



DOGS on JOGS

Want to run with the pooches?
Here's what you should know

by LYNNE BETTINGER

He was a 5-year-old rottweiler-coonhound mix with a hankering for the open road. She was a 24-year-old woman restless to hit the pavement and leave the treadmill behind.

When Petra Garosi found Rocky at an animal shelter, the lanky, high-energy pooch had been surrendered because of his propensity for running away from home. But no matter: From then on, Garosi would run with him.

That was nearly five years ago, but Garosi and Rocky still jog several times a

week around their Germantown, Md., neighborhood. Their average trek is three to five miles, but in Rocky's younger days, they sometimes went as far as 11 miles.

"He's definitely helped me get into better shape," says Garosi, who has long since given up her gym membership. And he's never tried to run away from home, she adds, even when the front door has been left open.

BORN TO RUN—OR WALK?

Just like people, dogs need regular exercise. But also like people, not all dogs are meant

to be marathoners. If you dream of hitting the track with a canine buddy, first do some research.

Your dog's breed will give you some clues about his ability to go the distance. Labrador retrievers and border collies were bred for strenuous outdoor work; lap breeds like Chihuahuas and shih tzus weren't. But size isn't everything. Not all large dogs can tolerate rigorous exercise, and not all small dogs are natural couch potatoes. Other breed traits—such as the short noses in bulldogs and pugs, which can cause breathing difficulties—can make a dog unsuited for jogging.

If your dog is a mutt of indeterminate heritage, chances are he'll make a hardy exercise partner, says Nicholas Dodman, a veterinarian and director of the Animal Behavior Clinic at Tufts University. So-called Heinz-57 mixes tend to be "very uniform with pointy faces and weighing about 40 pounds," Dodman says. "[They're typically] high-energy [dogs needing] lots of aerobic exercise, sort of going back to wild dog characteristics."

But keep in mind that even if his breed was born to run, jogging may not be appropriate for your dog. Before you start pounding the pavement with your pooch, take him to the vet for a thorough exam.

Seniors or dogs with health issues such as arthritis, hip dysplasia, or heart problems aren't good candidates for jogging. And while puppies may have the will and energy, a running routine isn't a good idea for them either.

"Jogging should be minimal until [a



Petra Garosi
and Rocky

TOP: FOTOSARCH; BOTTOM: MICHELLE/THEHSUS

Rules of the Road

- ▶ Take your dog to the vet for a checkup to be sure he's healthy enough to jog.
- ▶ Start slowly and build your dog's stamina with regular walks.
- ▶ As your dog becomes more fit, you can increase the pace and distance.
- ▶ Jog on unpaved surfaces when possible. Concrete and asphalt can cause cuts and abrasions to your dog's paw pads.
- ▶ To minimize the risk of bloat, a life-threatening condition, don't let your dog engage in strenuous exercise after eating a meal or drinking a lot of water.
- ▶ Adjust your workout routine based on the weather, and watch for signs that your dog is becoming overheated. Paved surfaces get hot in warm weather. In winter, ice-removing salt and chemicals can hurt your dog's paws.
- ▶ After a run, check your dog's feet for injuries to the paw pads and toenails. Watch for lameness and soreness the next day. Take him to the vet if you see any signs of illness or injury.



dog is] at least 10 months of age, when the bone growth plates close in most breeds," says David Goodman, a Damascus, Md., veterinarian. "Growth plates in giant breeds [such as Great Danes] may not fully close until 14 to 18 months of age. Pressure from too much jogging before the closure of growth plates can damage joint cartilage and the other hip joint structures."

BASIC TRAINING

If your dog is suited for running but hasn't been exercising regularly, start slowly. Build his stamina with brisk walks, and gradually work up to jogging. As he becomes more fit, you can run farther and faster.

Exercise him until he's tired, but watch for signs he's overdoing it. Panting isn't a problem, but "noisy breathing, wide-open mouth breathing, and bright red gums can all be signs [of overexertion]," says Sandra Sawchuk, a staff veterinarian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine.

In warm weather, remember that dogs don't sweat the way people do, and they

don't always know when they should stop and rest. "We're very careful in the summer," says Garosi. "We walk [Rocky], or I take him for a short run late in the evening."

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If your dog isn't marathoner material, your vet can help you choose an exercise program suited to his age, health, and abilities. You may need to find another running partner, or you could decide that power walking around the

neighborhood is the right workout for both of you.

Whatever the form, regular exercise will help keep your dog fit and trim, and it can benefit his behavior, too. As most canine trainers will tell you, a tired dog is a good dog. That may be why Garosi has never had to deal with destructive chewing, digging, or other problem behaviors from Rocky. Still, if he doesn't get a good run, she admits, he gets "whiny and pushy for attention."

Exercise is also a great bonding experience for you and your pet. With your best friend by your side, a fitness routine can be the highlight of your day and his.

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