

TRAINING YOUR CAIRN

by Jackie Burr



Anya, Millie, Woody, Topaz, Jamie, Katie and Sassie on holiday in Sutherland

Why is it that you see all the dog owners of other breeds in the local park walking calmly with a somewhat sedate and “obedient” dog? I mean, let’s take the most likely breeds we Cairn owners regularly encounter – Retrievers, Labradors, Border Collies, Dalmations – they all walk so beautifully beside their owners, apparently without the use of leads. Then, along comes the Cairn and BAM! All chaos is let loose! The Cairn has decided that it is much more fun to run to the local dog than it is to listen to the person who has just picked up his poop; and then, whilst you are left apologising for your Cairn’s disruptive behaviour, he is away after the next dog, just to see what kind of stir he can cause. The problem is that Cairns know they are quick; they know that they can cause a fair bit of trouble without actually getting caught. They’ve mastered the art over many years and will continue to perfect it.

Our breed has over a hundred years of experience in speed, agility, focus, listening skills and scent work. These guys were bred for it. After so many years of effectively being out of work, they are giving themselves the work that they were bred to do in the first place. So what better basis for giving them back the work that they so desire? Let’s give them back the thrill of the chase, and the scents of the great outdoors. They are quite content with our substitutions for them. Take them out into the field and hide their favourite toy and send them out to scent it for you; play fetch with a toy or ball; take them on your morning run with you. There are no limits to the games and tasks you can find to work your Cairn Terrier.

The sense of content your Cairn will gain does come at a cost to you. It requires a lot of patience and a lot of trust. This never comes easily, but we all want our Cairns to be happy and live as accepted members of our society.

Training is best done in a quiet room in your house, or in the garden, to start with. This way he will gain your trust and you can gain his. If you get a Cairn Terrier as a puppy at around 9 weeks, he will not be free to leave the vicinity of your property in case of infection. Use this time as the foundation of what I would call intense training. Everything you communicate to him at this stage is going to be the fundamental training for when you get into that park or dog training class. Whatever you decide you wish to train towards, it will have to be consistent right from the start: the same command that you use; the same body language; the same tone of

voice; the same calm approach every time. The only thing you will change is the reward – for example, change the treat or toy you use on occasions to keep that keenness to work for you.

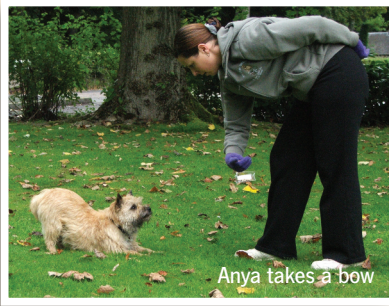
Your young puppy will be on 3-4 meals a day. What a fantastic opportunity for you to do recall and a sit, all at the same time! If you have an older Cairn and would like to start training, this will work the same way. Old dogs DO learn new tricks. The only difference is that the older Cairn will have learnt a few unwanted behaviours, such as being noisy or jumping up at feeding time, or running away when called. You must always ensure that you are calm and consistent. Wait until the unwanted behaviour stops, then reward. If your Cairn is not great at recall, go into a quiet room and do sit-stay and recall exercises, over and over until he comes 10/10.

Make yourself appealing to your Cairns. Have a favourite toy again, or the ultimate favourite food treat, but remember to keep the treats minute in size. There are two reasons for this: you will be rewarding at every good movement from your Cairn to start with so you don’t want to fill up his tummy before you have even begun, and we do not want a nation of obese Cairns!

It all seems very exciting to go on and do all the “fancy” things like agility or advanced obedience, or heelwork to music, but the basics will have to be covered all the same, and whilst you are doing all the basics, your Cairn’s body is developing. Any good agility class will not accept dogs under 10 months and even then they will not encourage any high jumping until at least 2 years of age. During this period you can attend a good obedience school with your Cairn. That way you can guarantee that you will be the one in the agility class with a dog that focuses on you and not on the others around you.



Katie



Heelwork to music with a Cairn is different from that which you see on television with the working sheepdogs. You have to work with what you have. A Cairn has not the height that a sheepdog has to jump over your shoulder whilst standing. Bring it down

to his level. You can do this by crouching to his size. A Cairn seems to love "close" work where he is perhaps weaving in and out of your legs or "reversing" towards you from a stay position. All the commands that are taught for obedience can be used in the



heelwork to music, agility, out in the field, or just for peaceful co-existence.

As we know, each Cairn is an individual and what will work with one may have an

opposite effect on the other. It is important to use the methods and tools that will suit your Cairn. My Cairns can all do the same basic obedience, but I may not have gone about it in the same way with each of them, and sometimes it may take a little longer to get results. But this is where the patience and consistency will come in.



One of my Cairns (Woody) is very "bouncy", and anyone with a more animated Cairn will know that such a dog's listening skills are a little slower to develop! So with him I stepped up my pace a little and, so that I could train him for basic obedience, we went to agility. He could get the fast pace he wanted and at the same time I got the control I needed. He had to do a sit-stay at the start and a recall at every obstacle and at the end of the course. Use the skills your dog already has and adapt.

I have had so many Cairn owners ask me about the recall. Naturally, a pack will stay together. Use this natural trait and work with it. From tiny, a puppy will follow you, but as he gets more experienced in life, he begins to investigate further. He is a terrier, and, as Cairns owners know, terriers love to chase. USE this natural instinct!



When he is young, in the home, practise taking back a ball or toy. I like to use a plastic practice golf ball when they are small and a tennis ball when they grow. He will instinctively chase the ball. It is what

he was bred for. The trick is getting him to bring it back! Don't stress too much if he doesn't come back straight away. Little by little works best. Praise him for picking up the ball, and gradually he will pick it up and take it back.



When he starts to come back with the ball well, use this as the "come" command. Timing is vital in this also. Dogs live in the "here and now", so if you praise even a few seconds too late, you have wasted your time and your dog has received a free treat and has learned nothing. If your puppy doesn't seem interested, it is probably because the eyesight is not developed enough to be able to track the toy. Dogs' eyesight is movement orientated. The ball becomes a focus for them because they get a natural high from it. They get the chase, the kill and the praise.

However, once you take your puppy out, there is far more "cool" stuff to smell and you suddenly seem uninteresting to your dog. I keep my young Cairns on an extending lead so that I still have control if I need it. I only use the "stop" button on the lead if I really need it. Otherwise the puppy is free to do what he wants within reason. Eventually, the puppy will not need that line any more. In this time you should have earned your Cairn's trust. If he trusts that he will receive a good reward on return, he will willingly return more quickly.

Don't over-fuss your Cairn with touch affection on return. The Cairn thinks fast and moves fast, so most Cairns will have already thought of something else to do by the time you go for a second pat on the head! With enough patience and consistency, you can incorporate most of the basic commands: 'sit', 'stay' before you throw the ball; 'fetch' when you want him to retrieve the ball; 'come', or 'sit', or 'down' and 'leave' to get your ball back.

A tip on recall to work along with the tennis ball game is to feed the main meal of the day on return from the walk. This also works along with a dog's natural instincts. They hunt, then eat, then sleep. Use feeding time as a recall exercise. Make up your dog's food, then, instead of just placing it on the floor where you stand, walk across to the other side of the room whilst calling your dog's name. He will associate his name with the most important time of day for him! You can also incorporate other commands. Call your Cairn and request the 'sit' or 'down' before placing the dish on the floor.

The Cairn Terrier is a master of negotiation. He stays focused on what he wants – the "treat", whilst never losing sight of what you require of him in return. Offer the Cairn a "pricey" reward, such as a slice of dried liver or chicken, and you may have yourself a deal!

