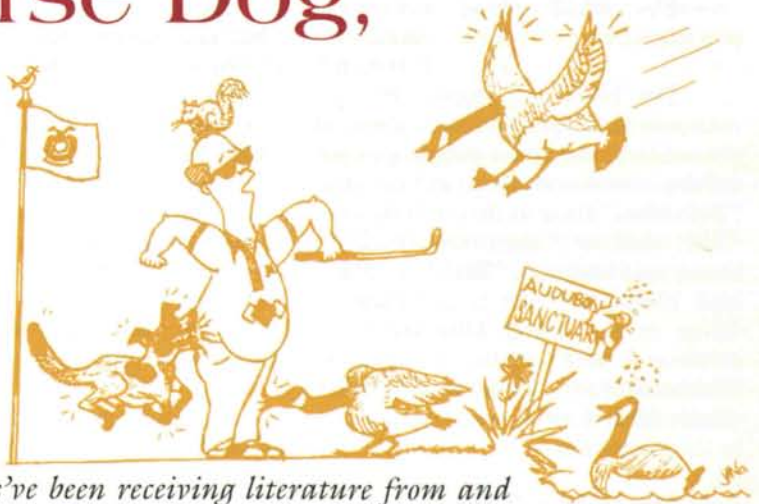


If You Are A Golf Course Dog, Read This!

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the June 1998 issue of On Course. We reprise it here with an all-new epilogue as an appropriate complement to our special "canine" issue.

One of the hottest topics in our industry right now is the use of dogs to control geese. Everyone seems to be getting into the act, as is evidenced by the "for-hire goose chasers" we've been receiving literature from and the Border collie barrage ("Send check or C.O.D. for \$3,000 before midnight tonight").



Don't get me wrong, I am a staunch advocate of pretty much everything that's fashionable, from environmentally friendly methods of pest removal to Audubon certification to cosmetic surgery. The thing about this is that with the means we are employing to achieve these ends, I have begun to take notice of the potential "risks" involved. If you were expecting a serious diatribe about the hazards and legal ramifications of dogs running rampant on your golf course, stop here—you ain't gettin' it. My purpose here is to entertain by relating a few experiences that some of our fellow goose-chasing, dog-using superintendents have had. So feel free to go to the "library," relax and don't forget to give your extra green-chairman copy to your dog. I suppose my own two pets, Dingo and Boomer, could fill this entire article with their exploits, but I am an equal-opportunity writer, so I have included others.

Okay, dogs, here's what NOT to do:

Do NOT chase, chew on or bury golf balls. My first season at Aurora started with a very good golfer and future green chairman having his approach shot at no. 13 stolen by Dingo, who then chewed it up and buried it. This could have been a nasty scene had it been a midseason money game; but luckily, it was a leisurely game with his wife, so it cost me a dozen Titleists as retribution.

Do NOT kill foxes, squirrels, ducklings or any other animals deemed "cute" by those plaid-clad humans you can see only in black-and-white—**ESPECIALLY** don't do it in their presence! If you feel the urge to grab and shake something, make it a paint can.

Do NOT bite people unless they are in polyester suits and carrying a huge briefcase full of aerosol cans. No

matter how adept you are at scaring off geese, members will not accept tooth marks on their backsides. Boomer has done this twice to my knowledge, and both times the victim was former club president/ Chamber of Commerce member/ Rotarian/bigwig-type without a sense of humor. Please save your master the embarrassment of having to be seen at the Sans-a-belt store buying replacement pants.

Do NOT get arrested. Your master is plenty good enough at that. Kevin DeRoo's dog was snatched right out of the Bartlett Hills parking lot by the local constabulary, taken downtown, booked and printed. You guys don't EVER want to go through an experience like that—especially the cavity search part.

Do NOT eat everything your master throws. I know you're colorblind, but anything dark in a shiny plastic packet that is tossed into a pond is taboo. According to the master of a particular dog, it takes about two weeks for pond colorant to fade completely off of a tongue.

Do NOT stay outside in a thunderstorm. Even if you're tied outside with a metal chain to a metal spike, figure out a way to get inside. One dog, having survived countless squishings by various tires, rollers, etc. (thus his name, Speed Bump), could not survive the wrath of Mother Nature, which came in the form of a lightning bolt. Hopefully for him, the old adage is true, and all dogs DO go to heaven.

Do NOT eat light-bulbs, staples, screws, bearings or any other neat, shiny things you might find on the floor of

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your master's shop. You don't like going to the vet anyway, and your master might just decide that the time is ripe for a new goose-chaser, and the only good news for you is that it will be your last shot.

Do NOT chase coyotes—you'll lose.

Do NOT act stupid. If your master is holding court with some of those black-and-white people you see on the course everyday, and he says, "Blah blah," then sit down. If he says, "Blah blahblah," then roll over. If he seems mad and says, "Blah blab bluck blah blah blah," it's time to go lay down in the office. Obeying these commands will greatly increase the likelihood that you'll grow old on this course (unless, of course, you stay out in thunderstorms).

Do NOT roll around in your own waste. I personally cannot fathom why any of God's creatures would do this on purpose, but for some reason, it seems to appeal to you guys. Thing is, it does NOT appeal to your master's masters (the black-and-whites). Once they've caught a whiff of you, you'll go from "the superintendent's dog" to "the superintendent's smelly dog," which is not in your best interests. On a related note, either learn to catch mice in your shop, or let the cat do it—just don't eat the big clumps of kitty litter! Those are not treats, but simply another way of showing your masters just how far along the evolutionary chain you've progressed (or regressed).

And finally: do NOT forget why you are there—to chase GEESE. It's how your master rationalizes your existence to the black-and-whites. There are a thousand Border collies out there that are trained and ready to go, so don't get lazy.

Okay, now give this back to your master. If you haven't chewed it up.

Epilogue

Nearly four years have passed since I wrote the "rule book" for proper golf course dog etiquette, and I have had the opportunity to observe

my own dogs on "their" turf in that time. Keep in mind that during those years, the dogs have tacked on four years themselves, making them, in human parlance, "four years wiser." Yeah . . . believe this and you are probably one of those who say things such as, "Beauty is only skin-deep," or, "No, that doesn't make you look fat" or the ultimate, "I'm so happy your mother is coming to stay with us." The thing I've learned above all else about dogs is that they don't necessarily improve with age—they just get older and lazier. They do retain certain learned responses due to positive reinforcement, and they do drop certain other responses due to negative reinforcement; but that is where it ends. Pavlov was right on, brothers.

Cases in point: My dogs' habit of picking up golf balls and chewing them has been dropped due to the negative reinforcement of chewing through the covers and having thousands of rubber bands break loose in their mouths. They now associate golf balls with stinging pain and bloody mouths, and have consequently put an end to that particular behavior. Conversely, though, they still enjoy killing cute animals on the golf course because no cute animal, while being killed, has inflicted pain upon them. Their habit of ingesting shiny objects from the floor of our shop has been dropped due to the negative reinforcement of passing those objects through their bodies, be it via the conventional aft method or the more colorful frontal method. Further negative reinforcement—a visit to the vet—has helped wean them off this habit as well. However, they still roll around in whatever stinks—dead fish, animal parts, assorted goops and glops and of course, goose droppings. Now on this one, you would think this is negative reinforcement (smelling like a treatment plant), but no—this is a pat on the head, a cookie if you will, to a dog. Finally, and most importantly, my dogs have forgotten why they are here—to chase geese—and I have a theory as to why. In the 12 years that Dingo has been alive, she has never caught a goose. In the six years that Boomer has been alive, she has never caught a goose. That's 18 years combined spent chasing

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something that has become, in their minds, unattainable. With no positive reinforcement, they have dropped the habit, and have enlightened me to the fact that I have dropped the ball. I assumed that the habit of harassing geese would remain with them throughout their days, but I did not diligently work with them to maintain this learned behavior, so now they must be retaught. This is no easy task, especially with a 12-year-old arthritic cripple who can't chase her own shadow, let alone a goose. But onward we go, trying to teach old dogs old tricks. So, if you are a golf course dog and have read this, tell your master to keep at you on this goose-chasing thing, or you'll surely forget. Oh, and by the way—Boomer and Dingo never have given up on herding the black-and-whites, so we just arm the members for their protection . . .

