

Ruff Regimens

Working Out with Your Dog Can Be a Whole Lot of Fun and Healthy for the Both of You

You awake slowly, the thought of your daily morning run rising in your consciousness like an air bubble through oil. You stretch reflexively but instantly relax; your body is not yet ready to obey. Somewhere deep inside you, a chain of excuses begins to formulate: I deserve a break ... I'll sleep in today and run extra tomorrow ... My exercise partner will understand ... She needs a rest too ...

And then, suddenly, lucidity is delivered with one big, wet tongue across the face; your dog is your exercise partner, and, no, she doesn't understand, nor does she want any more rest. It's morning, and she knows what that means; lick, whine, and nudge until you're up and ready to exercise together.

With a partner to motivate you when you're feeling slack and to guilt-trip you when you're feeling downright lazy, the chances that you'll reach your training goals increase dramatically when your exercise regimen is a tandem one. Make that partner your consistently energetic pooch with a resolute bark and an expression that can sear through the most lethargic moods; add the bonus of knowing you're giving her all the benefits of exercise that you enjoy — better health, boosted immune system, longer life, and, at least in her case, decreased chances of chewing up the furniture — and you've struck workout gold.

Just as you should consult your physician before beginning any new training program, visit the vet's office to ensure your dog is up to whatever you have in mind. The possibilities are numerous, so pick something that you're both inclined toward anyway and that suits your dog's age and health.

Running

Young dogs are better suited as a sprinter's companion; they haven't yet learned to pace themselves. Older or overweight dogs, of course, probably won't have the stamina for anything more than a brisk walk, but for the adolescent or adult dog in good shape, running can be the perfect shared activity. The Buddy System (\$18-\$37, 888-363-2818, buddysys.com) is designed for hands-free control of your pet for just this purpose. You wear a one-inch-wide adjustable nylon belt from which two movable loops are suspended. An adjustable nylon leash reaches from one of your belt loops to a swivel hook that you clip on your dog's collar or harness and the two of you are off to the races.



Although most dogs are natural-born swimmers, there is an inherent danger in swimming together: What if she should experience trouble while you're counting strokes or submerged? An underwater leash isn't practical, but the Ruff Wear K-9 Float Coat (\$49.95 & \$69.95, 888-Ruff-Wear, ruffwear.com) is, giving enough support to ensure safety but letting your dog still enjoy a water workout — and the pride of an eye-catching swimsuit.

Cycling

Unless your dog is a little miniature that can ride Toto-style — which is not recommended — you'll be doing the biking while your dog runs alongside. The Springer bicycle dog jogger (\$45, 801-532-7941, springerusa.com) is a bike-mounted leash with a safety release in case your dog heads for the wrong side of a lamppost. It also comes with a full set of instructions, so use of that quick-release mechanism can become a thing of the past.

Blading/Skiing

If your dog weighs more than 30 pounds and you're looking for a little more than encouragement from your pet, skijoring is your sport. Buy a basic skijor gear package (Free Spirit, \$86.95, 800-355-5575) that includes a wide, padded belt with leg straps to be worn around your hips and a towline that attaches from your belt to a tug lead, which clips onto a harness for your dog. Don Rollerblades or, in winter, cross-country skis and enjoy the comfort of the built-in shock absorption that cushions you from jerks as you mush across the plains ... or the park.

Hiking

You know that hiking can be intense on your knees and ankles — now imagine it barefoot. Dogs' footpads, although heartier than humans', aren't a match for rough or rocky terrain either. Cool Paws Productions' Tuff Paws dog hiking boots (Art's Pro Sports Apparel, 800-597-5109) are water-resistant and fleece-lined, provide protection from chafing and thorns, and are as adorable as they are necessary. ■

