Two bundles of canine joy prove big challenge

Three of US Boxed!

A week or so before I collected my pair of pups I read this!

‘Don't purchase two puppies together, even though some breeders remark how wonderful this can be. It's not. ‘It simply makes training much more difficult.

‘The two pups will form a little pack and constantly compete with one another. Their natural attention will not be focused on you.’

My heart sank!

I needed a challenge in my life. The Kennel Club definition appealed.

‘This clever, loyal, exuberant, and fun-loving dog is ideal for their energetic owner. ’I was attracted to their proud upstanding attitude, the forward thrusting jaw but most of all the life-long playfulness. I was undaunted by the fact that ‘this highly intelligent dog can be a handful to train.

Germany is the ancestral home. The Boxer was developed in the 19th Century and its ancestry is thought to include mastiff-type dogs such as the Great Dane and the Bulldog.

This is a working dog, used today as a police and military search-and-rescue dog and for guard work, the consequence of its endurance and courage.

The litter arrived in the world in Aughrim to a horse household on the 19th of December 2019 boasting two males and five females. I eagerly agreed the purchase of the boys, brindle and red. Things went belly up when the red was flattened by his mother shortly afterwards.

While I back myself to find ways to handle the ‘bull’ in the male I come up short on tolerance when confronted with the guile of the female! What I knew for certain was that I wanted a litter pair to play together!

Eleven months on the planet, I watched my ‘delicates' cover the wide open spaces of the beach on regular trips to Brittis Bay. Their joy is intoxicating. I find myself reflecting on why we succeeded so far…..

***Note to self***

1. **Time** - Full on to each dog everyday

2. **Organisation** - Must be one step ahead all the time. Otherwise overthrown!

3. **Absolute commitment** - Remember the cone confusion crisis after neutering and the fear that his barking would annoy neighbours.

4. **Perseverance** - Just when I thought I had made it my boy succeeded in delivering a late complication the like of which the experienced vet had not seen before. Contrary to his sister who was stoic in the aftermath of major surgery a few weeks earlier he proceeded to recklessly eat himself! When valium proved ineffective, bleary eyed at best, he was consigned to the ‘State Pen' for three nights. With nothing else to do he set about impressing the vet!

5. **Patience** - I waited for the human bond to develop. It had to be earned! At first it felt very much them and me. The dominant bitch was in charge of the canines. I only stepped in when she set her sights on taking charge of me!

6. **See the funny side!** - These pups bring the *‘Briget Jones'* in me bubbling up to the surface like a geyser! At times when I find myself batting defensively and they have me well and truly on the back foot the only thing left to do is laugh! Then, they look at me in that slightly incomprehensible way that makes me feel well and truly idiotic!

I set out to end up with two independent dogs. The key was for each to be comfortable alone. This turned out to be easy. Phew! Fact is in an urban environment I couldn't manage walking the pack so it was one of them and me from early days. While she enjoyed her little piece of me he adapted to depending on himself for company in the garden. They sleep in separate giant crates beside each other. His is pristine.

While dining outside *Voici* restaurant in Rathmines in early Autumn with one of them the waiter remarked ‘I wish my friends would get as excited when they see me!’ One of the joys is to watch them greet each other after spending some time apart! It is as good as it gets in an emotional life!

They travel by trike locally, at first together but now apart. Reason. His 26kgs puts me to the pin of my collar! At first they brought the place down barking their heads off but now they sit regally enjoying the view like the quintessential lord of the manor! It's together in the car to the beach!

Nothing could have prepared me for what seemed to happen overnight at five months. My pride in how well they were both trained would burst forth when we were out together walking to heel! Imagine the mortification when I found myself being pulled about by a force of nature looking to all in sundry as at best untamed!

Sex hormones combined with new found physical strength and full on teething catapulted the three of us into outer space. I cried ‘help’ to the market for training aids. The harness was only effective with two leads because of his strength at the head. There were days when it was such an achievement to get back home that I wondered if I would have the courage to take him out again ever!

By day I ate humble pie. I woke up at night sweating at the prospect of another day of him! At first I was uneasy when the vet stepped in because I wanted to keep him intact! The experienced professional enlightened me. He said ‘if he gets a taste of it he's lost forever’. Why would I want to struggle to manage a frustrated dog who would need a strong man handler half my age in the wide open spaces of Aughrim to live his manhood?

Before herself I was Bernardine Cantwell, 58, intolerant of fools but even tempered! Now, scrap the even tempered! It seemed that this hitherto unknown long dormant volcano started spitting hot molten rocks. It was the way she might look at me with that air of lofty defiance in the eyes that men find drop dead gorgeous on the street that ignited me! I was piggy in the middle of a pair from hell!

My knight in shining armour was late for her appointment in the nail bar across the road when she extolled the virtues of a collar! She had seen me ‘trying my best' with him on previous manicures. A Boxer owner of four generations saved my bacon as she slowly spelled out ‘C..a..n..n..y'

You could say I trained them not to use it! Once they learned to wear a nose band, Canny takes it's rightful dormant place nestling high up the neck while I walk them off their regular Ace wide leather collar. Only when they stop listening to me does it kick into action! Life on the street is so much more exciting than me but when my warning is ignored and the restriction imposed they think again!! No more marooned half an hour from home without a paddle!

I must acknowledge what they had to contend with in me…..

***Note to Self***

1. **Geriatric handler for our breed!** So much strength. So much energy. Restricted by the physical capacity of a late quinquagenarian female!

2. **House built in 1841.** The presence of canines unknown in living memory! Worse still, occupied by five Persian cats three of whom are long in the tooth!

3. **Pack management in force!** Four ‘Time Out' points strategically positioned in our patch! When the pack gets going one of us is tied up for a minute or so! Fun spoiler almighty!

Withers to toe he stands a proud 63 Kennel Club maximum. She trails by 5, centimetres and kilograms. I have felt my way with them. When the dust began to settle at nine months the early training resurfaced again. By eleven months I had the confidence to take the plunge! Off the lead in a public park! A terrifying prospect five months previous was now doable! The vet said ‘I only give a dog a treat when he comes back to me when I set him free.

Otherwise ‘good dog’ is what he gets.’

The enormity of the step! One by one, little by little along the banks of the Dodder I released them to the big bad world! The squeaky toy I used to associate to the whistle at eight weeks now has its squeak surgically removed (and chewed) by the pack! I am chuffed that they come to the whistle at home and away. My irrational fears of them jumping into the river or charging after any moving object and never seeing them again abated. The real test remained. Setting the pack loose in Brittis Bay!

They have different strengths. I admire and respect her. She initiates play as passionately as she works! Yes! I feel like a police handler when we’re out together! She, avidly sniffing the wet ground in her turquoise raincoat, fanning out to cover the river bank off the lead, all business as I watch.

Now, he and I walk out together couple-like! Mutual pride. Mutual respect. Mutual pleasure. Mutual love.

***Note to Self:-***  The days when I visualised myself being arrested on a charge of cruelty to animals! The way some self righteous types would look at me! Like all training manuals dealing with reality on the ground is a different story. I had tried all the gentle ways they proffered. Seldom, but there were times during those zany months when I had to haul him across the road when he stubbornly refused to budge from the middle regardless of the approaching car.

A few weeks ago when the river was high, as we approached the weir I observed a woman come onto the river bank with two small dogs off the lead. Instinctively I put him back on his. We walked forward, my big boy and me. Just the sight of him threw the rusty coloured small dog into a tizz! So much so that he capitulated dramatically into the fast moving water and seemed to disappear. The woman panicked! My heart was in my mouth.

Although Karl had done nothing other than be Karl I felt irrationally the baddy of the piece! The woman ran frantically with her other dog in pursuit. People were coming out of the woodwork to assist. Karl and I stood stuck to the ground as we watched the fast river but no sign of Rusty! Time seemed to stand still. What a relief! A few hundred metres down stream the dog was shaking himself into recovery! It took me a hell of a lot longer!

On occasion, when he felt like crucifying me, he would stand resolute and firm in the middle of the five crossroads of Kenilworth. Once inside the house I have been known to let fly uttering expletives that made him cower! As part of her cycle of dominance of me attempts, she would simply stop as we seemed to be walking along nicely. When verbal encouragement failed miserably and after numerous ‘stops ‘ I resorted to pulling her! The voice in my head that beats me down mercilessly had a field day those months!

3 - The way they respond to the sound of horses hooves as they pass by to the yard down the road.

Through it all I watched them play together joyfully. Here, socialisation, exercise and happiness happen spontaneously. A microcosm of the world as Marymeade was for Miss Marple.

No walking carpets territory! Boxers put it up to you every day. Once a situation has been resolved one may be forgiven for mistakenly thinking it’s plain sailing. The Boxer always has another trick up his

sleeve. Be alert. Act immediately. Lead regardless. Most of all have fun!

References

Colin Tennant – Mini Encyclopaedia of Dog Training

& Behaviour, page 28

The Complete Dog Breed Book -page 88

Vet – Michael Sadlier, Beechwood Vets, Ranelagh

Breeder – Lacey, Aughrim

Canny collar – Simple to fit and easy to use. It is kind to your dog, safe and effective

***set the stage >>>***