



## A WALK ON THE MOON

First-ever malamute to achieve many performance titles, Aura, Mtn. Home's Aura of Arctidawn, brightly shines. Owner-handler Raissa Hinman explains why Aura is like an opal, how it's all about the conversation, and which of this talented girl's accomplishments represents the biggest step for mal-kind!

Firsts are funny things, and the AKC and their many and varying titles are even funnier. I mean, the moon was there forever, so the first man to walk on it was a big deal. If someone builds a house, the first one to walk in it is no big deal, just the first person who happened to get there. That's how I feel about a lot of Aura's "firsts." The AKC has come up with a pile of new titles for us to spend our money on, and Aura's lifetime and skills just happened to come at the right time to earn them. Some of Aura's firsts are the result of wonderful additions to what the AKC has offered in the way of titles, and others are kind of silly, and then Aura does have one "landing on the moon" first, too. I'm going to try and explain all of them.



*Aura's grace and consistency make winning look easy!*

Aura came to me in the fall of 2005 from Sue Fuller, who traveled over 2000 miles with two of her girls the previous spring to breed them to Atka, my Ch MACH U-CDX Arctidawn's Guardian Spirit, UDX, XFP, WTD, WLD, WWPD. Atka is a son of Sister, MACH (3rd mal MACH) U-UD (another first) Mountain Home's Goldsmoke, UDX2 (first and only mal UDX2), WTD, WLD, WWPD and Dash, BISS Ch Black Ice's Sudden Impact. Many of Aura's titles were not available when I showed Sister. They did not even have Rally until after Sister finished her Utility Dog title, a kind of a silly time to start spending money on Rally entries. Aura is an Atka daughter, one of 14 pups born that summer at Mountain Home.



### About the Author

*Raissa Hinman's journey as a malamute breeder (Arctidawn) began in 1997. Raissa says, "I was looking through a copy of The New Complete Alaskan Malamute by Maxwell Riddle and Beth Harris, and saw a picture of a young woman sledding a team of Alaskan malamutes down a mountain side, with a baby in a pack on her back." Impressed with the trust between the musher and her dogs, Raissa found Sue Fuller (Mountain Home Malamutes), where she eventually purchased her foundation bitch, "Sister."*

*Raissa lives in Michigan with her husband George and sons Gabe and Gideon. She enjoys showing mals with Gideon, who started competing in agility at the age of eight!*



# HISTORY IN THE MAKING

signals are allowed, and the dog is not allowed to anticipate the signals.

After the signals there are the scent articles. The judge places a pile of numbered metal and leather articles about 20 feet out. You turn away from the pile and put your scent on an article. The judge asks, "How will you send your dog?" You have two choices, "After a sit," or "Directly." The judge places the article you scented in the pile and tells you, "Send your dog." There are about a thousand ways to NQ, including sending the dog differently than you said you would, anticipating the retrieve, failure to retrieve, bringing the wrong article, dropping the article, not coming directly back with it, etc. There are two scent article retrieves, one with a leather and one with a metal article.

Then there is the directed retrieve, otherwise known as the "glove" exercise. I have found this to be a difficult exercise for mals. They DO NOT get extra points for "killing" the glove, and marking is often not easy for them to learn. It's like retrieving. Dogs do it naturally, or you have to teach them. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a malamute that does not retrieve naturally. I've had two or three that love it, and one that took me 33 approximations to teach. Now, if you have a Golden or a Lab that doesn't like to retrieve, you have a problem with the gene pool. With a mal, it's just a "some do and some don't" kind of thing. You can teach it to any of them.

The judge puts out three gloves, usually across the back of the ring. You and the dog do not see the gloves placed. The judge tells you which glove to bring. You have to turn correctly, mark and send simultaneously, and the dog needs to bring back the correct glove. I won't even count the ways to screw this one up, but the most common way is the dog locking and loading on the wrong glove.

There are two more exercises in the Utility class. There is the dreaded stand for exam. You would think it would be simple. It is a "moving stand" exercise. The dog is in heel position and the judge says, "forward." After you have heeled the dog just a few feet, the judge says, "Stand your dog." While you are still moving forward, you can use a verbal as well as a signal command to have your dog stop in place. You move forward about 12 feet and turn and face your dog. The judge approaches your dog and gives it a full conformation exam, minus the teeth and



## New Moon

*Aura has many "walking into the new house" kinds of firsts, and the weirdest one of those is her TQX. If you are wondering what the heck a "TQX" is, rest assured, you are not alone. I had never really heard of a TQX until the day Aura's title certificate came in the mail. For starters, it's an agility title. I'd heard rumor that the AKC had a title for a dog that qualified in Excellent B Standard, Excellent B Jumpers with Weaves, and Excellent B FAST all in the same day, ten times. But there was no evidence of this title on the awards record on the AKC website. When I asked AKC, they said that periodically they go through their records and note qualifiers for the TQX title, which means "Triple Q Excellent."*



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testicles. After the exam, the judge tells you to “Call your dog to heel.”

Finally there is the directed jumping exercise. This is the most fun for the dog. The dog and handler stand on one end of the ring. Two jumps are set 20 feet apart in the middle of the ring, a solid high jump and a bar jump. The judge tells you, “Send your dog.” You tell your dog, “go out,” and the dog is supposed to run straight through the middle of the two jumps to the precise center of the wall opposite you. When the dog is three feet from the wall, the handler tells the dog to “sit.” It must turn and sit facing the handler. There are penalties for not going out straight, not going out far enough, going out too far, not turning immediately, etc. Then the judge tells you which jump the dog should take. Taking the wrong jump is an NQ. Next, you repeat the exercise, taking the other jump. My dogs love this exercise. They get to run. They get to jump. There are about 50 ways to mess it up, too.

Aura’s “first” that I am proudest of after our lonely OTCh point, is her OM1. The Obedience Master (OM) is a relatively new title, earned by qualifying with scores above 190 in Open B and Utility B classes, after a dog has earned their Utility title. A dog needs to earn 60 points each from the Open and Utility B classes, and the remaining 80 points can come from either or both. It is hard to get those Utility OM points. It’s a nice title because, unlike the OTCh, you don’t have to compete with anyone else to get it, yet it requires you to do a pretty decent job in the ring.

To me, Aura’s oddest “first” is her TQX agility title (see New Moon sidebar). Ten different days, she had qualifying runs in all three Excellent B agility classes, to earn her Triple Q Excellent.

- To qualify in Excellent B Standard, a dog completes 18 to 20 agility obstacles, including the A frame, dog walk, table, teeter, weave poles, chute, and an assortment of jumps and tunnels set with traps and turns. To qualify, you have to be “perfect” and under the standard course time of 55-65 seconds. Any fault on an AKC Excellent course is a non-qualifying score.
- Excellent B Jumpers with Weaves (JWW) is similar, but there are no contact obstacles, only jumps, maybe tunnels, and always weave poles. Dogs are allowed less time for JWW, usually 34-44 seconds. All obstacles must be completed correctly and the weaves have to be done right the first time.
- Finally, there is FAST (Fifteen and Send Time), a game of distance handling and speed. To qualify in Excellent B FAST, the handler and dog earn 60 points, partially by making their own course through obstacles which are each assigned a point value, and partially by completing a bonus. The three bonus obstacles are completed with the handler behind a send line, 20 feet back from the obstacles. The dog also completes the “Finish” jump. The FAST time limit is 32 seconds.

Aura has managed to qualify all three classes in one day, ten times. It does feel like an accomplishment. I’ll never have another like her, all grace and consistency. She makes it look easy, and I am certain that she is my gift from the doGs after completing a MACH on her father Atka. That was a “first,” too, as Atka was the first male mal MACH (say it three times fast). Of all the advanced titles I have put on Alaskan malamutes to date, Atka’s MACH remains the single hardest thing I have ever done. None of Aura’s firsts even come close.



## Conversation Starter

*“Firsts” are fun, but ultimately the joy for me is the conversation. This is why my true passion is obedience. As much fun as it is to show in agility, there is so much more to “talk” about and so much more commitment needed from the dog for the “discussion” in obedience. It’s the difference between a chat in the bleachers at a ball game and a heart-to-heart conversation over wine in a fine restaurant. Either way, if you love the conversation, there are always “firsts” to be had. If you have never earned a Utility Dog title, that “first” is a pretty amazing journey. If your passion, too, is the conversation, give it a go! Our mals can do it!*

