

ATTS Temperament Tests

"A SOUND MIND IN A SOUND BODY"

By Leesa Thomas, Photographs Courtesy of William C. McCormick, Jr.

Editors Note: We wish to thank AMCA Member Leesa Thomas for allowing us to print this story about her experience with the American Temperament Test Society evaluation process.

When my dogs reach about two years of age, I start checking for local temperament tests sponsored by the American Temperament Test Society (ATTS). Technically, dogs are eligible to test once they reach 18 months of age; however, my personal experience is that malamutes aren't mentally mature enough until they're at least two years old. In the past, I've been known to travel across 2-3 states to find a test, but I was very lucky this year: the nearest test was only about 20 minutes from my home. And I didn't have to wait six months for it, either. So on Sat, 12 Jun, I headed to our local metropark farm to "test" Xarri (Arctic Hope's Double T'Lead, CGC, ThD, WTD, WPD). We were accompanied by his brother, Quinn (Arctic Hope's Double T'Taiga), with his owners Mick & Kathie McCormick, Taiga Kennel. This was a



Easy A?

Quinn at station 1, Neutral Stranger.

first-time experience for Mick & Kathie, and they didn't know what to expect. Since I had been through it with five previous dogs, I knew what to expect from the test, but you never really know what to expect from your dog as you progress through the test.

Many of you have probably never heard of the ATTS, or if you've heard of it, you

have probably never watched or experienced it firsthand. The tests are few and far between (hence my willingness to travel 2-3 states to find a test), although the organization has been around since 1977. The test is for all breeds, and each dog is judged with consideration given to its age, breed characteristics, health and training. For example, a Schutzhund-trained German Shepherd Dog would be judged differently than a Pomeranian or a Golden Retriever, and a kennel dog is judged differently from a house dog.

"The ATTS Temperament Test focuses on and measures different aspects of temperament such as stability, shyness, aggressiveness, and friendliness as well as the dog's instinct for protectiveness towards its handler and/or self-preservation in the face of a threat." This is accomplished through a series of 10 subtests. The dog must pass all 10 subtests to earn the Temperament Test (TT) designation. There are three judges: a Chief Tester and two additional trained evaluators. It takes a majority to fail a dog. Panic without recovery, strong



No Test Anxiety Here

Xarri relaxing before the start of the test.



I LOVE This Test!

Xarri at station 2, Friendly Stranger.



Do You Hear What I Hear?

Quinn at station 3, Hidden Noise. While you're not allowed to talk to your dog, you are allowed to talk to the bucket, if instructed by the Chief Tester.



Passing the OK Corral
Quinn alert at station 4, Gunshots.



Rain in the Forecast?
Xarri at station 5, Umbrella. Again, you can talk to the umbrella, if instructed by the Chief Tester.

avoidance or unprovoked aggression constitutes a failure.

The dog is tested on a six-foot loose lead, and the handler may not talk to the dog during the test. No signals or corrections are allowed either (except to prevent imminent urination or defecation within the testing area). The idea is to test the dog's natural, i.e., non-directed, responses to stimuli that "simulates a casual walk through a park or neighborhood where everyday life situations are encountered." The website explains further: "During this walk, the dog experiences visual, auditory and tactile stimuli. Neutral, friendly and threatening situations are encountered, calling into play the dog's ability to distinguish between non-threatening situations and those calling for watchful and protective reactions."

I stated earlier that you never really know what to expect from your dog during the test, but you should have a pretty good idea of what its reaction will be to some parts of the test (see last page for full description of the subtests). For example, you probably know from experience how your dog reacts to neutral or friendly strangers, but you might not know how it would react to an aggressive stranger or to gun shots. Out of the six dogs that I have now tested, five have passed. My very first one failed because he was noise sensitive and panicked during the gun shots. That didn't surprise me because I already knew that he was noise sensitive, but I had hoped that he would recover enough to proceed through the rest of the test. My second one almost failed because he ignored the aggressive stranger. A dog prior to him had peed at

the last station, and he found that much more interesting than the stranger. He did look up briefly to check on the stranger, which is the only reason that he passed. Since our breed standard doesn't call for "guard dog" behavior, and he obviously did not panic, his reaction was sufficiently appropriate for a malamute. My third dog actually stood at the end of the lead and barked at the aggressive stranger, which surprised me immensely and highly pleased the Chief Tester. She had shown no indication of being protective up to that point in her life. It is primarily this last series of subtests (subtests 8-10) that test a dog's maturity level. My experience has shown that malamutes don't start to develop the "protective" gene until they're around two years of age. Your experience may vary.

Xarri and Quinn both passed with flying colors, scoring steadily in the center (4-5-6 on a 1-10 scale for reactions), which is where you want your dog to be. Kathie enjoyed the test thoroughly and had a new experience. And for once, I didn't really have any surprises. My Double T' litter tested extremely stable at eight weeks of age, and these two re-exhibited that stability at two years of age.

If you'd like to read more about the ATTS organization and test or check for upcoming testing dates and locations, check their website at <http://www.atts.org>. You may also enjoy watching the videos of Xarri's (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YvOYdOinjE>) and Quinn's (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOfEjUN36dA>) tests. It would give you a much better idea of what a test involves. Maybe you'll consider taking your own dog through the test!



Risky Business
Quinn checking out the Aggressive Stranger at stations 8-10.

About the Author: *Leesa Thomas has been in malamutes for 15 years and has participated in nearly all aspects of the sport: conformation, weight pulling, backpacking, sledding, rally obedience, and therapy work. She is heavily involved in the AMCA, having served as co-chair on the Breeders Education Committee and currently serving as co-chair on the Working Dog Committee. She has put the Temperament Test title on five malamutes to date.*

Leesa and her malamutes make their home at Arctic Hope (www.arctichope.com) in northeast Ohio. If you have questions on ATTS testing, she'd love to hear from you at arctichope@gotoadventure.com.

TT Test Description

Source: ATTS Website, www.atts.org

The ATTS Temperament Test consists of ten subtests divided into five subcategories:

Behavior Toward Strangers

Objective: To measure the dog's reaction to strangers in a non-threatening situation.

Subtest 1: Neutral stranger

A stranger to the dog approaches the handler, shakes hands with the handler and engages the handler in a brief conversation, ignoring the dog.

The purpose of this subtest is to evaluate the dog's reaction to passive socialization and the dog's protective instinct.

Subtest 2: Friendly stranger

A stranger to the dog approaches happily and briskly, is very friendly to the dog and pets the dog.

The purpose of this subtest is to evaluate the dog's active social skills.

Reaction to Auditory Stimuli

Objective: To measure the dog's reaction to auditory stimuli and the dog's investigative behavior.

Subtest 3: Hidden Noise

The handler/dog team approaches a hidden assistant who rattles a metal bucket filled with rocks and sets this bucket in the path of the team. The handler may encourage the dog to investigate the bucket only when asked to do so. The handler's focus must be on the bucket, not on the dog.

The purpose of this subtest is to test alertness and curiosity.

Subtest 4: Gunshots

The handler stops at a designated marker with his/her back towards a well hidden assistant. The assistant fires three shots using a .22 caliber starter pistol (SHOT-PAUSE-SHOT-SHOT).

The purpose of this subtest is to measure the dog's recovery response to a sudden noise.

Reaction to Visual Stimulus

Objective: To measure the dog's reaction to a sudden visual stimulus.



Subtest 5: Umbrella

The handler/dog team approaches an assistant sitting in a chair holding a closed umbrella parallel to the ground at a 90 degree angle to the approaching team. When the dog is five feet from the assistant, the umbrella is opened. The handler may encourage the dog to investigate the umbrella only when asked to do so. The handler's focus must be on the umbrella, not on the dog.

Tactile Stimuli

Objective: To measure the dog's reaction to unusual footing.

Subtest 6: Plastic Footing

Both the handler and the dog walk the entire length of a 15-foot by 6-foot clear plastic strip.

Subtest 7: Wire Footing

Only the dog will walk the entire length of a 12-foot by 3-foot unfolded exercise pen.

The purpose of these subtests is to measure the dog's sensitivity to unusual footing, its ability to recover from the fear of unusual footing and to measure its investigative behavior to the unusual footing.

Self Protective/Aggressive Behavior

Objective: These tests collectively evaluate the dog's capacity to recognize an unusual situation, its threshold to provocation, its protective instincts, and its propensity to realize when the situation becomes a threat.

Subtest 8: Non-Threatening

The handler/dog team stops at the designated marker. A weirdly-dressed stranger crosses the path 38 feet in front of the team.

The purpose of this subtest is to test the dog's alertness to an unusual situation.

Subtest 9: Threatening

The weird stranger advances 10 feet towards the stationary handler in a threatening manner.

The purpose of this subtest is to evaluate the dog's ability to recognize when an unusual situation turns into a provocation.

Subtest 10: Aggression

The weird stranger advances to within 18 feet of the stationary handler in an aggressive manner.

The purpose of this subtest is to evaluate the dog's protective instincts.

The stranger is never closer than 10 feet from the dog. The handler's 2 foot arm and the 6' lead is added in for a total of 18 feet. Aggression here is checked against the breed standard and the dog's training. A schutzhund trained dog lunging at the stranger is allowed, but if an untrained Siberian husky does the same, it may fail.

At the conclusion of the test, the handler will receive a critique about the dog's performance. Certificate will be mailed within 90 days of the test.

This copyrighted test may not be used in whole or part without the express written consent of the American Temperament Test Society.