

Agility Dog In The Making

They say that anything worth having is worth working for. On October 14, 2007 my parents brought home the new member of our family that would soon be known as "Charlie". I was 11 years old at the time and couldn't wait to have a new puppy in the house.

Long time ESS breeders and judges, Keith and Denise Vanhousen owned Charlie's father (Vankeiden's Nothing But Net OA AXJ "Jordan") and the only thing that stuck out to me as my mom got off the phone with puppy arrangements was the last thing she said before she hung up "Denise said that the father of the litter was an agility dog!". I didn't know what Dog Agility was at the time and I quickly began to submerge myself in videos, books and webpages. Needless to say I was absolutely taken by the concept and had already convinced myself that I needed to learn everything before Charlie was even be old enough to participate.

I'll never forget reading my agility beginners book for hours on end, looking at the pictures and hoping one day that would be me. I printed out the AKC agility rules, had the perfect slip lead picked out and was already addicted to looking at www.cleanrun.com. At first, when I told both of my parents that I was planning on doing dog agility, they both had a fit. My mom thought it was "way too dangerous" and my dad thought it was just something to waste money on that I would eventually get bored with. I don't think any of us at the time could have even predicted how deeply I would get involved.

By the time Charlie was four months old, I had him jumping over homemade jumps in our living room for his ½ cup of dinner every night. Realizing that I was alone in my pursuit, I began to read all the books I could get my

hands on and tried to think of ways to get my hands on some agility equipment. I saved up my dog sitting money for three months to buy a Be-



CHARLIE 4 MONTHS OLD - MAKE SHIFT JUMP

giner Dog Agility set off the internet that included one single jump, a tire and a set of six weave poles. I think that's when my parents started to realize I wasn't playing around.

I began to train Charlie all by myself when he was 6 months old in our front yard with a few homemade jumps, a plank for a teeter and my one real piece of agility equipment that I owned; a tire. Charlie absolutely loved training and we would spend hours outdoors on hot summer days playing agility. I begged and pleaded for months and finally when Charlie turned a year old my mom drove me fifteen minutes down the road to my first agility lesson. After one time I was totally hooked.

Charlie came along really fast and I spent endless amounts of time in my own yard with my five obstacles that I had constructed (with my dad's help) training and training my little liver dog. Charlie was very fast in learning and after two weeks of constant training I had taught him the weave poles all by myself. My parents soon began to see how much I had worked for this and began to take me to class on a regular basis. My hard work, persistence paid off and I began to persuade my parents

that Charlie and I were ready to show. Before I knew it, I had him entered in his first agility trial in February of 2009, at the age of 17 months and I at



"CHRLIE" TAKING IT ALL IN STRIDE

the age of 13. But as good stories always go, it was nothing short of a disaster. Every run would start out good and then about three quarters of the way through it would end in victory laps (the dog, not me) wrong jumps, zooming around the ring and last but not least a complete run out of the ring each time with no intention to come back. My mom took me to the show that weekend and I'll never forget the feeling of being totally alone. I didn't



"CHRLIE" JUMPING FOR JOY

know anyone, I really didn't know what I was doing and I never thought I would make it this far. On top of that, the trial ran so late that we didn't get out on Saturday until 9:00 PM! My mom told me in the hotel room that night that we couldn't stay for Charlie's second run on Sunday, because I had school in the morning and we still had a 2 hour drive home. Finally, after failing

our first run on Sunday, my mom took pity on me and agreed to stay to let me try one last time. After an extremely nerve-racking run with three tries on the weave poles, Charlie held it together enough to get a first place in jumpers with weaves, our first Q ever!

Our next few trials were just as disastrous, including the agility trial at our local club, The Dog Obedience Training



"CHRLIE" AND AMANDA - OUR FIRST AGILITY RIBBONS

Club of Rochester, NY. One of Charlie's runs he decided to take the #13 cone from the weave poles and run around the ring with the cone over his face! Most of all I remember just starting out and being so frustrated with him, getting so upset when he would misbehave for me and not listening to anything I (thought I) was telling him to do. I didn't get that I was a new handler and that we wouldn't be perfect.

I never, ever to this day have trained with anyone on a regular basis. I come and go in different classes, or rent the ring with friends. What I have picked up over the years has been a complete blend of known styles and personal creations. As we grew as a team, we got more consistent and we developed our own handling style that worked out just right for us. One of the biggest struggles the first year I ran Charlie was his pure, unbridled joy. I could get through a JWW course no problem, but standard was just too much fun for him to handle! As a consequence, it took us a year to get out of novice standard and



at the same time we were already in excellent jumpers. Late that year Charlie finally got his novice standard title and to stump me even more, he turned around the very next weekend and got his open standard title the first three times out! Charlie began to Q consistently and on June 4, 2010 Charlie got his first MACH points.

It has been a long three years, but what I have learned and seen in those



"CHRLIE" AND AMANDA - MACH GOAL ACHIEVED

years I would not trade for anything. I have met so many people, done so much, failed so much, and most of all learned from my mistakes. The journey has been absolutely amazing, and anyone who doesn't see it that way is missing out on so much. I will be forever grateful to all my friends, family, teachers, and many other people that have supported me and help me along the way. I could have never made it to so many trials without the constant support from my parents.

Thank you to my Agility family, from that first time I stood on the start line (without electronic timers, without a leash rule, with a sit or down on the table) I never ever imagined I would ever make it this far. This is more than a journey for me, this is an adventure and I'm happy to share it with so many of you all. Really special thanks to all of the people who drove me to shows, road tripped with me, encouraged me and provided endless support at the dozens of trials we've done together. Also thank you to those people who came up to me to give me tips or pointers, without knowing it you have



given me all the contributing factors of my success.

This is not the end of the road but instead the beginning of a new journey. I can never, ever thank Denise & Keith VanHousen and Charlie's breeder, Rhonda McMaster thoroughly enough for my heart dog. Also, thanks to Denise & Keith for providing me with endless amounts of support and guidance along the way. Last but not least, "Thank you Charlie Brown " for being an absolutely amazing agility dog and teacher. You were always there for me;



"CHARLIE" - SWEET REWARD

you let me know when I was wrong and celebrated with me when I was right. We have gone through thick and thin, many years and changes in life. Charlie taught me more than I could have ever imagined and has shown me glory and humility which are infinite. After all, he is more than a dog and we are more than a pair . . . we are a team.

Amanda Brown lives in Penfield NY with "Charlie"-MACH UKC Alt. CH Talk To Me RE, MX, MXS, MXJ, MJS, MXF, URO1, CL-3 and "Eric" UKC CH Esquire's Rhythm Of The Night CD, RAE, OA, NAJ, NF, CA, URO1

This story was originally published on Facebook by Amanda Brown and has been adapted for print by Anne Hutchinson.