



BMDCA Info Series

Bernese Mountain Dogs And Obedience

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Introduction ► All dogs need to have **good manners!** This is especially true for a large breed dog such as the Bernese. A well-trained dog is a better pet, much easier to live with, more pleasant to take places, and more likely to be a welcome guest. As more legislation is passed in this country to control dogs and their ownership, it is imperative that our dogs be trained. The main reason we have a dog is for companionship. Bernese need a "job" to do. Obedience training helps the owner to gain control, teach manners, create a very special bond, prevent boredom, help satisfy his/her Berner's need to be with and to please his owner, as well as giving the dog a task to accomplish. Obedience training can become an enjoyable sport for both owner and Berner, whether the goal is having a well-behaved pet or earning titles.

How To Train Your Berner ► Bernese are a Working breed, developed to have a strong desire to accompany and interact with people. They are intelligent, learn quickly, and strive to please their owners. Positive training methods help to keep them eager and willing. Bernese are impressionable with excellent memories. Training sessions should be kept short to prevent boredom. Be creative in motivating your Berner by using games and play training techniques. Try to end each training session with your Berner "wanting to do more." Your primary job is to make obedience training interesting and fun.

Male or female? Either sex presents its own set of challenges! Personality is unique with every dog regardless of sex. A female may be moody with hormonal surges. A male can be easily distracted by all the good smells in the ring. For competition, a neutered animal of either sex may be ideal as they have a tendency to be more focused on their handler and less on other dogs.

Where To Start ► The main reason for obedience training is to develop a pleasant adult dog that is easy to live with. This is a gradual process that will continue throughout the dog's life, for in living with dogs, we are training them to live under our rules. Training dogs requires the 4 "P's" – Patience, Persistence, Positive and Praise.

Puppy Kindergarten (PK): All puppies should attend Puppy Kindergarten (3 to 5 months) with their owners. Conscientious breeders require this. Look for a class that uses food treats, toys, clickers, play, pats, and lots of "happy voice" praise! PK will provide needed gentling and socialization, satisfy doggy needs to play with other puppies, help owners to acquire valuable knowledge to meet a dog's basic needs and provide a good foundation for more structured training in coming months. PK

instills confidence and helps shy pups to overcome insecurities. PK gives all pups an excellent head start.

Good Manners Class: A Beginners or Good Manners class is a good way to continue socialization as the dog learns to "watch-me", sit, down, stay, come, leave it, wait at doorways or gates, and heel around other dogs, distractions, and people. It is also a good way for owners to meet other dog owners to talk "dog." Adolescence can be a trying time for owners as the dog learns how to meet human expectations and rules. A dog training class can provide information, guidance and support. Attendance with your adolescent puppy is strongly recommended. Select a trainer who favors the use of food treats, clickers, and toys for motivation and reward.

Canine Good Citizen ► With some training and conditioning, a dog should be capable of earning a CGC (Canine Good Citizen) certification when the dog demonstrates good behavior for the testers. Exercises are done on leash and include: sitting/staying while owner shakes hands with and talks to a stranger; walking on leash without pulling; walking comfortably with the owner through a milling crowd of people; being stroked, examined, or brushed by a stranger; a sit and down on command; coming when called; walking past another dog in a controlled manner; accepting of a distraction such as a stroller or bicycle and/or loud noise; and, staying quietly with another person with the owner out of sight. Check the AKC website for further information (www.akc.org).

AKC Obedience Titles ► The purpose of obedience is to demonstrate that the dog is able to follow specified routines, validating the usefulness of a purebred dog as a companion to man. Anyone interested in showing in the sport of obedience needs a copy of AKC's Obedience Regulations, which is usually available at shows or can be downloaded from AKC's website. Read and know the rules.

AKC has several obedience titles that are fun as well as challenging to earn from the Novice, Open and Utility classes. The Novice class is the basic, foundation level. Open is more advanced and requires greater physical effort on the part of the dog. Utility is the most difficult, requiring the dog to make decisions and work away from the handler.



For more information, please visit our website at www.bmdca.org.

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Novice: The *CD* (Companion Dog) title is within reach of the majority of dogs. The CD requires 3 qualifying scores (legs) in obedience trials. The dog is required to heel on leash, which also involves a "Figure 8" pattern, stand for examination by the judge with the leash removed, heel off leash, and recall to the handler from the opposite side of the ring. There is a group stay exercise where the dogs must do a one-minute sit-stay and a three-minute down-stay with the handlers standing on the opposite side of the ring.

Open: The *CDX* (Companion Dog Excellent) title is the next level. The *CDX* also requires three qualifying scores. All the exercises are done off lead and include: heel with "Figure 8"; drop on recall, retrieve (dumbbell) on the flat; retrieve over a high jump (solid board); and, a broad jump. The height of the jumps for Berners is three quarters of their shoulder height. The width of the broad jump is twice the height of the high jump. There is a group stay exercise with a three-minute sit-stay and a five-minute down-stay, both with the handlers out of sight.



Utility: The *UD* (Utility Dog) title is the most advanced set of exercises and requires three qualifying scores. All exercises are done off lead and include: Heeling with Hand Signals (down, sit, come) from the opposite side of the ring; two Scent Discrimination exercises where the dog is required to retrieve the handlers scented article from identical articles placed on the ground; a Directed Retrieve to one of three gloves; the Moving Stand and Examination where the dog, while heeling, must stand/stay for examination by the judge; and, Directed Jumping where the dog is sent out between a high jump and a bar jump to the opposite side of the ring, commanded to sit, then signaled/commanded to return to the handler over one of the jumps. This is repeated a second time for the dog to return over the other jump.

UDX: The *UDX* (Utility Dog Excellent) title requires that a dog must have received qualifying scores in both Open B and Utility B at 10 trials.

OTCH: The *OTCH* (Obedience Trial Champion) title is the ultimate obedience achievement! This Championship requires that 100 points be won in the Open B class or the Utility B class. Points are awarded by winning 1st through 4th place in these classes based on a scale of the number of dogs entered. The dog must also win three 1st places from these classes, with one 1st place in Open B and one 1st place in Utility B. One of the required first places may be won at a Specialty show. Additionally, the **National Obedience Invitational** is an annual

AKC event where the top achieving dogs in each breed are invited to participate. A *National Obedience Championship* is awarded annually to the dog that wins the Obedience Invitational.

AKC Non-Regular Obedience Classes ▶ Titles are not earned in these classes. They include:

Graduate Novice: This class combines Novice and Pre-Open exercises plus a moving stand and a group out of sight, three-minute down-stay. This class is for dogs that have not earned a third qualifying score for a CDX.

Veterans: The class exercises are at the Novice level for dogs over seven years of age.

Brace: The Novice class exercises are done with two dogs working side by side. They may be coupled at the collar or on separate collars.

Versatility: This class is a varied combination of two exercises from each of the Novice, Open, and Utility classes for a total of six exercises. There is no group stay.

Team: In this class, four dog-handler teams execute the Novice exercises together.

Rally Obedience: Rally-O requires teamwork combining obedience, agility, and a course with stations. It is a good confidence builder for dogs and people. It is relaxed and great fun! There is a walk-through for the handler prior to the start of the class as in agility. The stations are numbered and each will have directional signs. Handlers are allowed to talk to and encourage their dogs during the routine. The judge gives no commands after the start. The judge will make deductions for errors, but will be less exacting than in obedience. Rally is a good tool and conditioner for teaching your Berner to focus on you in the ring like they have been doing in practice! It will prepare your Berner to show its best in regular obedience classes for the CD, CDX, and UD titles where the ring atmosphere is more stressful.

Canine Freestyle ▶ A new sport evolved from obedience in the early 1990s. Freestyle is a creative combination of obedience and music, with choreography and artistry adding a whole new dimension to dog training. The two US freestyle organizations have very different approaches to this new and evolving sport. Find out more about the Canine Freestyle Federation at www.canine-freestyle.org and the World Canine Freestyle Organization at www.worldcaninefreestyle.org.

Obedience References ▶ A good obedience reference site is <http://www.dogpro.com/designs/links/obedlinx.htm>. A wide variety of obedience books are available through www.amazon.com and www.dogwise.com. These include:

- ***Taking Care of Puppy Business – A Gentle Approach for Positive Results*** (Pivar & Nelson)
- ***Dog Training in Ten Minutes*** (Benjamin)
- ***The Canine Good Citizen: Every Dog Can Be One*** (J. Volhard, W. Volhard, J. Volhard)
- ***Good Owners Great Dogs*** (Kilcommons, Wilson)
- ***Surviving Your Dog's Adolescence*** (Benjamin)
- ***Click and Go*** (Jones)
- ***Choose to Heel*** (Jecs)
- ***Best Foot Forward, Successful Obedience Handling*** (Handler)