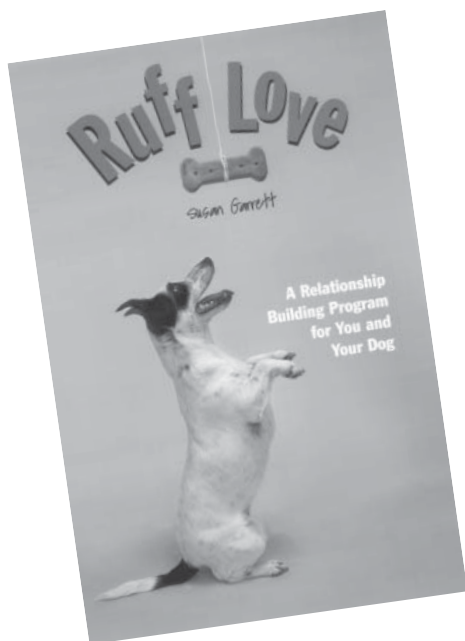


Review:

Ruff Love

A book by Susan Garrett

By Tracy Sklenar



“If you compete in canine sports, your performance will benefit from a strong working relationship with your dog. Perhaps you find it difficult to motivate your dog to do what you would like him to do, when you would like him to do it. Perhaps your competition dog is ‘too energetic’ or ‘too distracted’ to give you his best work. Your competition dog may not be the kind of partner you had hoped for, but that can be changed.”

– Susan Garrett

Ruff Love is a one-of-a-kind book that you’ll read, re-read, highlight, flip through, debate, underline, ingest, pick apart, and eventually memorize. It is an in-depth, how-to training manual that you will find yourself referring to constantly, much like a favorite cookbook or travel guide. Without ever mentioning how to train perfect contacts or faster weave poles, *Ruff Love* manages to be one of the most significant and informative books ever written for agility enthusiasts.

Author Susan Garrett is an internationally known dog trainer and agility handler. In *Ruff Love*, she outlines the “relationship-building program” she has developed to teach her dogs to be wonderful household companions as well as driven, top-notch competitors in agility, obedience, and flyball. Susan has enjoyed tremendous success with all her dogs, and in *Ruff Love*, she gives the reader the tools to enjoy the same level of success, both at home and in the competition arena.

According to Garrett, “Dogs do what is reinforcing” and that is what drives their behavior. After reading *Ruff Love*, experts and newcomers alike will have a deeper understanding of the value of reinforcement in training and how to use reinforcement appropriately. She dispels the myths that dogs can be stubborn, spiteful, or untrainable and encourages you to take responsibility for your relationship with your dog. The program forces you (as trainer) to evaluate reinforcement from your dog’s point of view (what does the *dog* think is reinforcing?) instead of what you would like the reinforcement to be.

By extension, “relationship” is based on reinforcement—does your dog think that playing with you is more reinforcing than anything else? Garrett’s *Ruff Love* program brilliantly outlines how to put yourself at the top of your dog’s list of reinforcers.

Much of *Ruff Love* is based on teaching the owner to control the dog’s access to reinforcement while maintaining a high rate of reinforcement for appropriate behaviors. In the initial stages, the *Ruff Love* participants (dog and human) will lead a dramatically different lifestyle. The dog will no longer be able to choose his own reinforcement; instead, the owner will provide all the dog’s reinforcement. *Ruff Love* is full of detailed exercises and games, and a tremendous variety of creative and fun ways to present all this reinforcement to your dog. The book places a strong emphasis on interactive games (such as Garrett’s famous “1-2-3 Game”) and self-control exercises as ways to reinforce the dog and improve your relationship. The explicit descriptions of these games are valuable to dog trainers and pet owners alike.

Because the dog can gain an incredible amount of reinforcement from his environment, *Ruff Love* also insists that the dog should be crated away from any “free” reinforcement (including furniture, other dogs, running free in the yard, and so on) if the owner cannot control the dog’s access to all reinforcement. This will lead to the *Ruff Love* dog spending substantially more time in his crate than usual in the early stages. *Ruff Love* participants will perhaps find this to be the biggest change

in lifestyle for both the dog and owner, yet eliminating free access to reinforcement is one of the most important facets of the *Ruff Love* program.

Garrett reminds you, however, that *Ruff Love* is not an isolation program. The crate is simply a training tool that assists you in controlling reinforcement, not a magical device that will produce the perfect dog after a period of confinement. Implemented correctly, the *Ruff Love* program will allow the dog to enjoy a lifestyle rich in positive reinforcement, and he will most likely spend more time interacting and playing with his owner than ever before.

By clearly outlining what to do if your dog makes a mistake, *Ruff Love* succeeds where many other training books and videos fail. *Ruff Love* is not simply a how-to book; it also raises and answers the “what if” questions that we all encounter during training. Garrett teaches her readers how to successfully and appropriately balance the use of positive reinforcement with negative punishment to fairly and effectively teach the dog while solving any problems that might come up.

Perhaps the only drawback of the *Ruff Love* program is that it is not an easy program to implement, and it takes a tremendous amount of work and dedication. In Chapter 3, Garrett begins her description of your job as your dog’s trainer by saying, “The trainer’s commitment determines the level of success the dog achieves with *Ruff Love*.” She encourages you

to constantly reevaluate your progress and your relationship while providing a multitude of great ideas on using training journals, creating lists of reinforcers, and modifying the program for puppies. Personal experience using Garrett’s techniques has shown that the hard work required when fully implementing the *Ruff Love* program is well rewarded with spectacular results.

Readers will enjoy Garrett’s conversational and witty writing style, highlighted by Tweenergraphics’ illustrations. The illustrations are not only humorous, but they also help to drive home all Garrett’s important points. One of *Ruff Love*’s most effective statements is “Positive is not permissive,” and the accompanying illustration of a terrier being served by his owner is both amusing and clever.

Ruff Love packs every page with valuable training information. Dogs of all breeds, ages, and backgrounds will benefit from Susan Garrett’s enormous insight, creativity, and skill. *Ruff Love* is a priceless tool for dog trainers and a must-read for people wishing to bring out the best in their dogs, as both agility competitors and well-loved companions. 🐾

Tracy Sklenar owns Leader of the Pack Dog Training & Day Care in Matawan, New Jersey. She shares her home with two Dalmatians, a Rat Terrier, a Dogo Argentino, an All-American, and a very understanding husband.

BILL TACON & ADCH LIZZY
MARY TACON & ADCH SILK

SAME DAY. SAME TITLE. SAME GAMBLERS COURSE. JACKPOT!





NOTHING BEATS FOUR ACES!

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