dalmatians. One instructor suggested I get a different breed because "Dalmatians make very poor competition

obedience dogs." Another instructor told me to drop the class because I wasn't progressing fast enough.

MF: How did you find training techniques that worked for you?

JW: Fortunately, about that time, a well-known obedience trainer, Patty Russo, came to town and showed me how to use food as a reward. Koshare blossomed with the use of food rewards and earned his CD in four tries. He earned his CDX title in AKC as well as obedience titles in ASCA and UKC. He also became my first Dal to earn his AX and AXJ in AKC.

MF: How did you get started in agility?

JW: About the time I was having success training Koshare in obedience, I acquired another Dalmatian, a rescue puppy bitch named Chelsea. Since she wasn't responding to food rewards, someone in my obedience class suggested I try agility as a way to motivate her. Chelsea was an excellent jumper, but she was inconsistent in performance. I later discovered that she was unilaterally deaf and believe that may have kept her from hearing directional commands. Even with her performance problems, she earned 27 titles, the most of any of my Dals. I was especially proud that she was my first Dal to earn three NADAC Elite titles.

MF: Which training methods have you found helpful?

JW: I think I've been influenced by my early work with horses, especially dressage training. I believe in training directional cues, such as *Left* and *Right*. I have trained many of my Dals to work on a long line, getting them to work off their hindquarters as they change direction. Longe



(L to R) Coorain, Honey, Jane and Rodeo



(L to R) Jane with her current agility Dals, Honey and Coorain



Jane longeing her Dal
© Ken Gee



Original rescue Dals in 2000,
clockwise: Arson, Patch, Holly,
Chelsea, Ole, Koshare

work is a good way to exercise them and take the edge off an energetic dog—just like with horses. I also use cavaletti jumps to help the dogs learn both to extend and to collect their strides.

Early on, I made my own agility equipment for the backyard so I could improve my skills. I don't really train with anyone else, and have relied on the training information from *Clean Run* magazine. I have every issue since 1996. I also recommend the book, *Flatwork: Foundation for Agility* by Barb Levenson, since I'm a big believer in the benefit of flatwork for dogs.

MF: Who has helped you the most with rescuing and training Dals?

JW: In 1996 at the Dalmatian Club of America national specialty, we were warned about the probable increase in the Dalmatian population as a result of the upcoming release of the Disney movie, *101 Dalmatians*. That increase was certainly evident here in New Mexico, where some people bred Dalmatians for the money and didn't seem to care much about health and temperament problems, or if the puppies went to good homes.

Lyn Melin from a Dalmatian rescue group in Albuquerque has rescued even more Dals than I have, and if it weren't for her, I never would have had Coorain or Honey. Lyn discovered Coorain, a "liver" Dal about 18 months old, at the Westside shelter here. He had been found emaciated almost to the point of death alongside a desert highway. Lyn spent hours reviving him with hand-fed chicken soup. But to her dismay, he wasn't house trained, climbed fences, and had a loud "sing-song" bark.

My good friend Calvin Barnard has helped me with a number of rescues over the years. He built our original agility equipment and also helped with the extraordinary veterinary bills we've incurred with some of the rescues. He trains and handles some of the dogs and handled Arson, another rescue with an amazing story, for his final MACH run in June 2005.

MF: Many of your rescues have succeeded after a rocky start in life. Tell us about some of the stories.

JW: After Coorain recovered from near starvation, I started him in AKC agility in 2004. The Dalmatian Club of America compiles year-end rankings of all Dalmatians competing in AKC, and they ranked Coorain in the top 10 both in Open in 2005 and Excellent A in 2006. We entered our first USDAA trial last year, and he earned most of his Performance Dog I titles by the end of the year. My goal for Coorain is to earn his Performance Dog II versatility title in 2008.

One of my dogs, Arson, was found at a shelter in 2000, just after the big fire in Los Alamos, New Mexico, destroyed hundreds of homes and displaced many animals. Arson was big and strong and loved agility but was often out of control. Since Calvin is stronger and faster than I am, he and Arson made a good team. Early in training, Arson decided to bail off the top of the A-frame, ignoring his *Touch* command, but Calvin caught all 70 pounds of him in midair and plopped him down at the base of the A-frame. Arson seemed to get the message. Calvin and I both ran him, but it was Calvin who achieved his last Double-Q for the MACH. They also earned their NADAC O-EAC.

Perhaps the most horrific rescue story was Patch, named for the large patch over his left eye. In 1999, a woman called me and begged me to take him. She took him off a chain, gave me a \$100 bill, and we loaded him into a crate. When we got him home, Calvin and I started to pull ticks off with tweezers and noticed his choke chain collar was completely embedded in his neck. Patch spent the next day at the vet under anesthesia getting the chain and the rest of the ticks removed. (The bill was hundreds of dollars.) Patch learned agility work very quickly, but directional commands were hard for him since he, too, was unilaterally deaf. After he earned his AX and AXJ, I placed him with a new owner who has a working sheep ranch. Patch is now a working ranch dog whose job is to flush sheep out of sagebrush.

MF: What dogs are you training now?

JW: In addition to Coorain, who is now eight years old, I'm training Pallas Athena, also known as Honey. I found Honey in a shelter cowering at the back of her kennel. The shelter worker described her as a biter who had a nasty personality and would not let anyone touch her. So I called Lyn, my friend who also does Dalmatian rescue, and she came over and sat by the kennel for four hours until she coaxed Honey to come over to her. Lyn worked to socialize her and taught her some obedience. Then she sent her to me as an agility prospect because of her high energy. Since Honey has hip and knee problems, she jumps in the 16" Preferred class. Honey has earned her AXP and AJP titles in AKC. My goal for Honey in 2008 is to earn her PII titles in USDAA. I'm also competing exclusively in obedience and rally with Rodeo, a five-year-old rescue Dalmatian. He needs only one more Double-Q for his RAE.



Arson jumping with ease.
© Sterling Photography



Jane's 2007 competition dogs: Guy, Coorain, Rodeo, Surya, and Honey



Jane weaving with Coorain and Honey

Jane has rescued, rehabilitated, and re-homed over 120 Dalmatians. She has trained and handled many of them to over 230 agility and obedience titles.

MF: Other than Dalmatians, what dogs have you worked with?

JW: I trained and handled my boss's Pug, Babes, to an AX and AXJ title, and I have a two-year-old rescue Aussie, Surya, who currently competes in ASCA and AKC. My Border Collie, Guy, now eight years old, has his MACH, CDX, RE, and is working toward PIII titles in USDAA. Busy, a Boston Terrier, is working on his RA title.

MF: What are your wishes for Dalmatians?

JW: I wish that all Dalmatian breeders were responsible people who are interested in more than just selling puppies. I also wish that more agility people would appreciate the fact that Dalmatians are more than just a cosmetic breed. They can be incredibly good jumpers, and they learn directions quickly. After all, they were bred to run alongside horse-drawn fire wagons. With good training techniques, their speed, drive, and athleticism make them excellent agility dogs. 🐾

Martha Faulk, author and consultant in business and legal writing, lives in Fort Collins, Colorado. She competes in agility, Rally obedience, and herding with her two rescues, RebaRae, an Australian Cattle dog, and SallyAnn, an Australian Shepherd. Her Border Terrier EmmaLou, MX, MXJ, and USDAA Performance National Standard semifinalist in 2005, is retired from agility but now pursuing a career in Earthdog. Her young Border Terrier, StevieRay, is in training for agility and competing in Rally obedience. Contact Martha through marthfaulk@msn.com.

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