

The making of an adventure dog

By Donovan Webster, *Outside*

A well-trained dog is the product of its owner's diligent effort and persistence. If you would like to train your dog but are unsure how to begin, consider these recommendations.

Photo: Hannah Dewey/Tandem

About 12,000 years ago, canines came to the fire.

Before long, humans and dogs became very close friends. No one can say exactly where it happened, though it was likely in southern Europe or North Africa. But the terms of the arrangement were simple: The two species would look after one another. Dogs would sniff out and run down game as well as guard the homefront. Man would offer food and shelter. Neither would be lonely.

Since then, it's been man who most often fails to live up to the bargain—not by skimping on kibble, but by allowing his dog to become a do-nothing layabout or even a nuisance. The idea of a dog as purely pet is a 20th-century concept and, frankly, a bad one. Of course, I'm not telling anyone anything they don't already know: Dogs like daily order and work. Hell, they need it. If you're not willing to give a dog a job, whether it's running with you, sitting calmly while you fish, or running behind you while you ski, you should probably stick to having goldfish—or ferns.

But if you're ready to dedicate time to training a dog that's up for adventure, then we've got the drill sergeant you need. Mike Stewart, 58, is a former police officer—he spent seven years on the force in Oxford, Mississippi, then 18 years as chief of campus police at the University of Mississippi—who's been “piddling around” training dogs since he was a young man.

Today, he is widely regarded as one of the best dog trainers in the world. He breeds, trains, and sells British Labradors out of his Wildrose Kennels, a lovely and well-tended farm on 143 acres of fields, ponds, and woods outside Oxford. Stewart's new book, "The Wildrose Way", details how you and your dog can be better in tune with each other in all sorts of situations, from boating to snowshoeing to birding—even just walking along Fifth Avenue in New York. While he trains everything from hunting dogs to diabetic alert dogs, Stewart's favorite pastime these days is training adventure dogs.

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