

A Tale of Two Thirteen Year Olds

(or you can teach old dogs and their not so young handlers new tricks)



Once upon a time, two Canadian women decided that they would each compete in rally obedience with their 13 year old dogs – siblings actually - at the Border Terrier Club of America National specialty. Their names were Pam and Anna. Pam knew what she was aiming for having competed in obedience for years – OK, let's clarify that a little – Pam has been seen in the Novice B ring with Border Terriers for years - "competing" however, may be a slight exaggeration. None-the-less, Pam's Border, Gunter, has his CD, although the scores are classified information. Pam has also watched rally on at least one occasion and really saw what it required and what it didn't. Her sole worry, prior to the specialty, was interpretation of the signs, but worry on this she did. Anna, on the other hand, had only a vague idea of what rally was, no formal obedience experience and a dog with no more experience than she had. Others had however convinced her that, with a bit of practice ahead of time, it was an achievable goal for her and her dog Roger. Anna wasn't quite so sure but figured "what the heck".

As the specialty approached Pam looked up information on the signs and gained a bit of understanding of how they worked. Although she was nervous about remembering what the signs meant when she got in the ring as it would be her first time in the rally ring, she hoped that she and Gunter could do it, with perhaps some blips.

With the Specialty just around the corner, Anna had some crises. The largest one being an ACL tear on one of her other dogs that required surgery and daily physical therapy. She had no time to attend classes or figure out signs. She had started at a disadvantage from the other competitors and it was widening. Her one advantage was Roger, her velcro dog, who felt that walking next to Anna was the only place he wanted to be, but she didn't really know just how much of an advantage that was that at this point.

Obedience and Rally day approached and as it did the group of us at the specialty site did NOTHING. ::sigh:: Looking back it would have made so much more sense to have "rallied" a group of us over to the arena on Sunday or Monday or both. We could have done a stay line in there. Pam and Gunter could have worked off some of their nerves. Anna and Roger could have been given a better understanding of what Rally Novice required and didn't require. We didn't. We socialized – the food was good, the company fantastic, a grand time was had but soon we would "pay the piper".

The big day came. The morning was full of obedient and disobedient dogs. Team competition took place with much laughter and fun. Then it was the start of Rally and the 13 year olds turn was imminent. The handlers balked.

Anna decided to pull Roger. Pam offered to do the deed – with an ulterior motive – she was also going to pull Gunter. They didn't have enough experience in rally to compete, hadn't memorized the signs. Their dogs were too inexperienced or too out of practice to go in there. The rally stewards reluctantly accepted Roger's withdrawal but balked at Gunter's given they had the handler in front of them. "No. You can do it. You're already entered. Give it a try. It's just for fun. You've nothing to lose". Pam relented. Maybe she and Gunter could do it and the worst case scenario might be an entry for Border Terrier Canada's "Molly Award".



A Tale of Two Thirteen Year Olds (cont'd)

The rally novice handlers walked their course, without Anna. Anna was completely convinced that without being able to train ahead of time and without the slightest knowledge of what the signs meant, there was no way that she and Roger could qualify or even look like they had a clue of what they were doing. So she sat out.

Novice A started with smiles, bumbles, fumbles and lots of good humour. Anna watched and thought, "Well I could do THAT exercise....and maybe that one too....but that one looks beyond what we can do." She said as much and the person sitting next to her said, "You can actually not do an exercise and still qualify in rally." She watched the rest of that performance and started to become convinced that maybe she and Roger could do this. There were just a few little glitches. She had scratched from the class already and, oh! she didn't have the dog! He was napping over at the RVs and Novice A just wasn't that large a class. So Pam stepped in. She ran to the rally table. The wonderful stewards quickly unscratched Roger as he had not yet been marked absent. Anna's number was obtained – that just left the dog. As Pam was about to sprint to the RV parking she spotted Mary Ellen Moehler near her Thistle Patch booth grooming a dog. Mary Ellen had been busy all week as a gofer in a golf cart and said golf cart was just a few feet from the grooming table. The request was gasped out and Mary Ellen didn't hesitate – stripping knife was abandoned, dog left with surprised helper and they were off down the hill and headed for the RVs, Mary Ellen handling the golf cart with the finesse of a Formula One driver. Within minutes, a rudely awoken Roger found himself on Pam's lap and they hurtled back with all speed. (BTW, it turns out that Roger, the "I hate riding in cars" dog, loves traveling by golf cart).



Roger arrived outside the ring and he and Anna immediately had to go in. They were looking good! Well, they looked good up until they reached the exercise where Anna had thought "that one looks beyond what we can do". It was a swing the dog to a front and then finish left. By watching Anna had figured out the-bring-the-dog-to-the-front part, but what she had seen and understood was a bring the dog to the front and then a bring the dog to your side, but not that it mattered how you did it. Over and over Roger circled around past Anna's right and sat next to her and people kept indicating to her that it was wrong. The judge even broke down and said "finish left", but since Anna had no clue what that meant, it didn't help much. Finally they went on. They did rest of the course beautifully. Roger doing his best to respond to whatever Anna asked of him. Even with the one bad exercise they ended up with a score of 82 and third place! Well done!!

It was a bit anti-climactic, but during Novice B, Pam and Gunter did a really nice turn themselves, for a score of 97 and third place in Novice B.

These two veteran BTs and their handlers should be very proud of themselves.

Donna Sapp