



## *Article Reprint*

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*"On the Seminar Trail with Susan Garrett, Part I: Puppies and Agility"*  
*by Terry Long*

I am an admitted seminar junkie. I log over 100 hours per year in continuing education by attending a variety of seminars in pursuit of the latest and greatest information about dog training and behavior modification. With more and more people on the seminar circuit across the country, it has become increasingly difficult to decide where to spend my seminar dollars.

One of my decisions this year was to attend a Susan Garrett seminar scheduled for March. At first, I was going to sign up for a working spot for the two-day advanced portion of the six-day-long seminar. Then I reconsidered, rationalizing that since I teach agility, I would benefit from learning more about Garrett's instructing techniques. I bit the bullet and signed up for the entire six days, auditing the two days on introductory agility skills, one day on puppy training, one day on intermediate handling, and worked with my dog Moka for the two-days on advanced handling. Thirty-three pages of notes later, I am glad I did.

### *Puppy Training*

As many of you know, I have had puppy-envy for a long time. But, with four dogs in the household and, often, one of my client's dogs boarding for training as well, I've got my hands full (my two cats agree!). However, after seeing all the things Garrett teaches her pups before ever getting them near agility equipment, I'm more eager than ever to start out fresh with an eight-week old. Since that's not in my immediate future, I'll share here some of the things Garrett teaches at her seminars.

### *Philosophical Foundation*

- ✓ *"Work is play and play is work."* Huh? Part of Garrett's philosophy is that whenever we are interacting with our dogs we should be fun and we should be working. There should be no distinction between the two. For example, during a play session with your puppy, it should be fun, but you should be teaching at the same time. Tug of war? Sit first. Play hard. Relinquish. Sit. Play hard. And so on. Working on sit/stay? Play the 1-2-3 game where you work on sit/stay in a fun, motivational way. One of the things Garrett is respected for is her expertise in motivating dogs of all ages, breeds, and temperaments. Part of what she does is to make training and interacting with their owners a real blast for the dog—imagine what kind of a dog you'd have if you started this from day one with a new pup!

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*"On the Seminar Trail with Susan Garrett, Part I: Puppies and Agility" (continued)*

- ✓ *"Being positive doesn't mean permissive." Garrett is a clicker trainer in the sense that it is more than just a technique to use here and there; it is a philosophy based on using positive reinforcement to build a relationship with the dog. However, she is very clear that she is the antithesis of a permissive trainer. She works very hard at being consistent and clear in training her dogs. If her one-year old pup Decaf dances out of the crate without permission? Back into the crate she goes. Try again. Break a stay on the start line? Ooops! Agility privileges revoked. Back in the crate. Bring another dog out. Try again later.*
- ✓ *"Dogs don't make decisions." An integral part of Garrett's training approach is that she makes the decisions, her dogs don't. That applies to initiating play, dropping the toy, taking the toy, getting out of the crate and most important for agility enthusiasts, whether or not to take a particular obstacle. This concept is closely integrated with "Work is play and play is work" in that you are always the one directing interaction with your pup. Another well-known clicker trainer, Sue Ailsby, calls this "leading the dance."*
- ✓ *"Punishment (timeouts) is only fair when there is a history of positive reinforcement." This means that it is our responsibility as trainers to ensure that we are telling the puppy "Yes!" a lot more than we are telling them "No" by giving them timeouts and other messages that what they are doing is wrong. Traditional training focuses on corrections and teaching "No!" Garrett's approach is to have a rich history of catching the puppy in the act of doing good things. She does this by breaking behaviors down so that the puppy can easily be successful. For example, if you have a barking terrier puppy, clicking and treating with a high rate of reinforcement for no barking will be more efficient than yelling at the puppy, squirting lemon juice in his mouth, etc. If you don't teach a puppy what is right, how can he possibly know what works?*

*Food for thought, eh? Next time, I'll outline some of the games and basic agility skills she teaches.*