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# From utility to sporting dogs

By Raymond Audemard

Since prehistoric time man has relied on dogs in a wide variety of situations for their physical capabilities of speed, endurance and agility. Dogs used as hunting partners were selected for their suitability for prevailing hunting techniques: dogs which can run after game, follow orders to lie down or stop when seeing game (pointer dogs), dogs capable of bringing game back in difficult conditions (retrievers), dogs small enough to enter burrows (terriers) etc.

As their partnership grew and developed, man and dog shared many new activities where the working element was gradually transformed into sports and leisure activities: this is illustrated amongst others by Greyhound racing, sled dogs, agility, show ring and many other canine activities.

Dogs have nevertheless maintained a true role as man's assistant in

many areas: detection of drugs, tracking, detection in avalanches or through rubble, assistance for the handicapped... utility dogs are present throughout the world.

## ■ Dogs can save lives: a historic complicity

The first record of dogs providing assistance date back to at least 120 B.C. as archeologists have found drawings that resemble a guide dog for the blind painted on the walls in Pompeii.

However, it wasn't until the First World War that the use of dogs for detecting people buried under collapsed buildings was developed. In the trenches that scarred the face of north eastern France, dogs were used for the first time to find soldiers buried after explosions. A second key phase was during the Second World War, when dogs helped find victims after the bombing of London.

Less than 10 years after the War, the USA, Switzerland and the Federal Republic of Germany established the first training schools for rescue activity.

## ■ Utility dogs all over the world

From the Malinois used by the Thai police's canine brigade to the New York fire department's dogs; from guide dogs for the blind trained by the Israeli charity 'Association for blind persons' to the Austrian police force's Rottweilers...utility dogs are relied upon for a vast array of purposes.

Typically, emergency and assistance services contact breeders to acquire animals with a selected working background which offer the qualities expected from a given breed (flair, endurance...) but also balanced character and sociability.

Over the past thirty years the intervention of canine brigades



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A working dog's performance is based on 4 basic elements: genetic selection, training, quality of the human-dog relationship and nutrition.



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The working dog must be ready for action at all times in any place of the world.

and teams after a catastrophe (earthquakes, collapsed buildings, Tsunami...) has become increasingly widespread.

International availability and the capacity of being operational in the most remote, isolated or devastated regions is closely correlated to the teams' level of training. This is partly why international meetings and competitions are regularly held to bring national teams together to test their skill levels, speed of reaction and efficacy.

■ **"A dog providing assistance is a dog in movement"**

This is a statement which will certainly not be contradicted by Dominique Grandjean, Professor of the National Veterinary School at Maisons-Alfort near Paris, Colonel of the Paris Fire Brigade, Head of the Canine Team and a sports and utility dog specialist.

*'A search and rescue dog must be ready 24/7. This means that it must always be in peak condition. Like any sportsman it must train and train again. But the difference compared to a human athlete is that it cannot tell us what it is feeling. It is our job to understand.*

*Intervention in catastrophes requires more than just being in good condition. The teams have to cope with highly stressful or hostile conditions: noise, crowds, engines, smoke, mud, cold, altitude... none of these are easy and yet the dog must be able to get on with the task in hand, immediately, anywhere on the planet.*

*Better knowledge of the dog's metabolism has enabled us to adapt techniques to dogs which were hitherto the reserve of sportsmen and sportswomen. Amongst all the factors it is certainly nutrition which has developed the furthest and has enabled canine brigades to make*

*so much progress. For example, by improving the yields of transformation of chemical energy into mechanical energy (effort) we reduce energy losses such as through higher body temperatures'.*



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Herding dogs, such as Border Collies, perform well in agility competitions.