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Dustin is a champion and obedience-titled Australian Shepherd who lives in Indiana with Sheila W. Boneham, Ph.D., her husband Roger, and several other Aussies, a Labrador Retriever and two cats. Dustin is retired now, but was an eager participant in many of the activities described here. This article appeared with Dustin's by-line in *Dogs USA*. You can meet Dustin at www.perennialaussies.com/dustin.html.

Calling All Canines for Fun from A to Z

by

CH. Brookridge Dustin U, CD, as told to Sheila W. Boneham, Ph.D.

Are you tired of walks around the same old block? Do you long for new challenges and adventures? Are you sick of being an in-front-of-the-armchair athlete? Here's an alphabet of fun, so get up, grab a leash, and get your person -- it's time to let get moving!

Agility is a blast! You get to scramble up and over things, zoom through tunnels, fly over jumps wow! what a blast! You and your human can do agility just for fun with simple home-made equipment, or you can join an agility class and compete against other dogs and people. Agility will keep you both in good shape, and build your confidence if you're a little low on self esteem.

Backpacking gets you and your person into what they call the Great Outdoors and it is great. You can wear a nifty backpack and carry your own food and water to make things easier for your two-legged partner. You should start with light loads to build yourself up, but eventually you can carry a pretty good jug of water and a snack for both of you. Then off you go to enjoy the sounds and scents of a day on the trail.

Carting puts you in the driver's seat. Well, ok, not really the human still gets to steer but you can pretend you're driving as you pull a cart or wagon around. Too small, you say? Nonsense! If you're a small dog, you can pull a small cart with a teddy bear or doll. The big guys can pull big carts and even people. There are wheeled carts and harnesses for dogs of all sizes. Pulling is kind of fun, and people really get a kick out of this (and it never hurts to please people).

Dog Camps are really nifty places. You and your person go for a weekend, a week, or even longer, and you get to try out all sorts of fun activities .like herding, agility, water rescue, carting, earthdog, and more! Many of the camps offer lectures about canine health and other subjects, but you don't have to listen if you'd rather sleep.

Earthdog training is pretty much reserved for you terrier and Dachshund types who are supposed to catch vermin. You get to zip through a tunnel to catch a rat! Ok, ok, you don't actually catch the rat, cause these rats aren't vermin, they're pets, you know? But you can pretend you'll get to catch the rat. Earthdog training is lots of fun, and if you go to tests and trials you can even win a ribbon. I'm not sure what use they are, but people like them a lot, so make 'em happy.

Ever dream of a game where you could run fast, play with a tennis ball, and bark your head off without getting yelled at? Flyball! Wheee! You get to be part of a team of dogs, and each of you takes turns (really, you have to take turns) running down a lane and jumping a series of jumps. Then you hit the box, grab the ball, and race back.

Grooming is a really nice way to spend some quality time with your person. You can even take turns with this activity. First you stand or lie down when they tell you, and they brush your coat to make it clean and pretty. They check your ears and clean them once a week or so, and they check your teeth and clean them too (it's not so bad once you get used to it). You also need to have your nails trimmed frequently so you can walk properly. After your person gets you all nicely groomed, you can lick her face!

Hiking is like backpacking, but you don't usually go for all-day trips, and you don't have to carry a backpack since you won't need to stop to eat. Usually hiking is done in a park or other place with forests or hills or meadows. Be sure your human takes some water along for both of you, because you will get thirsty even hiking for just an hour or two. And also (I hate to bring this up), remind your human to bring some bags to clean up after you. We dogs want to continue to enjoy public places, and if you leave a mess, you might make people mad enough to stop us.

I hate to bring this up in the middle of all the fun stuff, but if you find you're itching a lot, you need to get your person to check you for fleas, ticks, and skin rashes or sores. If they find anything that shouldn't be there, they should take you to the vet and take care of it. If there's nothing obvious but you keep itching, tell your person you might have an allergy to your food, chemicals in the lawn or house, and see if the vet can help figure out what it is. You shouldn't have to scratch, scratch, scratch!

Jogging is a great way to keep you and your human in shape. Before you start a jogging program, though, be sure your nails are neatly trimmed, your pads are in good condition, and you're not too much overweight. You don't want to strain your heart or your other muscles and joints. Ask your person to jog mostly on soft surfaces like dirt trails or grass, because pavement is harder on your joints, and can be really hot in the summer. If your feet hurt, you might ask for a set of booties. They look silly, sure, but they'll protect your feet.

Kid training is kind of an informal activity, but a very important one. You and I would never hurt a kid, of course, but some dogs aren't real friendly, and some are scared of kids. Try to get your human to help you teach children about dog safety and how to approach strange dogs and pet them. You can do this at schools, may as a Canine Ambassador of the American Kennel Club,

and when you're out and about and meet people.

Do you like to run really fast and chase things? Get your person to take you lure coursing! This is a sport for sight hounds, but sometimes other dogs get to try it too. A lure is a white bag that gets pulled really fast on the course, and you try to catch it. (Don't let on to your person that the lure is a bag people think it's a bunny.)

Musical Freestyle is lots of fun, too, once you get the hang of it. It's like dancing with your person obedience set to music, but lots more interesting because you get to spin and twirl. You can do this just for fun, or if you become the Fred and Ginger of people and dogs, you can compete for more of those crazy ribbons that people like so much.

Nosework lets you put your schnoz to work. There are all kinds of variations of nosework, but mostly it means your person hides something and you use your scenting ability to find it. Sometimes it's not as easy as it sounds because people can be really tricky but it's always fun, and usually you get a cookie or a toy when you find what you're looking for.

Believe it or not, obedience training and competition are lots of fun. Just be sure you choose a teacher who will teach your person to use motivational training methods with you (that means they make it fun, fun, fun with toys or food or silly noises). You'll have to learn to watch your human very closely, and to obey commands, but if you do well and train at open and utility levels, you'll get to jump and retrieve you know, have a great time!

Pulling sports, like carting, give you a chance to take your person places. If you both like to be outdoors in the winter and enjoy snow, you could try sledding or skijoring. For sledding, you might want another dog or two, and you'll need a harness and a sled of course. For skijoring, you pull your owner, who will be wearing skis, on the snow. You can do the same thing in the summer with your owner on rollerblades. Just be sure the person you're pulling is really good on skis or rollerblades, because you know you're going to get going very fast! And you need to be sure you understand your training, especially the command to stop, because you don't want to hurt anyone.

This is a good time to point out that you might not always understand right away what's expected of you. After all, you are trying to learn new things in a foreign language (let's face it, few people speak Canine very well). So if you're not sure, ask Questions. You can make people understand that you have a question by stopping and looking at them. If you cock your head a little to one side, they'll understand even faster. Be patient people sometimes forget that we aren't born knowing how to do some of the things they want us to do. Keep trying, and sooner or later they'll find a way to express themselves clearly so you can understand.

Retrieving is a great sport, and admit it, most of you enjoy it. The trick to training your person for successful retrieving is to bring whatever he throws back to him so he can throw it again. If your human tries to chase you to get the toy, don't teach him bad habits by running away. Stop and

give him the toy. If you follow this simple rule, you can train your human to throw a ball or stick for you for, gosh, hours!

Swimming is terrific fun, and it's one time your not only allowed to get wet and dirty, you're supposed to! If you're a little stiff in the joints or have any problem that makes your legs hurt sometimes, swimming is a great way to have some fun and exercise without winding up really sore. Of course, be sure your person takes you to safe swimming places. For real fun, combine swimming with retrieving you can fetch sticks or special retriever "bumpers" from the water. Oh, and always remember to shake the water out of your coat when you get back to your person. They like that.

Tracking is a special kind of nosework, and once again, it means just doin' what comes naturally following your nose to find where somebody went. People have some trouble with this, being less highly developed mammals with a very poor sense of smell. But for us, hey, the only hard part is figuring out exactly what it is they want us to find. You can even get titles and ribbons for tracking if you can train your person to trust you and keep up with you as you fly along with your nostrils scooping up all that glorious scent!

Sometimes we all just need to unwind, so when you have been cooped up for a while, or have been learning new things and feeling stressed, remind your person to take you out for some unstructured fun in a safely fenced area. Then you can just race around like a nut, maybe retrieve some balls, leap into the air, and generally let yourself go. .

You can also be a volunteer in a home for old people or a school for children or a place for sick people. This is a great thing for us dogs to do, because all we have to do is be ourselves to make people happy. I volunteer at a school almost every week, in the special education class (I think they call it special because I'm there). Your human can get you registered as a therapy dog through several organizations.

Water Work is a special kind of swimming mostly for Newfoundlands. For water work, a dog has to learn how to rescue people who are drowning and bring them back to shore. You also have to learn to pull a boat through the water. Newfies can earn titles for knowing how to rescue people in the water. If you like swimming and you're reasonably big and strong, you might get your person to teach you about water work. You never know when it might come in handy!

Once a year you should have your person take you to the veterinarian for a thorough eXamination and your annual booster shots. I know, it's not fun like the other things I've mentioned, but it's very important. Your doctor will listen to your heart and lungs, and look at your eyes, ears and teeth. Your person will have to take some of your feces along so they can make sure you don't have worms (yuch!) and if you live where heart worms are a problem, they will take some blood and check it. Then your vet will give you a biscuit, and you're outta there!

Yanking on a tug toy now that's good fun! For this game you will need a good toy like a long

rope or a sturdy plastic pull toy. You will also need a friend to play with, either another dog or a human. Now, if you play with another dog, you can play by your own rules. But if you play with a human being, you need to play by their rules. First, you can win once in a while, but mostly you have to let them win to show them proper respect. After all, the person should always be in charge because they buy the dog food. Also, be sure the toy you find is long enough that you won't accidentally bite the person on the other end it's very bad to bite your person, even by accident.

Zzzzz. Don't forget to get lots of sleep. If you try even half of the activities you've just read about, you'll be ready for a good nap. My recommendation? Get the person who shares your life, the person who sees to it that you have good food, proper care, and lots of fun. If you're small enough to fit, climb up on your person's lap. If you're bigger, snuggle in beside your person in a chair or on the floor or bed. Give your person a kiss. Sigh. And dream sweet dreams.