

AKC Gazette Column - by Grace Massey

About the AKC Breed Columns:

The Breed columns are a time-honored feature of the AKC Gazette. Each columnist is appointed by a breed's national parent club, which preserves the breed's standard and helps to educate breeders, judges, and the public about the breed's history, function, and possible health issues. A national parent club is comprised of dedicated breeders and fanciers, and it represents many years of collective experience in the breed. Columnists are asked to write about topics of interest to the fancy in general as well as those of specific interest to judges and devotees of the breed.

Australian Terrier Breed Column November 2018 Issue

A S.T.A.R. is Born

I spend a lot of time with my puppies before they go to their new homes. By the time they are 12 weeks old, they are normally coming when called, manding (patiently sitting watching me instead of jumping on me) when they want attention, sitting when asked, and walking reasonably well on a leash. However, I have always encouraged my puppy buyers to take their new puppies to a puppy class. I maintain that this additional professional guidance is important to help create a strong healthy bond between themselves and their puppies, as well as a continuation in expanding their social skills. Typically, most new owners take a class at a local training facility or at one of the pet food stores and receive a certificate saying they passed their puppy class. Recently, one of my puppy owners informed me that her puppy had earned a certificate and medallion as an AKC S.T.A.R. puppy. Intrigued, I looked into the program, and I was impressed. The AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy program takes puppy classes to another whole other level. It goes beyond just basic training and emphasizes a lot of the important aspects spelled out in my puppy buyer contract, which I really appreciate!

S.T.A.R. stands for Socialization, Training, Activity, and Responsibility. The socialization and training are accomplished with the owner and puppy attending at least 6 classes given by an AKC approved Canine Good Citizen evaluator. At first I thought finding AKC approved evaluators might be a prohibitive factor until I looked up the list of evaluators. The Petco stores in the surrounding counties all were listed as being evaluators along with 3 evaluators in my county alone. In addition to the normal come, sit, down and walk-on-a-leash behaviors the puppies are normally taught in a puppy class, the puppy must also be free of aggression toward people and other puppies during the classes and allow others to pet it while in any position. The puppy must also allow the owner to hug or hold it, to take away a treat or toy, and groom and handle ears and feet. It must walk in a straight line with its owner past people while on a leash, as well as allow someone else to walk it on a leash. It must also not react adversely to distractions. These are all important attributes for a well socialized puppy that allows the owner and puppy to move on to fun, rewarding activities.

The responsibility portion of the S.T.A.R. program is done through a Responsible Dog Owner's pledge. In the pledge the owner agrees to be responsible for the dog's health needs, with routine veterinary care (including checkups and vaccines), adequate nutrition through proper diet and clean water, daily exercise, and regular grooming. The owner also pledges to be responsible for their dog's safety by not allowing their dog to run loose and properly controlling their dog by providing proper fencing and using a leash in public. They also agree to ensure the dog has some form of identification (collar tags, tattoos or microchip ID) and provide adequate supervision of their dog around children. In the pledge the owner further agrees to not allow their dog to infringe on the rights of others. This includes not allowing the dog to run loose or to bark while in the yard, hotel room etc., as well as picking up and properly disposing of their dog's waste in all public and wilderness areas. The pledge ends with the owner agreeing to being responsible for the dog's quality of life, which includes basic training as well as attention and playtime. The final statement is an understanding that owning a dog is a commitment in time and caring.

As a responsible breeder I truly appreciate and applaud the effort that went into creating and implementing this worthwhile program! Hopefully more of my puppy buyers will participate. I know I will be recommending it.

