

Trials and Tribulations

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF TRAINING ALASKAN MALAMUTES



Kim found tricks make a great performance competition warm-up for her mals Zayk and Will.

Trick and Treat

Top Ten Performance competitor Kim Manassa explains how teaching tricks helps her dogs maintain focus during competition.

My malamute Zayk

(U-CD U-AG1 ALCH DcMals Rebel Alliance CGC, CDX, RE, NA, NAJ, NAP, NJP, OAP, OJP, AJP, AXP, WWPD) started his obedience career in 2004, and quickly earned his Canine Good Citizen and Companion Dog titles. We started training for open competition

right away; little did I know how long it would take to get his Companion Dog - Excellent (CDX) obedience title! He also started weight pulling, rally, and agility while we were working on his CDX. He was easily earning titles every year, but still no CDX.

We took a break for a while due to some health problems and rehabilitation for Zayk. When we returned to obedience competition, I realized that Zayk was shutting

down and starting to stress whenever he went into the open ring. In that moment, I realized that I had to change my methods.

The Secret of My Success

Take the “natural comedian” trait in your malamute, and put it to work for you.

Step-by-Step

Take a Bow (pictured above)

Start with your dog in a basic stand. Next, while saying “take a bow,” support his rear and coax him into a bow position with treats. When you are training Take a Bow, never reward the dog if his rear hits the ground. You will be surprised how quickly they learn to bow, if a jackpot is not given when the dog mistakenly drops.

Two Feet

I use the cue “two feet” to get my dogs to put two feet up on anything. Put your arm out, say “two feet” with a treat in your hand, and reward when the dog jumps up and lands two feet on your arm. I use this trick often in agility; with my dog’s two feet up, I use a second treat to get him to stretch his back.



Teaching Bang

Start with a basic "down" command.



Next, pick a command for lying flat on his side, mine is "put your head down."



Reward, reward, reward for the correct behavior...this is very important!



Pictured on right - Add the gun and the word "bang." Now the dog will associate the gun and the term "bang" with lying on his side. Below is the finished product; the gun now means "lay on your side when I say 'bang.'"



How I Train Fun Tricks



Here I am adding the gun and the word "bang" to my training. I use a treat after saying "bang" to slide the dog into the down on his side position.

I cannot express how important it is to teach tricks to your performance dogs. I have found over the years that de-stressing your dogs before stepping into that obedience or other performance ring can help make your run successful. Let's face it, malamutes are not your typical obedience type of dog and in most cases, are very comical. So why not take the natural comedian in them and put it to use?

I started trick training at home just to see how many things I could teach Zayk and just for fun. What I soon realized is how much he enjoyed doing the tricks - no stress, all rewards - and he made me laugh every single time! If there was a treat, he would just start offering tricks without being told. Zayk's

"bag-o-tricks" now includes "Take a bow," "Give me skin" (aka gimme five), "Give me two skins" (aka gimme ten), "Circle right," "Circle left," "Two feet" (for this one he jumps up on my arm, I use it to stretch him for agility), and "Roll over." His best performance is "Bang," complete with a waving arm that will eventually die.

I started doing tricks to relax Zayk before entering the obedience ring, and it worked. We walked into the open ring for the last time in 2008, earning the last leg for his CDX title. We moved up to utility training last year, and Zayk LOVES utility. Why, you ask? Because it gives him the chance to be the secret clown that he is. He currently knows all the exercises for utility but

lacks confidence on “go out.” I suspect that as soon as he masters that, he will finish his title easily. Our first love is agility, and I always use tricks before he goes out on the course. I like to warm him up and get him excited; performing tricks accomplishes this for him.

Tricks have become very helpful for our everyday life, as well. For example, “put your head down” for the Bang trick comes in handy when I want to clean my dog’s teeth. I use “two feet” when I want them to put two feet up on the grooming table. There are so many possibilities to train your dogs; their learning capabilities are endless!

In this article, I provide step-by-step instructions for some of our tricks. They are easy to teach, since malamutes are food driven. Yes, use food to reward while you train. You will enjoy much quicker responses. I also use a clicker with food, so I can mark the desired behavior as soon as it happens. Have fun!



Teaching Circle

Lead the dog’s nose with a treat where you want it to go, then give it a name - I use “circle.” Go all the way around and then treat. Teach both directions.



Bloopers

Readers share their Malamute Moments

Perseverance Rewarded



Photographs of Gideon and Lia courtesy of Raissa Hinman.

The above photo of Lia (CH MACH 2 Arctidawn’s East of Atka UD, WTD, WWPDX) and her favorite Junior handler, my son Gideon, was taken at the biggest fiasco of an agility weekend we ever went to! We drove 700 miles round-trip to Wisconsin at Christmas time, only to NQ all but one course, competing with three dogs, over a four-day weekend! Lia has always had a few, er, “table issues,” and her refusal to do the table is what NQ’d this run. Pleading with Lia is an 11-year-old Gideon; Lia is four. But perseverance pays off: the picture on the right shows Gideon (at 16) and Lia (at 9) winning Best Junior Handler at the 2010 Eukanuba Invitational!

~ **Raissa Hinman**



About the Author

Hailing from Illinois where she lives with her fiancé Joe, Kim Manassa says her interest in malamutes began when she saw Tyler (BIS BISS CH Nanukes Take No Prisoners, ROM) competing in the Eukanuba dog show on television. She thought “what a beautiful animal - I will have one someday!”, never suspecting that she would one day own a Tyler grandson.

Kim credits her first mal Meisha for bringing her love of the breed into full bloom and teaching her many life lessons. Her second mal, Zayk, is the Tyler grandson, and Kim’s first performance dog. When an obedience instructor told Kim she was wasting her time because mals cannot do obedience, Kim decided to start



competing - and the rest is history. Zayk currently has 17 titles to his name and is still going strong!

An AMCA member for three years, Kim now trains for obedience, conformation, rally, weight pulling, and agility. She also dabbles in dock diving and Newfoundland water work with her young dog, Will.